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No Writer Left Behind: Examining the Reading-Writing Connection in the Reading First Classroom through a Teacher Study Group

Kim Street Coady
coad9992@bellsouth.net

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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, NO WRITER LEFT BEHIND: EXAMINING THE READING-WRITING CONNECTION IN THE READING FIRST CLASSROOM THROUGH A TEACHER STUDY GROUP, by KIM STREET COADY, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

_____
Dana L. Fox, Ph.D.
Committee Chair

_____
R. Steven Whatley, Ed.D.
Committee Member

_____
Joyce E. Many, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Amy Seely Flint, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Date

_____
Joyce E. Many, Ph.D.
Associate Chair
Department of Middle-Secondary Education and Instructional Technology

_____
R.W. Kamphaus, Ph.D.
Dean and Distinguished Research Professor
College of Education

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

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Kim Street Coady

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Kim Street Coady
4148 Hwy. 162 South
Covington, GA 30016

The director of this dissertation is:

Dr. Dana L. Fox
Department of Middle-Secondary Education and Instructional Technology
College of Education
Georgia State University
Atlanta, GA 30030-3083

VITA

Kim Street Coady

ADDRESS: 4148 Hwy. 162 South
Covington, GA 30016

EDUCATION:

Ph.D. 2007 Georgia State University
Teaching and Learning
Ed. S. 1998 Georgia College and State University
Early Childhood Education
M. Ed. 1996 Georgia College and State University
Early Childhood Education
B.S. 1995 Georgia College and State University
Early Childhood Education

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

2005-2007	Assistant Principal Newton County, Georgia
2006	Graduate Research Assistant Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA
2005	Graduate Teaching Assistant Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA
2004-2005	Education Program Specialist/Reading First Georgia Department of Education
2002-2004	Assistant Principal Newton County, Georgia
1995-2002	Teacher Newton County, Georgia

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES AND ORGANIZATIONS:

2000-Present	International Reading Association
2000-Present	Georgia Reading Association
2000-Present	Newton/Rockdale Reading Association
2001-Present	Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
2001-Present	Alpha Delta Kappa Women Educator Sorority
2004-Present	National Council of Teachers of English
2006-Present	National Reading Conference

PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS:

Many, J. E., Taylor, D. L, Dewberry, D., & Coady, K. (2006, December). Case studies of preservice literacy teachers' development of instructional scaffolding. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Reading Conference, Los Angeles.

Fox, D. L., Calder, R., Coady, K., Taylor, D. L., West, C., & Williams, M. (2006, March). *Stories matter: The complexity of cultural authenticity in literature for young people*. Poster presentation to the Georgia State University Annual Cultural Competency Conference, Atlanta, GA.

Coady, K. S. (2006, February). *Literacy stations workshop*. Presentation for East Newton Elementary School, Covington, GA.

Coady, K. S. (2006, February). *What's hot/what's not in reading*. Presentation for the Georgia Reading Association State Conference, Atlanta, GA.

Coady, K. S. (2005, January). *Integrating informational text into the elementary classroom*. Presentation for the Annual Georgia Read-Write Now Conference, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

Coady, K .S., & Mills, S. (2003, September). *Using informational text to teach reading strategies*. Presented at the Georgia Reading Association Fall Forum, Macon, GA.

ABSTRACT

NO WRITER LEFT BEHIND:
EXAMINING THE READING-WRITING CONNECTION IN THE READING FIRST CLASSROOM THROUGH A TEACHER STUDY GROUP
by
Kim Street Coady

The goal of the federally-funded Reading First program is to ensure that all students read well by the end of third grade (Georgia Department of Education, 2006). However, Reading First makes few (if any) provisions for writing in its required 135-minute reading block for literacy instruction. Is it possible to teach reading effectively to young children without involving them in writing?

The purpose of this naturalistic study was to investigate how the Reading First framework affected the teaching of writing in primary classrooms in one elementary school that received Reading First funding for three years. Using a social constructivist theoretical lens, the researcher explored these issues in the context of a professional learning community—a voluntary teacher study group—focused on writing instruction. Guiding questions were (1) What are primary teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection for students in kindergarten through third grade? (2) How does the context of a school wide Reading First grant affect primary teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection for students in K-3? (3) In what ways does a voluntary teacher study group focused on the reading-writing connection influence primary teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection and their literacy instruction?

Fifteen primary teachers participated in the study during a six-month period. Data sources included an open-ended questionnaire, three in-depth interviews with each participant, audiotapes and selective transcription from ten teacher study group sessions, field notes from observations in 12 of the 15 participants' classrooms, a final focus group interview, and a researcher's journal. Data were analyzed inductively using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Trustworthiness and rigor were established through methods that ensure credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Findings revealed that the teachers viewed reading and writing as connected processes in literacy instruction. Although the Reading First parameters made them fearful of engaging children in writing during the 135-minute reading block, the teacher study group validated their beliefs and knowledge and empowered them to interweave limited writing activities across the curriculum. Overall, the Reading First requirements prevented teachers from involving children in extensive writing process instruction and writing workshop.

NO WRITER LEFT BEHIND:
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by
Kim Street Coady

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the
Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Teaching and Learning
in
the Department of Middle-Secondary Education and Instructional Technology
in
the College of Education
Georgia State University

Atlanta, Georgia
2007

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to first express my gratitude to the members of my committee for their support. Dr. Fox, Dr. Many, Dr. Flint, and Dr. Whatley, I know that time is a gift, and I appreciate the time that you invested in me. Dr. Fox, there is no doubt that there was a plan that led me to your door over three years ago. Your guidance, compassion, friendship, and most of all, belief in me, formed the scholar that I am today. My greatest wish is to be a "Dr. Fox" to someone else one day.

I want to thank the fifteen ladies that were so giving and supportive even though they had more important things to do than to help me with this study. You are the real scholars.

Mama and Daddy, thank you so much for providing all of the support and opportunities that were never afforded you. I know that this accomplishment in my life was built upon the foundation that you built years ago.

I would also like to thank my mother-in-law. Mrs. Coady, thank you for all of the meals, support, and love that you have offered throughout the years. You are the best mother-in-law that a wife could wish for!

Erin and Will, thank you for pushing me out the door so many times to pursue my dream. Often, you were the teachers, and I was the student. You two have made me so proud and make it easy to be "Mom." I love you.

Steve Coady, you are the one to whom this work is dedicated. Even when I had no vision of this day, you did. You were the first one to utter this occurrence, and you have been there every step of the way to make sure that it took place. I love you now and forever.

Finally, I must thank my Heavenly Father. You made it all possible.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AYP	Adequate Yearly Progress
CO	Classroom Observation
CRCT	Criterion Reference Competency Test
DIBELS	Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
FN	Field Notes
I	Interview
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NCTE	National Council of Teachers of English
NRP	National Reading Panel
Q	Questionnaire
SACS	Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
SBRR	Scientifically Based Reading Research
TSG	Teacher Study Group

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> *Why would you waste your time teaching a child to write before you teach a child to read?*
>
> --Professor of Reading Education associated with the federal Reading First grant program

The statement above, one made to me so matter-of-factly approximately 3 years ago, literally changed my life as an educator and instructional leader. This statement was made in reply to my question about what I perceived to be a profound absence of writing and writing instruction in Reading First grant-supported elementary schools and classrooms. This pivotal moment provided the impetus I needed to begin to question my own beliefs about literacy rather than accept wholeheartedly the beliefs of others. It also brought me into the research community as I sought to answer my own questions about how children become literate. Until that point, I had accepted, without question, the authority of the "experts."

So began my journey to determine the relationship between reading and writing in the elementary classroom. Specifically, I examined this reading-writing relationship within the parameters set forth by the Reading First grant program. At the same time, I examined the perceptions that one group of elementary teachers had about the reading-writing relationship and, working closely with this group of teachers over time in a professional learning community, I explored how we might work together to assure that

the reading-writing connection remained intact in a school receiving Reading First grant support.

In this chapter, I discuss the background of and rationale for the study. Next, I briefly outline the reading-writing connection and principles for effective professional development practices as applied to teacher study groups. Third, the theoretical lens which provides a foundation for my decisions for this study is explained, along with the overall design for the study. Finally, the specific questions related to the study are also outlined.

Background and Rationale for the Study

As the instructional leader in the school, I am expected to "lead" the faculty and staff as we search for the best ways to meet the academic needs of the students. After spending 2 years as the assistant principal in an elementary school receiving Reading First funds, I found myself in a precarious position. It was my responsibility to oversee the implementation of the Reading First grant in the school, but after interacting with the teachers over this 2-year period, I realized that many of the teachers were having the same concerns that I was about the lack of writing "allowed" within the Reading First framework. Because the Reading First grant is based on the findings outlined in the National Reading Panel's (NRP) report (NICHD, 2000) and writing was not included in the NRP report, writing is not included as one of the five important dimensions of literacy in the Reading First grant. Because of this, I began to wonder if writing was once again falling into the "disinherited stepson" category (Graves, 1973).

The Reading First grant focuses specifically on the five key areas of reading discussed in the report of the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) including

phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. These five key areas of reading were determined to be the areas of importance in the teaching of reading based on scientifically based reading research (SBRR). SBRR is a type of reading research involving controlled experiments using data analysis and a thorough peer-review process. According to the U.S. Department of Education's Reading First website (Georgia Department of Education, 2006, ¶1), the determination of these five key areas are based on rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures used to obtain knowledge about reading. Writing is not included as one of the key areas in the NRP; therefore, it is not included as a dimension of literacy in the Reading First grant program.

While there are very strict guidelines and restrictions placed on how schools implement the grant, the grant itself offers generous funding for grant-allowed classroom materials, such as a core reading program, various intervention materials to be used with struggling readers, libraries of leveled readers, assessment tools such as the Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, a full-time literacy coach, and professional learning opportunities for staff.

Because I had previously held a position with the Georgia Department of Education as a Reading First education program specialist and had extensive experience with the grant when it was first implemented in Georgia, I have intimate knowledge of the grant's purposes and guidelines as well as the expectations for teachers and schools where Reading First grants are in place. Because of my experiences as well as the concerns voiced to me by teachers, I realized that I was not alone in my questioning of how one can effectively teach reading without the inclusion of a writing component in a literacy initiative.

With the Reading First grant, specific criteria are delineated and expected to be adhered to with utmost care because of the federal regulations associated with the grant. Without complete compliance to these criteria, the school receiving the funding faces a loss of the funding. In conversations with school staff, I determined that while on the surface this grant appeared to be of benefit to the students, there seemed to be two key issues of concern. One of the most profound concerns expressed by the school staff was the limited amount and type of writing allowed during the 135-minute "reading" block as defined by the grant or as interpreted by the architects of the grant. It would seem that because reading and writing are two important aspects of literacy, they would be mutually supported in literacy learning, but in the case of the Reading First grant, this is not so. Reading is focused on and the various methods used to teach reading are to be taught in the 135-minute reading block in isolation from writing (Dobson, 1989).

A second key concern expressed by the teachers at my school focused on the professional development aspect of the grant. According to the Georgia Department of Education website, one of the goals of the grant was to "provide professional development of sufficient intensity and duration to ensure that all teachers have the skills they need to teach reading effectively" (Georgia Department of Education, 2006, ¶1). While the grant does provide for extensive professional development for teachers, the only professional development supported and funded by the grant at the school level is delivered by a literacy coach who is given explicit instructions by a Georgia Department of Education Reading First employee concerning when, how, and exactly what is to be said during the professional development sessions.

The professional development associated with the Reading First grant is most often held after school for several hours in a media center with the literacy coach standing before the group of teachers going through slides of a PowerPoint presentation prepared by the Reading First architects, sharing with the teachers what the architects have instructed the literacy coach to say. All of the presentations specifically discuss one of the five components of literacy outlined in the report of the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000): phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Since writing was not included in the report of the National Reading Panel, it is not included in any of the professional development sessions. There is no teacher choice or input as far as what is discussed, and each teacher is required to attend 80 hours per year of this mandated training in order to remain in compliance with the terms of the grant.

As the assistant principal in the school charged with implementing the approved state and local curriculum as well as the grant requirement, I found myself in a quandary as I listened to the teachers and felt their frustration. While many of these teachers were effective teachers of writing previously, they found themselves forbidden to do something that had always been a natural part of the early childhood education classroom, at least before the Reading First grant was in place in our school. Because I am also expected to monitor the teachers to make sure that they are adhering to the grant requirements, I sometimes feel hypocritical as I know that it is impossible to offer students the best literacy experiences when writing is left out of the curriculum. Because of issues such as this, I worked with teachers at this school not only to examine ways in which the reading-writing connection was occurring in the classroom, but also in a study group setting to learn how to implement the reading-writing connection more thoroughly into the

curriculum while adhering to the parameters set forth by the grant. This study allowed me to engage in inquiry with teachers about these issues.

The Reading-Writing Connection

There appears to be a natural relationship between reading and writing. Writing assists young children in learning how language appears in print and how the sounds of language translate into print. Reading allows children to learn about print conventions and language structures and how that transfers to their writing. Writing gives students the opportunity to reflect on their reading, which serves to clarify and deepen their understanding of what they have read (Dahl & Farnan, 1998).

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has also expressed support for a reading-writing connection. This is delineated in their November 2004 publication of their beliefs about the teaching of writing. Within this set of beliefs, NCTE posits that writing and reading are related, and writing can help people become better readers. According to NCTE, in children's earliest writing experiences, they listen for the relationships of sounds to letters, thus contributing to phonemic awareness and phonics and to children's learning how texts are structured. Students also experience plotting a short story, organizing a research report, and creating poetry, thus permitting the writer, as a reader, new experiences (NCTE, 2004, ¶14).

Shanahan (1990), past president of the International Reading Association, notes that ". . . if reading and writing are taught together, different and better things will occur in the classroom" (p. 3). He goes on to share an anecdote describing this connection:

> In a third-grade class, for example, the children commonly worked in teams to revise their composition. One day, during reading instruction, the teacher brought attention to the type of thinking they did during revision activity and how useful that would be in reading . . . As a result of the

> personal examples from writing revision activities that had actually taken place in the classroom, the children were able to understand clearly why rethinking should be a part of reading as well as writing. (p. 16).

Interestingly, Shanahan was a member of the National Reading Panel when they produced the results of a study (NICHD, 2000) that was the impetus for the guidelines set forth in the Reading First grant. Writing was not specifically discussed as one of the five dimensions of reading in the findings of the National Reading Panel and is therefore not one of five foundational stones that make up the Reading First grant. Shanahan explains that the NRP identified writing as one of the approximately 30 potentially important topics to explore, but they did not have enough time to review it. Therefore, writing was not eligible for Reading First support (Shanahan, 2006).

Did Shanahan change his mind about the importance of the reading-writing connection in the ten years between 1990 and 2000? In a 2006 publication, Shanahan explains that writing is valuable and still needs to be taught, but writing instruction must proceed with state and local support alone, much like math, science, and social studies, as no federal support is provided for these subjects with Reading First money (Shanahan, 2006).

Effective Professional Development

Many in the field of education (e.g., Birchak et al., 1998) suggest professional development as a time for teachers to come together collaboratively to identify needs and work together to meet those needs. Some believe that when teachers and administrators are active participants in an improvement journey because they believe that what is asked of them is possible and worthy of attempt, it allows everyone within the system to perform better and to be comfortable with their responsibility in doing so (Zmuda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004). The model of professional development mandated by the

Reading First grant ignores these principles of collaboration and empowerment and instead requires the teachers to sit passively while an expert trains them despite findings that suggest that this is an ineffective method of professional development (Sparks & Hirsch, 1997). Unfortunately for all involved, the greatest resource, the knowledge and expertise of the teachers, is totally ignored in this major reform effort.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection, how the reading-writing connection could be incorporated into the curriculum, and how participation in a teacher study group would affect the reading-writing connection aspect of the literacy framework in a Reading First grant-supported school.

With close to $200 million to be spent on early reading instruction over a 6-year period through the federal Reading First grant program in Georgia (Georgia Department of Education, 2006, ¶1), it is of paramount importance for educators to be aware of the methods used or not used to provide this reading instruction. If the goal of the Reading First grant is to ensure that all children learn to read well by the end of third grade, as members of the literacy community, we should examine the ways in which this should occur. By taking an introspective look into just one of the communities where the Reading First grant is being used, I hope to offer more insight into the need for all components of literacy to be included in the instructional setting.

Specifically, the guiding research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What are primary teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection for students in kindergarten through third grade?

2. How does the context of a school wide Reading First grant affect primary teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection for students in K−3?
3. In what ways does a voluntary teacher study group focused on the reading-writing connection influence primary teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection and their literacy instruction?

Theoretical Framework

For the purposes of this study, two theoretical lenses were employed. One lens allowed me to approach this study from a constructivist point of view. The other lens in the study examined the data with an eye toward social constructivism. By using both lenses, I captured a snapshot of the ways the individual teachers involved in the grant constructed knowledge and also the ways in which their interactions with others affected this construction of knowledge. The theories of Dewey and Vygotsky served as a guide for my interpretation of constructivism and social constructivism.

Constructivists emphasize the active construction of knowledge by individuals (Woolfolk, 1999) as well as a view of learning as a natural and ongoing state of mind (Tracey & Morrow, 2006). When individuals are actively involved in incorporating new knowledge with existing knowledge, learning occurs. The constructivist emphasizes the growth of the individual, the importance of the environment, the idea that learning is situated within inquiry, and, ultimately, the idea that the learner must create his or her learning (Dewey, 1916). By taking part in the teacher study group focused on the reading-writing connection, teachers had the opportunity to examine their current beliefs about reading and writing in an environment that encouraged active discussion,

reflection, and questioning in order to grow as a literacy educator. This type of inquiry learning emphasized the active construction of learning by the individual that may result in changes in the classroom but may only be internal and not necessarily observable (Tracey & Morrow, 2006). Because the teachers were still required to adhere to a certain curriculum as mandated by the grant, these changes in the classroom may not be immediately observable and may only be seen in the years to come.

Beyond an individual approach to learning, social constructivism describes knowledge as constructed within individuals as a result of social interaction (Vygotsky, 1986). Conversations and social interactions among the members of the study group allowed for the consideration of others' perceptions in a socially interactive environment. As the participants took part in the group, they had the opportunity to share ideas, question the beliefs of others, and form new understandings of what it means to be a literacy teacher in a Reading First school. By using a narrower theoretical lens, constructivism, juxtaposed against the broader theoretical lens of social constructivism, I gained better insight into the ways elementary teachers approach writing in a Reading First school.

Overview of the Research Design

This study was a naturalistic study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) conducted in an elementary school in a suburban area of the southeastern United States, a school currently receiving Reading First funding and in the last year of implementation of a 3-year grant. I began the investigation with the formation of a voluntary teacher study group consisting of 15 teachers in kindergarten through third grade. The purpose of the study was to examine the reading-writing connection with the specific goal of discovering ways to

incorporate writing experiences into the curriculum. For their participation in the teacher study group and in other aspects of this study, the teachers received two professional learning units based on their total contact hour time of 20 hours.

Data collection began in January 2007, when we began meeting as a teacher study group, and continued until the end of the school year in June 2007, allowing for prolonged engagement with the informants. The study group originated with 15 teachers meeting together 10 times during those 6 months to discuss topics of interest to the teachers regarding the reading-writing connection in the classroom specifically as it applied to the grant. Three of the teachers attended the study group sessions sporadically because of personal issues that prohibited them from attending all sessions, but they asked to be included in the group because of the richness of the conversations that took place during the meetings. Initially, we discussed *Classrooms That Work* (Cunningham & Allington, 2006), but as teachers became more involved in the group, the focus of the discussions shifted from what others in the field of literacy said about reading and writing to what the participants in the group had to say about their own perceptions and experiences with reading and writing. I took part in the study group as a participant observer as well as served as the facilitator of the group. These meetings were audiotaped and selective transcriptions of the audiotapes were completed.

All of the original 15 teachers were asked to complete an open-ended questionnaire concerning their beliefs about writing and the Reading First grant. I conducted three in-depth interviews with 13 of the participants, investigating each teacher's perception of the reading-writing connection, their perceptions of the reading-writing connection as it applied to the Reading First grant, and their ideas of how the

grant had affected the school curriculum. I also investigated issues of teacher choice, positive and negative aspects of the grant, and any related issues that were presented during the course of the research study during these interviews. These interviews were transcribed and examined for emerging and recurring themes. The participants were also asked to participate in a total of 10 teacher study group sessions. Each session was audiotaped and selective excerpts of the audiotapes were transcribed and examined for pertinent themes. In addition, I observed in 12 of the original 15 participants' classrooms for a total of 45 minutes each, recording field notes and also audiotaping in order to capture the participating teachers' discussions with her students. Finally, I conducted a focus group interview for the purposes of member checking at the conclusion of the study. I also maintained a researcher's reflective journal to capture my thoughts and perceptions of the study. Overall, data sources consisted of the open-ended questionnaire, selective transcriptions of the teacher study group sessions, verbatim transcriptions of the three interviews with each of the teachers, field notes and audiotapes from observations conducted in the teachers' classrooms, the researcher's reflective journal, and selective transcription of a focus group interview at the completion of the study.

Significance of the Study

How do we prepare our students for full membership in the literacy community? What methods are employed to accomplish the task set before us? According to the Georgia Department of Education's website (Georgia Department of Education, 2006, ¶1), the goal of Reading First is to ensure that all students read well by the end of third grade. Is this an attainable goal without including a writing component in the mix? Are we offering our students the very best opportunities for membership in the literacy

community when we only present half of the equation? Can teachers be told what to do without giving voice to their expertise in the field of literacy and still reach the goal of literacy for students? Questions such as these provide the impetus for the study. As members of the academic community, I believed that it was imperative that we examine the complexities involved in a very well-funded quest to ensure that all students read well by the end of third grade.

In the following chapters, I examine the relevant professional literature concerning the reading-writing connection in literacy education and trends in research outlining principles for effective professional development for teachers, including research on teacher study groups as professional learning communities. A discussion of the report of the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) as it applies to the Reading First federal grant program is included as well. I discuss the research design and methodology used to examine these aspects of literacy learning as I situated this investigation in one place in one time within the larger realm of literacy education. Additionally, the results of the 6-month study will be detailed, and finally discussion of the findings will be shared.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

> *A look at comparative research efforts in the language arts shows writing falling in the "disinherited stepson" category.* (Graves, 1973, p. 5)

> *Today, unreasonable voices outside our profession are clamoring to tell us how and what to teach. People who have little idea how children learn to read and write are speaking out loudly, bombarding the media with simplistic "quick fixes" and loud criticism of sound educational practices.* (Routman, 1996, p. xv)

Words such as these by Graves and Routman, along with my own experiences as an educator closely associated with a Reading First grant, motivated me to conduct an investigation concerning the reading-writing connection and to investigate the effect of a teacher study group on teachers' knowledge of this relationship. I find it amazing that Graves penned the words quoted above 34 years ago. Today, over 3 decades later, we are in the throes of a major reading reform where writing is once again the "stepchild" of literacy education due in part to a lack of so-called "scientifically based" research studies that would have perhaps provided a rationale for writing to be included in the report of the National Reading Panel (NRP; NICHD, 2000) and subsequently included in a major literacy initiative.

A grant base on the NRP report, Georgia's Reading First, will supply a vast amount of money to schools over a 6-year period in hopes of bringing about positive changes in literacy instruction. Because writing was not investigated by the National Reading Panel as part of their report, it was not included as one of the five important

components of an effective literacy program. Consequently, the views of one group of individuals have set the course for all reading reform efforts in Georgia, and unfortunately this course exacerbates an already prominent reading-writing disconnect.

Donald Graves (1973), composition scholar and long-time champion of writing for the elementary school student, voiced a concern in his dissertation about a disconnect between reading and writing as he discussed the fact that in comparison with writing, reading enjoyed a much stronger research tradition. The trend Graves pointed out continues today with reading and writing often existing as two separate entities of literacy. For the purposes of this study, I investigate the reading-writing connection as it applies to the Reading First primary classroom.

Another aspect of my investigation considers the professional development component of the Reading First grant. Within the framework set forth by the grant, the mainstay of professional development consists of a literacy coach standing before a group of teachers (at the end of a school day) for approximately two hours re-delivering a Power Point presentation which had been delivered to the literacy coaches previously by a Reading First employee. As early as 1980, this transmission model of professional development was found to be ineffective (Joyce & Showers, 1980), yet 26 years later, it is the professional development method of choice for this particular grant initiative. Is Reading First meant to be a “quick fix” delivery model that takes the professional learner out of the mix?

Reading First had affected my endeavors as an educational professional on a daily basis for over 3 years. I was first employed as a Reading First Program Specialist with the Georgia Department of Education for one year, and I am currently an assistant

principal in an elementary school that just completed the third year of a 3-year Reading First grant. Because I have been placed in educational leadership positions that have required me to work within the auspices of this grant, as part of this study, I examined the Reading First grant in light of a reading-writing connection in order to clarify my own understandings of the connection and the grant.

For the purposes of this literature review, I searched the university library data-bases using key word searches as well as examined the references of articles that I located during the key word searches. Some of the terms I used in the key word searches were the reading-writing connection, balanced literacy instruction, reform and writing instruction, Reading First, professional development and teachers, and teacher study groups. I also referred to articles and books that I had studied during a doctoral class based on theoretical models of writing. Because I had experience at the state level with the grant, I also examined materials that I had read during my tenure as a Reading First employee.

In this chapter, I will focus on (a) the reading-writing relationship, (b) writing as it applies to the Reading First grant, and (c) professional development as it relates to teacher study groups. The topic of the reading-writing connection will be addressed in three ways. First, I will provide background concerning the relationship between the No Child Left Behind Act, the report of the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000), and the Reading First grant. Next, I will review the professional literature as it pertains to the reading-writing connection. After a discussion of the reading-writing connection, I will review the literature on effective professional development for teachers, especially scholarly writing and research on teacher study groups.

No Child Left Behind, the National Reading Panel, and Reading First

During President George W. Bush's first week in office, he proposed a bipartisan education reform effort presented in the form of The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), which was passed into law on January 8, 2002, a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Within the auspices of NCLB, Reading First, a new, evidence-based literacy policy and national program to provide literacy instruction to all primary-aged students in the United States was established (Block & Israel, 2005).

The Reading First grant is built upon the findings of the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) and the subsequent research synthesis commissioned by the National Academy of Sciences (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The results of these two bodies of information propose that a comprehensive, scientifically-based approach to reading instruction is necessary in order for children to learn to read. According to these reports, the essential components of reading instruction should include systematic and direct instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Writing was not identified as one of the essential components (Block & Israel, 2005).

The report of the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) has drawn criticism from some in the field of literacy. In a paper written commissioned by the National Reading Conference, Pressley (2001) discussed the narrowness of the National Reading Panel report in that much of the scientific evidence relating to beginning reading instruction was ignored in the development of the report as the review was limited to experimental and quasi-experimental evidence only. He also discussed the exclusion of several topics that are very relevant to the field of literacy, one of which was writing:

> Literate people also can write. Given the extensive experimental literature documenting that even struggling learners can be taught to write in school in ways that make them unambiguously more literate (Gersten & Baker, 2001), saying nothing about writing was a salient omission by the Panel. (Pressley, 2001, p. 16)

The Reading-Writing Relationship

Historically, two of the major components of literacy—reading and writing—have been largely disconnected in U.S. education. Despite efforts to unite the two, a divide has been in place, and they have often been taught as unrelated subjects. This divide goes back to colonial times when reading and writing were taught as separate subjects characterized by the emphasis of reading over writing and the delay of writing instruction until the basics of reading had been acquired. Because writing was thought to depend on the ability to read and was viewed as more difficult to learn, reading has traditionally been taught first (Nelson & Calfee, 1998).

The language arts consist of an interwoven pattern of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. As reading teachers, we know that we need to engage students in writing if we want to teach them to read. If we don't interweave the two, it is much like trying to teach someone to swim with one hand tied behind them. Writing and reading are two sides of the same coin; they both involve creating meaning through print. As writers, there are times when we must stop writing and turn to reading as we are faced with a dilemma, a problem to solve, or a need for inspiration to write more or to write better. There is a reciprocal relationship involved in that as readers, we often need to write or talk after reading, sometimes so filled with emotion that we express our feelings in writing. You can't become a writer without reading (Culligan, 1993).

How do children come to make this association between reading and writing? Ralph Fletcher (1993) states,

> The reading-writing connection is an important spark that happens within each student. Internal connections take time. The process can be slow and painstaking; moreover, this process cannot be forced. (p. 16)

The reading-writing connection happens as we provide students with opportunities to make connections between the books they read and their own writing. It is not accomplished with a worksheet, a carefully orchestrated class project, or a read aloud (Fletcher).

Are we reading teachers, or are we writing teachers? It has been said that in the United States, we tend to be one or the other and most often at the primary level, writing has been the poor relation (Barrs, 2000). Is there truth in this perception? To some, Donald Graves and Lucy Calkins may appear to be teachers of writing on the surface, but as we examine their words closely, we see that they position reading and writing in the same framework rather than in separate frames. As we examine the professional literature, we realize that even experts in the field have had to examine their own perceptions of what literacy instruction entails and the relationship between the different components.

In his landmark work, *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work,* Graves (1973) states that children just want to write. They come to school wanting to write and ninety percent of them believe that they can write. Interestingly, only fifteen percent of the students believe they can read. When asked about how much reading helps writing or writing helps reading, Graves pointed out that there was no reason that one process could not help another, and he called for a need to demonstrate to students how we not only read during writing, but compose during the reading process. To Graves (2004), “Writing is the making of reading” (p. 89). He found that if students know how to construct reading through writing, they will better understand how to take reading apart. Separating the reading and writing process, Graves believes, is a waste of time because they have too

much in common. This has not always been the case for Donald Graves. He was once asked what he had found in his research about a relationship between writing and reading, and he confidently replied at that time that there was no relationship. He explained that at this point in time, he was in the midst of a career devoted to examining both processes, but he is still haunted by the response he gave at that time (Graves, 2004).

Another giant in the field of children's writing is Lucy Calkins. In 1983, Calkins published an ethnography that spanned a 2-year time period spent with a student named Susie, documenting the day-to-day changes in her writing along with that of her classmates during their third- and fourth-grade years. Interestingly, Donald Graves was the one who conceived of this study, and Susie's story was imbedded within the context of a larger research project involving Graves, Calkins, and others. Calkins tells the story of the changes in Susie's writing occurring within the milieu of her friends, her teachers, and her researchers.

Even though Calkins was telling the story of Susie and her experiences with writing, Calkins found that out of spite, she ignored the reading-writing connections because for years she had watched teachers spend 2 hours a day on the teaching of reading and little time on the teaching of writing. Calkins also lamented the large language arts budgets that went almost exclusively for reading textbooks and kits with little funding left over for writing supplies. She stated matter-of-factly that she was so angry at reading that she treated reading and writing as separate, even competing processes. Because the study was focused on writing, she did not make a point of documenting the connections between reading and writing and assumed they were each based on separate skills, but she stated, in retrospect, that she was very wrong to do so.

Calkins (1983) found that there was no way she could watch writing without watching reading because while composing, the students read continually. She said that

> as they wrote, they read to savor the sounds of what they had written, they read to regain momentum, they read to reorient themselves, they read to avoid writing. They read to find gaps in their work, they read to evaluate whether the piece was working, they read to edit. And they read to share the work of their hands. (p. 153)

Calkins also noted that during the course of the study, other researchers took note of this connection. One researcher observed a student rereading his work twenty-seven times before he finished writing, and another researcher calculated that the students spent thirty percent of their writing time reading (Calkins, 1983).

Throughout the course of the study, Calkins observed students using and developing skills that were traditionally assigned to reading, such as selecting the main idea, organizing supporting details, and adjusting the sequence of events in their writing. They developed conclusions, discovered cause and effect, and honed the skill of inferring. Throughout her observational notes, Calkins recorded that she saw time and time again that reading and writing were inseparable with 6-year-olds working for several minutes sounding out words such as "tuxedo," putting letters on the page, reading them back, and asking a friend for help with the /u/ sound noting that the child's teacher said, "No workbook could ever ask a first grader to do this much drill on sounds, but my writers do it all the time" (p.155).

Calkins admits that she was wrong to view the two processes of reading and writing separately because writing not only involves reading, but it also reinforces and develops skills that were traditionally viewed as reading skills only. She also admits that she was wrong because

> writing can generate a stance toward reading which, regretfully, is rarely conveyed through reading programs. When children are makers of reading, they gain a sense of ownership over their reading. As we've seen again and again, owners are different from tenants. (p. 156)

Writing can demystify the printed word for children, giving them an insider's view on reading. When children see themselves as authors, they approach text with the consciousness of a writer affording them a new reason to connect with reading (Calkins, 1983).

In addition to the works of language arts giants such as Graves and Calkins, several studies have been conducted examining the writing process of young children, balanced literacy instruction, and effective literacy instruction. While these studies did not begin as an examination of the reading-writing connection, findings from these studies support a connection between the two.

Martin, Seagraves, Thacker, and Young (2005) conducted a study describing what three 1st-grade teachers and their students learned while engaging in the writing process via a workshop environment over the course of a year. Three classrooms consisting of 21 students in each classroom were involved in the study. The three teachers involved in the study were all female with experience as teachers ranging from 8 years to 29 years. The professor conducting the study acted as a participant observer sharing the basic components of the writing process and various professional research studies on the topic of writing instruction with the teachers during professional development meetings held twice monthly.

Several types of data were collected, including classroom observations made weekly, students' writing samples, teacher interviews, and student interviews. Findings from the study indicated that as the teachers learned to use the writing process, they began to understand how it extended across the curriculum, especially in the area of

reading. The teachers noted that the students were able to apply their reading skills and make connections to content areas such as science, social studies, and health as evidenced by their writing. The principal of the school noted, “I can’t believe the conversations they have about their pieces of writing. So they’re thinking. It’s comprehension” (Martin et al., 2005, p. 243). One of the teachers involved as a participant in the study said, “I don’t think I can explain or express how important the writing and reading is. They go together. Good writers read what they write to make it make sense” (p. 243).

Pressley et al. (2001) conducted an investigation premised on the belief that much could be learned about excellent beginning reading instruction by observing and interviewing excellent beginning reading teachers. For the purposes of this study, school administrations were asked to identify Grade 1 teachers whom they felt were very effective in promoting literacy achievement as well as teachers who taught similar students but who were more typical literacy teachers. Thirty 1st-grade classrooms were observed with observers especially attending to teaching processes, types of materials used in the class, and student reading and writing performances and outcomes. Interviews were also utilized to complement the observational data.

While the findings of the study indicated that effective first-grade instruction is complex, there were four obvious behaviors and characteristics that distinguished the most effective teachers. Two of the four directly related to literacy:

- There is much more reading skills instruction in most-effective-for-locale classrooms relative to least-effective-for-locale classrooms.
- Process writing was prominent in the most-effective-for-locale classroom, with students explicitly taught higher order writing processes (i.e., to plan,

> draft, and revise), although there were also high demands with respect to writing mechanics (i.e., capitalization, spelling).

Pressley et al. (2001) emphasize that in the most-effective-for-locale classrooms, "a lot of skills instruction was intelligently integrated with voluminous reading and writing" (p. 50).

If the goal of literacy is to help students learn to read and write, we must adopt a more comprehensive view of literacy and literacy instruction. The ultimate goal of reading instruction is to help children learn to read and write and ultimately become life-long readers and writers. In order to accomplish this, reading and writing must carry equal weight where they are equally important and benefit one another. In most cases, reading instruction outweighs writing instruction. Writing instruction deserves equal weighting with reading and the best way to teach literacy is in an integrated fashion. "All reading assignments should have a writing component," argue Rasinski and Padak (2004), "and all writing assignments should involve some external reading" (p. 98). Rasinski and Padak go on to say

> When students read a text they should be asked to respond to their reading through writing – responding in a journal, composing a poem that reflects their thoughts on the piece, developing a written script on the text that will later be performed for an audience, or writing their own version of the story by changing one aspect of the story and keeping the other factors constant. (p.98)

Rasinski and Padak continue with suggestions for writing assignments to be preceded by the opportunity to read and discover the writer's craft and then emulating the writing on their own. They write, "A balanced literacy program may include separate and roughly equal times for reading and writing instruction, but integrated within each should be opportunities to do the other" (p. 98).

Professional Development and Teacher Study Groups

In 1980, Joyce and Showers conducted a 2-year inquiry in the form of a meta-analysis analyzing more than 200 studies examining how teachers acquire skills and strategies. Their findings indicated several things, one of which is that teachers are wonderful learners who can acquire new skills as well as learn new information, thus fine tuning their competence as teachers. From their research, Joyce and Showers identified the need for certain conditions to exist in order for this learning to occur, but they also found that these conditions did not usually exist even when teachers participated in the governance of these settings. The results of the meta-analysis also identified five major components of training that occurred in the studies. These were

1. Presentation of theory or description of skill and strategy,
2. Modeling or demonstration of skills or models of teaching,
3. Practice in simulated and classroom settings,
4. Structured and open-ended feedback (provision of information about performance), and
5. Coaching for application (hands-on, in-classroom assistance with the transfer of skills and strategies into the classroom).

Their findings pointed to the idea that for maximum effectiveness of inservice activities, it is wisest to include several, and if possible, all of the training components in inservice implementation. Joyce and Showers (1981) noted that there must be consideration given to how to help teachers not only acquire and improve their skills, but also to integrate their learning into their active repertoire of teaching. An understanding of the theory

behind the teaching approach contributes to the development of skill and ultimately to its use.

From this early inquiry concerning professional development for teachers, the field has expanded its repertoire of knowledge about effective professional development, but the discussions continue to relate back to the early work of Joyce and Showers. While Joyce and Showers referred to this expansion of knowledge and skills as inservice, several labels have evolved through the years such as staff development, professional learning, and professional development.

Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989) identified five models of teacher development which included individually guided staff development, the observation/assessment model, a development/improvement process, a training model, and an inquiry model of staff development. Additionally, school employees can learn through action research, observation of peers, planning with colleagues, and reflective journal writing. One of the newest approaches, teacher study groups, has been shown to be a meaningful approach to professional learning.

Teacher Study Groups

Joyce and Showers (1982) found that change requires enormous amounts of effort and that teachers must organize themselves into groups for the express purpose of training themselves and each other. Birchak et al. (1998) implemented a longitudinal study spanning seven years that began as a result of Short's questioning of the method of inservice offered to teachers in the Tucson Unified School District. During the time of the study, the researchers took part in varying roles. Initially, the group consisted of teachers

from two schools, but eventually the group split into two groups because of the size of the group.

Birchak et al. (1998) discuss the complexity of defining a study group because of the many factors involved in the group. For the purposes of the Birchak et al. group, a study group was defined as "a voluntary group of people who come together to talk and create theoretical and practical understandings with each other" (p. 28). Within the study group, educators push their own thinking and support others, but it is not a place where change is imposed on the members of the group or where certain members decide on the needs of the other members. The power of the study group is the collaborative nature of the group. A study group is not the work of one person, but is the work of a community of learners attempting to gain understanding of the issues that are important to all members of the group.

According to Birchak et al., a study group does not serve as an inservice or staff meeting, but instead acts as a support of this type of meeting. It may be school-based, job-alike, or topic-centered and may function as a discussion group, teacher research group, readers group, or writers group, or a book study group. Nevertheless, all members of the group share a focus on transforming teaching through dialogue and reflection and creating a sense of community among teachers. Within a study group, talk is used to integrate theory and practice, and the talk also allows for sharing and dialogue in powerful ways. Talk and discussion have been identified as important components of staff development. Colleagues conversing in a learning community serve to help build the professional culture that is so vital to academic success for all students (Lyons & Pinnell,

2001). Therefore, a study group is one promising means by which this talk and discussion can take place.

In today's schools, teachers often spend a great deal of time isolated from other teachers embedded within a hierarchical system where day-to-day experiences are governed by external forces. Sometimes the teachers with the most knowledge about the specifics of the contexts in which they work are the ones who feel the least empowered. This does not have to be the case. A teacher study group can supply the vehicle by which teachers might break free of isolation and engage in powerful learning about literacy. A teacher study group may also allow teachers the opportunity to develop a sense of professional agency. Florio-Ruane and Raphael (2001) found this to be true in a qualitative study that investigated the nature of teachers' oral and written participation in a book club, how participation in a book club affected their understanding of literacy, and how their participation informed their thinking about literacy curriculum and instruction.

Sparks and Hirsch (1997) discuss an interactive approach to learning as they note, "Soon to be gone forever, we hope, are the days when educators (usually teachers) sit relatively passively while an 'expert' exposes them to new ideas or 'trains' them in new practices, and the success of the effort is judged by a 'happiness quotient' that measures participants' satisfaction with the experience and their off-the-cuff assessment regarding its usefulness" (p.1). Lieberman (1995) points out that it is ironic that what everyone appears to want for students, which includes a wide array of learning opportunities that engage students in experiencing, creating, and solving real problems using their own experiences as they work with others, is denied to teachers when it comes to their learning.

Constructivist Approaches with Adult Learners

Sparks and Hirsh (1997) suggest a constructivist approach to professional development in order to promote interactive learning. Since constructivists believe that learners create their own knowledge structures instead of merely receiving them from others, an interactive approach to professional development lends itself to a constructivist approach because learning is being constructed in the mind of the learner as opposed to learning being transmitted from teacher to student which has been found to be ineffective (Sparks & Hirsch). If teachers are given ample opportunities to learn in constructivist settings, they can construct for themselves educational visions instead of having instructional programs trivialized into a cookbook approach for them (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). With an interactive approach, teachers no longer receive "knowledge" from "experts" in training sessions, but collaborate with peers, researchers, and their own students to make sense of the teaching/learning process in their own context rather than a context that has nothing to do with them (Sparks & Hirsch).

As discussed above, there have not been many studies to date on teacher study groups in the literature. Chandler-Olcott (2001) gives a brief description of the framework for one teacher study group for which she served multiple roles (including that of facilitator) and details their experience with the presentation of a symposium. She relates the story of the symposium through the individuals involved in the symposium in a qualitative study on spelling constructed from multiple data sources through the lens of shared authority. The concept of shared authority employed by Chandler-Olcott fits within a constructivist framework for professional learning for teachers.

Weaver, Calliari, and Rentsch (2004) use a monograph to tell three stories about their experiences with a teacher study groups. The first story detailed a study group that was formed in response to dismal test scores in a middle school in Michigan. This group used a book study format to implement changes in teacher practice and student learning. Calliari went on to facilitate another study group 3 years later that successfully changed the county reading curriculum. Lastly, Rentsch shares her perspective on the study groups. The monograph tells the story of two study groups, but it also shares the progress of the students using test scores. Subsequent groups that formed are also briefly discussed in the monograph.

Adult learners have many of the same characteristics as children. They bring their knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and assumptions to new experiences and construct new knowledge or refine previous understanding to gain meaning, but they must be motivated to learn and actively engage in the process. They must also take ownership of the process (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). Friend and Cook (2000) outlined seven characteristics of adult learners. They are as follows:

1. Adults bring a vast amount of prior knowledge, experience, and skills with them.
2. They have acquired ideas, beliefs, values, and passions about learning developed after years of success and perhaps failure during their years of schooling.
3. Adults are goal oriented and want to resolve problems or issues now.

4. They are usually more flexible learners because they have had to adapt to many different learning contexts, teaching approaches, and teacher personalities.
5. Adults have high expectations.
6. They have many commitments and many demands on their time.
7. Adults are generally motivated to learn and are motivated to try new approaches and techniques that will improve their practice.

Likewise, Lyons and Pinnell (2001) recommend several principles to use with adult learners within a constructivist framework:

1. Encourage active participation.
2. Organize small-group discussions around common concerns.
3. Introduce new concepts in context.
4. Create a safe environment.
5. Develop participants' conceptual knowledge through conversation around shared experiences.
6. Provide opportunities for participants to use what they know to construct new knowledge.
7. Look for shifts in teachers' understanding over time.
8. Provide additional experiences for participants who have not yet developed the needed conceptual understanding.

Each of these principles for effective adult learning seems to be embodied in the framework of a teacher study group. Teacher study groups promote a sense of a learning community for teachers, inviting them to question each other, respond thoughtfully to

professional readings and research, develop conceptual understandings, and learn together in a safe setting.

Summary

This chapter has focused on a review of literature related to the reading-writing relationship, writing as it applies to the Reading First grant, and professional development as it relates to teacher study groups. In the following chapter, I present an overview of the research design for this study as well as detailed account of the data collection and analysis processes used in the study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of primary teachers concerning the relationship between reading and writing as it applied to the larger theme of literacy within the parameters set forth by a federally mandated grant program titled, "Reading First." Additionally, I investigated how participation in a teacher study group focused on the reading-writing connection influenced primary teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection and their classroom practices.

A total of 15 teachers participated in this study with 3 of the teachers participating on a limited scale. Each of the teachers had been involved in the Reading First grant for 1-3 years as classroom teachers in kindergarten through third grade in one elementary school. The parameters set forth by the grant were very explicit, and as a result, a definite demarcation line existed in the school between reading acts and writing acts in these elementary classrooms. Unfortunately, writing was the component that was deleted from the literacy equation. This study emerged as a result of my own questions concerning the parameters of the federal Reading First grant, but more specifically from questions posed to me from others concerning these parameters as I filled multiple roles associated with the grant (i.e., school administrator, teacher leader, state educational specialist, and literacy educator). Specifically, during my tenure as an administrator in a school receiving money from the Reading First grant, I was questioned by the teachers in the school about the lack of writing that was allowed by the grant. As a literacy educator, my

questions and concerns compelled me to seek answers for myself, for the teachers in my school, and for the broader literacy education community.

Design of the Study

This study was qualitative and interpretive in nature, and as a participant-observer in the setting, I served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. As I studied the participants in their natural setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I interpreted the phenomena in terms of the meanings the participants brought to the study because meaning is socially constructed (Merriam, 2002). Because there was more than one story to share, I approached the investigation in a manner much like a light striking a crystal (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) with ensuing results determined by the vantage point each participant held. Through the interweaving of these individual stories and perspectives, a complex, holistic picture emerged from the detailed reports of individuals involved in the study (Creswell, 1998). As the researcher, I was interested in understanding the meanings the teachers in my school had constructed (Merriam) concerning the influence of the Reading First grant as well as their perceptions of and practices associated with the reading-writing connection. Multiple means of data gathering were used, including interviews and observations, in order to offer a rich description of the events.

Guiding Questions

The questions that I selected to guide my study are multifaceted because I was not only looking at literacy as it applied to a primary classroom but also investigating how literacy was defined in this context within the parameters set forth by the Reading First grant. I also investigated the effect that a teacher study group had on teachers'

perceptions and their classroom practices with writing in a Reading First classroom. The questions guiding this study were:

1. What are primary teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection for students in kindergarten through third grade?
2. How does the context of a school wide Reading First grant affect primary teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection for students in K−3?
3. In what ways does a voluntary teacher study group focused on the reading-writing connection influence primary teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection and their literacy instruction?

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher in this study, I was in a unique position. While I was the assistant principal in the school receiving the Reading First grant, I was previously an education program specialist with Georgia's Reading First program. These two vantage points on the same federal program placed me in a position to view the grant in multiple ways. During the study, it was also necessary for me to be mindful that I was conducting research in "my own backyard." As the researcher, I had to be cognizant of my own biases, values, and understandings concerning the school, the informants, and the grant with the understanding that informants may withhold information or slant information because I was in a supervisory position (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). I approached the study from an emic perspective (Merriam, 2002) because I was deeply involved in the grant where the study took place. Because of my position, I had an insider's perspective which was a great asset but also a liability (Fecho, 2000). As I conducted the study, I sought to

be mindful of my relationship with the participants, cognizant of my perspective of the phenomenon, and aware of any bias that I might hold.

Throughout the process of the research, I attempted to minimize any distortion that occurred because of my role in the setting. Because I was the assistant principal in the school and because I had supervisory responsibilities, I reassured the participants that anything they said or did during the study would not affect their professional evaluations or status. As an assurance to them, I did not serve as the primary evaluator for these teachers during the time of the study; instead, another administrator at the school served in this evaluative role.

Before I became involved with the Reading First grant, I was a classroom teacher for 7 years, serving 4 years as a second-grade teacher and 3 years as a fourth-grade teacher. For 2 years after I left my position as a classroom teacher, I was an assistant principal in an elementary school before leaving the local school system to work as a Reading First program specialist with the Georgia Department of Education. After working with the Reading First grant at the state level, I returned to the local school system as an assistant principal in this Reading First school. I have served as an assistant principal for a total of 4 years and for 2 years at the school where I conducted the study.

During the time of the study, I was a doctoral student at Georgia State University, studying language and literacy as it relates to teaching and learning. While a student at Georgia State University, I had the opportunity to assist a professor with the teaching of a master's-level class and then had the opportunity to teach the same class. I gained research experience as well when I worked with a professor on a research project concerning preservice teachers and scaffolding; from that study we developed a paper

that was presented at a national conference. I also worked as a graduate research assistant with two research and policy summits (one national conference and one state-level conference) focused on writing and reading. Each of these experiences broadened my understanding of literacy and the multidimensionality of this sometimes ambiguous term.

As a Reading First specialist with the Georgia Department of Education, it was necessary for me to disseminate information given to me by the Reading First architects to the teachers and administrators with whom I worked throughout the state. I was told not to deviate from the information given to me. Because the model used to disseminate Reading First information was a "train the trainer" model, I was not in a position to add my own views to the information. I was merely supposed to assist teachers in implementing the mandates set forth by the grant. While there are many aspects of the grant that I agreed with, the lack of writing allowed during the 135-minute reading block required by the grant was disconcerting to me as a former classroom teacher. From that viewpoint, I could see where there must be adherence to the guidelines of the grant, but even so, literacy instruction without opportunities to engage children in writing went against everything that I knew as a literacy educator.

My role as the administrator charged with implementing the overall curriculum in a Reading First school added an extra dimension to the study. While I was mandated to make sure that the grant was totally implemented in the school, I was also required to oversee the implementation of other aspects of the curriculum such as the Georgia Performance Standards for English/Language Arts, Math, Science, as well as the Quality Core Curriculum for Social Studies. While the Georgia Performance Standards have clearly stated objectives for writing, most writing activities were not allowed during the

135-minute reading block specified in the Reading First grant. I was instructed as a Reading First employee and later as the administrator in a Reading First school that no process writing was to occur during the 135-minute reading block. Because a writing assessment was mandated for students in third- and fifth-grade, it was deemed important that the teachers prepare the students for this writing assessment, but this instruction took place outside the mandated 135-minute reading block. In addition, there was little time left in the day for science, social studies, or math.

I was the individual that the teachers most often approached with curriculum matters because I was the assistant principal in charge of curriculum at my school and because I had established a rapport with the teachers that allowed them to question me about curriculum matters. Because my tenure at the school began during the second year of implementation of the grant, the concern on the part of the teachers for the missing component of writing consistently surfaced. This concern also was evident as I traveled around the state in my capacity as a Reading First program specialist. Classroom teachers continually addressed their dissatisfaction with the grant concerning this important aspect of literacy. As the administrator, I was in a difficult position that required me to oversee the implementation of an instructional program with which I did not totally agree.

Context

The School

Riverview Elementary School (pseudonyms are used for all names of places and participants) is a school in a rapidly growing area of a county in a suburban area of a large city in the southeastern part of the United States. It is one of the older schools in the county school system, and it sits in the shadow of the original high school in the county.

It began as a school for children of cotton mill workers in a small mill town and eventually moved to its present location in 1973, which lies on the outskirts of the mill town. While it has never been one of the more affluent schools in the county, it has always maintained a reputation as an effective school serving children of blue collar workers. Over the past 4 years, Riverview has experienced not only rapid growth in student population, but also a change in student demographics. During the 2003-2004 school year, which was the school year preceding the implementation of the Reading First grant, Riverview's student population was 50% Black, 40% White, and 10% represented by other racial and ethnic groups. The total enrollment at the end of the school year was 691 students with 60% of the students eligible for free or reduced lunches. During the first year of implementation of the grant (2004-2005 school year), the student population rose to 717 students made up of a student body consisting of 52 % Black, 38% White, and 10% represented by other racial and ethnic groups, with 61% of the students eligible for free or reduced lunches. The 2005-2006 school year, the second year of the reading grant, saw the student population reach 805 with a student body consisting of 61% Black, 30% White, and 9% of other racial and ethnic groups represented. Sixty-four percent of the student population was eligible for free or reduced meals. During the 2006-2007 school year, the population increased to a total of 851 students, with a Black population of 64%, a White population of 28%, and 8% of the student population consisting of students from other racial groups and with 61% of the population eligible for free or reduced meals.

Because of the rapid growth during these few years, Riverview had 12 portable classrooms at the peak of enrollment, which coincided with the time of this study. While

the building was aging, it was a clean, well-maintained building. There were two interior courtyards and a very large recreational area located at the rear of the school with several playscapes and a track. Children's work adorned the hallway and classrooms, but a recent Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) review suggested more presentation of children's work in the hallways. Many of the teachers suggested that the lack of children's work in the hallways was a result of the influence of the Reading First grant because there was no drawing, use of markers or crayons, or process writing allowed during the 135-minute reading block, thereby limiting the activities used in the classroom.

At the time of this study, Riverview had 54 certified teachers serving students in Pre-K through fifth grade. In the grades receiving Reading First money, kindergarten through third grades, 37.5 teachers worked with the students on a daily basis. There was also one literacy coach that worked with the kindergarten through third-grade teachers. Three of the teachers were designated Title I teachers because Riverview was a Title I school, and three of the teachers were paid with Early Intervention Program funds. Administrators included one principal, the researcher who was a full-time assistant principal, and one half-time assistant principal.

Riverview Elementary made Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) during the 2003-2004 school year and the 2004-2005 school year as determined by criteria set forth by the Georgia Department of Education, but it failed to make AYP during the 2005-2006 school year. The school also did not make AYP for the 2006-2007 year. The school did not meet the necessary goal for students passing the Georgia Criterion Reference Competency Test in the area of students with disabilities in either 2005-2006 or 2006-

2007. Because of this, they were deemed a “Needs Improvement School” and had to offer school choice for the 2007-2008 school year. During the 2005-2006 school year, Riverview’s special education population was 12.3 % and the gifted program served 6.5% of the student population. While Riverview did not have an English Language Learners program at the time of this study, 1% of the population was eligible to receive those services. During the 2006-2007 school year, Riverview served a student population that included 16% special education students, 6% gifted students, and 2% students eligible to receive services for English Language Learners, even though parents elected to waive these services in order to remain at Riverview Elementary.

Guidelines for the Reading First grant were very specific, and teachers were closely monitored by the literacy coach, the county level grant coordinator, and the state level educational program specialist assigned to the school. These individuals consistently monitored schedules, curriculum, and strategies used in the classroom. Teachers were not at liberty to use any curriculum that had not been approved by the Reading First division of the state department of education for the school and could not deviate from their reading schedule for any reason. In the event that there were time constraints placed on the 135-minute “reading block,” teachers were expected to make up that time even if it meant neglecting other subjects such as math, social studies, and science. The reading block only consisted of activities directly related to the five components of literacy allowed by the grant: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. At no time was there to be any process writing during the block, and the only writing allowed was as a response to literature.

Participants

In January 2007, teachers in kindergarten through third grade were invited to take part in the teacher study group. A flyer (see Appendix C) was placed in various locations around the school, and teachers were asked to let me know prior to the first meeting if they would like to participate. The group was limited to 15 participants and amazingly exactly 15 teachers volunteered to join the group. All of the participants took part in the group for the duration of the study. Three of the teachers attended sporadically but still managed to attend more than half of the meetings. Two of the participants had family issues that prohibited them from attending all of the meetings and one of the participants was completing work on a doctoral program. The different personalities of the teachers were very much evident during the time of the study, varying from subdued to boisterous, depending on the topic of discussion.

Criterion sampling was employed for the purposes of this study because all participants involved in the study had experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 1998) of teaching children in kindergarten, first, second, or third grade in the same school receiving federal Reading First funds. Sampling was also a matter of convenience because the participants were employed in the school where the investigator was employed. The sample was small, 15 teachers, and nonrandom (Merriam, 2002) because the teacher study group was open to all teachers at the site who were currently teaching kindergarten through third grade, except for the literacy coach. Even though the literacy coach had been employed for the duration of the grant, I purposefully excluded her from the teacher study group because I was concerned that the teachers might not be as forthcoming with their discussions if she were part of the group. Because of her position

as a literacy coach, she had assumed a semi-evaluative role with the teachers. She had also been the individual who had delivered the majority of their professional development sessions for the time of the Reading First grant, and because one of the areas I was seeking to explore with the participants was based on professional learning, I feared that the teachers would not be as honest about their experiences if I were to include her as part of the teacher study group.

The participants (see Table 1) included three kindergarten teachers, five first-grade teachers, four second-grade teachers, and three third-grade teachers. (Pseudonyms are used throughout this study to ensure anonymity.) Their years of experience ranged from that of a first-year teacher to a veteran teacher who had taught for 32 years. The educational level of the participants was also varied as some of the teachers had only completed bachelor degrees while one participant completed a doctoral program during the time of the study. According to state guidelines, each teacher was fully certified in the state of Georgia.

All of the teachers involved in the study were excellent teachers who had consistently proved themselves as effective educators during the year and a half that I had worked with them. They were very knowledgeable of subject manner, innovative and creative in their instructional methods, and, above all, passionate about their chosen profession. Before becoming the assistant principal at the school, I had the opportunity to work with two of the teachers in another school where this same level of professionalism had been demonstrated. While all of the teachers who taught kindergarten through third grade were given the opportunity to take part in the study, I could not have personally chosen 15 more exemplary professionals.

Table 1

Study Participants

Name	Grade	Experience	Degrees	Certification Level
Joy	1	32 years	B.S.	T-5, ECE
Rachel	K	26 years	M.S. Ed.	PBT-5, ECE
Jane	K-8, Adult Ed.	21 years	B.S.	T-4, Elementary Ed.
Kim	1, 3	18 years	B.S.	PBT-4, ECE
Hope	2, 3, 5, 6	17 years	B.A., M.S., Ed.S.	T-6, Elementary Ed.
Lee	K, 5, 3	13 years	B.A.	T-4, P-K, Elem. Ed., Middle School
Addie	K, 1	10 years	B.A., Ed.D.	T-7
Caroline	K, 1, 2, 3	10 years	B.S., M.S.Ed.	PK-6, Sci. 6-8
Quillion	K, 5, 6	7 years	B.S., M.S.W.	T-5, Social Work
Shelley	PK, K	6 years	B.S., M.Ed.	T-5, ECE, Sp. Ed.
Willa	2, 3	5 years	B.S., M.Ed.	T-5
Diane	1, 2	4 years	B.S., M.S.	T-5, ECE, Inst.Tech
Laila	Pre-K, 1	2 years	B.S.Ed.	T-4, ECE
Ryan	1	2 years	B.S.	T-4, ECE
Nannette	2	1 year	B.S. Ed.	T-4, ECE

The 135-Minute Reading Block

The 135-minute reading block was the key component of the Reading First grant. It was to be protected from interruption at all costs. Even if other areas of the elementary school curriculum were to be ignored, the 135-minute reading block was to be implemented each day. Additionally, there were strict parameters set forth for this sacred block of time. The use of only pre-approved Reading First materials, instructional diets outlining the division of time, and curriculum designed around the five important components of reading as presented in the Report of the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) were allowed. Every activity and learning experience presented during the time period known as the "reading block" had to be directly related to one of the five components of reading which included phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

During the "reading block," students were either receiving whole-group instruction delivered on grade-level, or they were grouped into needs-based groups as identified by assessment data. The majority of instruction during the block was directly from the Houghton-Mifflin reading program. The materials used were delineated by the grant, and no other materials could be used because this was perceived to be "layering" and strictly forbidden. While writing in response to literature was allowed, teaching of or use of the writing process was never allowed during the 135-minute reading block.

Reading First Professional Development

Professional development was another important component of the Reading First grant. Teacher participation in different professional learning activities was mandated as part of the requirements of the grant. In addition to attending a Reading First Academy,

teachers were also expected to participate in monthly professional development activities presented at the school level by the literacy coach.

Each month the literacy coach attended a training session where she was presented a module of instruction in the format of a Power Point presentation based on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, or comprehension that was developed by the Reading First architects in Georgia. In most cases this Power Point presentation was delivered to the coaches by the Education Program Specialist from the Georgia Department of Education assigned to their school district. On occasion, the Reading First architects presented the information directly to the coaches. There was usually a book study that went along with the Power Point presentation as well.

After participating in the session, the literacy coach returned to the school to "redeliver" that instruction verbatim. Using the Power Point with notes pages as her guide, she was to present the information as it was presented to her without deviating from the script in any way. The teachers were also assigned certain chapters from a book chosen by the architects to read and answer questions from and to be prepared to share those answers at the professional development meeting.

Data Sources and Data Collection Methods

Data sources for the study consisted of an open-ended questionnaire completed by all participants, selective transcriptions of the teacher study group sessions, verbatim transcriptions of three interviews with 13 of the teachers, audiotapes and field notes from observations conducted in 12 of the teachers' classrooms, the researcher's reflective journal, and selective transcription of a focus group interview at the completion of the study to allow for triangulation of data sources and member checking.

Questionnaire

Data collection began with an open-ended questionnaire (see Appendix A) completed by each of the 15 participants in the study in January 2007. The questionnaire was used to collect baseline data on teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection, their ideas about the Reading First grant, their knowledge of writing in the early childhood curriculum, their attitudes about professional development, and their ideas about the effectiveness of teacher study groups.

Interviews

After the completion of this questionnaire, each teacher took part in a series of open-ended, in-depth interviews which were transcribed soon after each interview and analyzed for themes. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in their entirety, and the pages were numbered and coded with each participant's pseudonym, type of data document, and date. This careful coding enabled me to cite excerpts from the data (i.e., Diane, I1, p.3). I conducted a series of three separate semi-structured interviews with each participant with a final focus group interview conducted at the completion of the study. Each interview served a purpose both by itself and within the series of interviews (Seidman, 2006).

The series of interviews began in February and continued until the completion of the data collection in June. The protocols for each of these interviews appear in Appendix B. The first interview focused on the teachers' perceptions of the grant and how it affected the school curriculum. Teacher choice, positive aspects of the grant, what was lacking in the grant, and how the grant affected classroom writing were also addressed in that interview. The second interview, conducted in March, focused on teachers' ideas

about reading and writing instruction and whether or not they saw any connections between the two. The third interview, conducted in April, served as a debriefing session of classroom observations and study group sessions. Participants were asked to reflect on their teaching as well as what they found to be useful from the study group sessions. Finally, a focus group interview was conducted in June with all of the participants in order to conclude the study and to allow for triangulation of data sources and member checking.

Audiotaped Teacher Study Group Sessions

Audiotaping of the 10 teacher study group meetings took place along with selective transcriptions from each of these meetings. We attempted to meet weekly, but on occasion we were unable to do so because of conflicts with schedules. After each meeting, the audiotape was transcribed and coded with the type of document, page numbers, and date to allow for accurate citations of data excerpts (i.e., TSG 1, 2.14.07, p. 3). To be fully involved with the study group conversations, I elected not to take field notes so that I would not be distracted from the conversations. I also elected not to video-tape the study group sessions because I did not believe that the participants would be comfortable with videotaping during the sessions. I served as the primary facilitator of the sessions, but my goal was to release this responsibility gradually throughout the study group process by asking each participant to serve in the capacity of facilitator at least once during the timeframe involved with the study. While there was extensive discussion by each of the participants, only two participants offered to facilitate one of the sessions. Laila and Ryan facilitated the fifth teacher study group, where they shared information they had gathered about the Reading First grant.

Field Notes from Classroom Observations

Field notes, in addition to audiotapes from classroom observations in 12 of the 15 participants' classrooms, were recorded from February 2007 through May 2007 with a total of one observation per teacher, with the exception of three participants. These field notes were coded with each participant's pseudonym, type of data document, date, and page numbers to ensure careful documentation of data excerpts cited in the study (i.e., Willa, O, 3.13.07, p. 10). Each of the observations occurred when the participant invited me into her classroom for specific observations of an activity that related to the reading-writing connection. These were all prearranged visits. Scheduling constraints were the reason that three of the participants were not observed.

Researcher's Journal

Throughout the study, I kept a journal detailing my own questions and concerns. The journal also served as a repository for thoughts about emerging themes and ideas.

Data Management and Analysis

> Data analysis has been described as something like a "mysterious metamorphosis" where the "investigator retreated with the data, applied his or her analytic powers, and emerged butterfly-like with 'findings.'" (Merriam, 1998, p. 156)

For the purposes of the study, I used my home office as a repository for the data that I gathered. All of the information concerning each participant was contained in one notebook divided into sections labeled for each participant who had chosen a pseudonym for herself at the beginning of the study. A list with the participants' names linked to the pseudonyms was kept in a separate file in my home and destroyed at the conclusion of the study. Transcriptions of interviews, results of the initial questionnaire, and field notes from the observations in the classroom were housed in this notebook. I also dedicated one

notebook to the transcriptions of the study group sessions. A researcher's journal was also maintained throughout the time of the study. The audiotapes associated with the study were destroyed upon completion of the study.

In qualitative research, the process of analysis begins with the first interview and the first observation. It is an interactive process where informed hunches direct the investigation of the researcher (Merriam, 1998). I found this to be true in this particular study because of my decision to transcribe my own data. Initially, I considered having someone transcribe the participants' interviews and the teacher study group sessions due to time constraints, but having decided to complete the task myself, I found that even as I transcribed, I constantly compared and analyzed each data set to subsequent data sets. While transcribing, themes would emerge giving me insight into future interview questions and plans for upcoming teacher study group sessions. A particular incident from an interview or teacher study group also served to lead me to tentative categories that were then compared to other instances later in the data analysis process (Merriam, 1998).

Data sets, which I printed as double-spaced hard copy to begin with, produced a richly descriptive product. Unfortunately, this "product" was overwhelming for me as a new researcher because there were so many interesting themes that I wanted to pursue. I decided to heed the advice of Bogdan and Biklen (1992) and discipline myself concerning the need to pursue everything. To facilitate this endeavor, I employed a system for organizing and managing this data in the form of coding, and my research questions served as a guide during this process.

Coding has been described as "nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of data" (Merriam, 1998). I began the process of coding by concentrating my efforts on the three questions that were the driving focus of the study. Using erasable colored pencils to code the data as it related to the three research questions, I reduced the data in order to bring them to a more focused level. When doing this, broad themes began to emerge, so I next assigned specific codes to these themes, highlighting them with certain colors. These preliminary themes generally pertained to each research question. For example, themes such as the reading-writing connection, the reading-writing connection as determined by the Reading First grant, the writing process, Reading First professional development, Reading First restrictions, and participants' dissonance with the grant were obvious.

I then embarked on the process of coding the data in more detail, which allowed me to focus on refining the emerging themes. As I continued the process of data analysis, more specific themes emerged, and I made the decision to utilize acronyms as codes to represent these themes to circumvent confusion because of the various colors utilized. After coding the text according to these acronyms, I physically cut the pages apart and taped the corresponding coded data excerpts to sheets of paper with other excerpts taped to it coded with the same acronym. Continuing this thread, I then assigned "sub" acronyms to represent sub-codes and carried out the same process of cutting and taping. Because I had accumulated data from different sources, I carried out this process with teacher interview transcriptions, questionnaires, teacher study group session transcriptions, and field notes from classroom observations. By doing this, I was able to test the

emerging themes and compare them to subsequent data, adjusting and refining the themes as the information emerged (Merriam, 2002). The data analysis process was also recursive and dynamic (Merriam, 1998) because I was constantly looking "back" as a way to guide me as I moved forward with the study. Once I reached the point of saturation, I began writing up the findings.

I attempted to approach the material with an open attitude, seeking what emerged from the data as important (Seidman, 2006). Throughout the analysis process, I had to be cognizant of any bias I felt concerning the grant and remember the focus of my study as it related to my research questions while conducting the analysis of the data. Table 2 provides an overview of the timeline of the data collection and analysis associated with this study.

Trustworthiness

In the field of education, a researcher using a naturalistic paradigm must be careful to communicate the rigor with which an inquiry in implemented and subsequently reported. Because of the applied nature of educational research, it is very important that researchers and others have confidence in the conduct of the investigation and the results of the study (Merriam, 1998). The assumption is often made by those who adhere to a more conventional paradigm that naturalistic research is "soft," that it therefore lacks the rigor that is the hallmark of a conventional study. Despite the assertion by some researchers that rigor is not the hallmark of naturalistic inquiry, certain criteria to ensure trustworthiness should be employed to ensure rigor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Next, I discuss

Table 2

Timeline and Overview of Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Dates	Activities
January 2007	Offer invitations to teachers in kindergarten, first, second, and third grade to participate in the teacher study group Begin researcher's journal Distribute, collect, and analyze open-ended questionnaire Selectively transcribe audiotapes of first study group session Initiate researcher's journal and begin data analysis
February 2007	Selectively transcribe audiotapes of second, third, and fourth study group sessions Conduct and transcribe first interview with each participant Conduct observations and take field notes in participants' classrooms Meet with peer debriefer on process Continue researcher's journal and data analysis
March 2007	Selectively transcribe audiotapes of fifth, sixth, and seventh study group sessions Conduct and transcribe second interview each participant Conduct observations and take field notes in participants' classrooms Meet with peer debriefer on process Continue researcher's journal and data analysis
April 2007	Selectively transcribe audiotapes of eighth and ninth study group session Conduct and transcribe third interview with each participant Conduct observations and take field notes in participants' classrooms Meet with peer debriefer on process Continue researcher's journal and data analysis
May 2007	Selectively transcribe audiotapes of tenth study group session Meet with peer debriefer on process and themes Complete researcher's journal and continue data analysis
June 2007	Focus group interview for member checking Complete researcher's journal and continue data analysis Meet with peer debriefer on process and themes Begin drafting of findings
July-August 2007	More data analysis and writing
September 2007	Complete penultimate draft of dissertation
October 2007	Defend dissertation

the ways in which I sought to ensure trustworthiness in the research design and methods for my study.

Credibility

Credibility is the term that most closely parallels the term internal validity used by researchers who employ quantitative methods. This term addresses how well a researcher provides assurances of the fit between the respondents' views of their life ways and the researcher's reconstruction and representation of these life ways (Schwandt, 2001). Lincoln and Guba (1985) have identified five major techniques that make it more likely that credible findings and interpretations will be produced in naturalistic studies:

1. activities increasing the probability that credible findings will be produced such as prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation.
2. activities that provide an external check on the inquiry process, such as peer debriefing.
3. an activity aimed at refining working hypotheses as more and more information becomes available in the form of negative case analysis.
4. an activity that makes possible checking preliminary finding and interpretations against archived raw data such as referential adequacy.
5. an activity that provides for the direct test of findings and interpretations with the human sources from which they have come through member checking. (p. 301)

In this study, I sought to ensure credibility by prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking. Prolonged engagement was maintained by spending 6 months focused on the research in the setting, a setting

with which I was already familiar. I also endeavored to continue to build upon the rapport and trust that had already been well established since I had worked previously with the group of teachers who participated in the study. As I utilized member checking to tell the story of the teachers' experiences, I had the opportunity to assure the teachers that I was seeking to represent their experiences as they have constructed and reported them. Persistent observation allowed me to identify characteristics and elements of the situation that were most relevant to the story, and triangulation of data provided different types of data with which to construct the findings.

Finally, a peer debriefer was used to assist me at various points in the data collection and analysis process as I worked through the study by listening, offering an outside view point, and providing an opportunity for catharsis. Jo Anna Fish, another doctoral student at Georgia State University, served as my peer debriefer. We were employees of the same county school system, and we spent countless hours discussing our studies, our frustrations, and our successes.

Dependability

The term dependability in qualitative research is parallel to the term reliability in quantitative research. Dependability focuses on the process of the inquiry and the researcher's responsibility to ensure that the process was logical, traceable, and well-documented (Schwandt, 2001). In this study, I ensured dependability by providing thick description in the researcher's notebook as well as in the reporting of the data collection and analysis processes and the findings. Within the researcher's notebook, I discussed emerging themes and findings. An audit trail was provided through the use of notebooks

housing all relevant questionnaires, transcriptions, audiotapes, and field notes as well as the analysis of the data.

Transferability

Transferability, a parallel to external validity in quantitative research, focuses on generalization in terms of case-to-case transfer concerning the researcher's responsibility to provide readers with sufficient information on the case studied to subsequent cases that may be undertaken (Schwandt, 2001). Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain that transferability by the naturalist is very different from the establishment of external validity by the conventionalist, and case-to-case transfer can only be accomplished if the inquirer provides sufficient detail about the circumstances of the situation or case that was studied. This level of explicit detail has been labeled as thick description (Geertz, 1983) and has been described as more than a matter of amassing relevant detail, but to actually begin to interpret it by recording the circumstances, meanings, intentions, strategies, and motivations that characterize a particular episode. Thick description, as opposed to thin description, is the interpretive characteristic of the description as opposed to the detail per se (Schwandt).

The degree of transferability is also dependent on the degree of similarity between sending and receiving contexts. Transferability inferences cannot be made by the initial investigator who knows only the sending context, so the burden of proof lies less with the original researcher than the person who is seeking to make application. It is the responsibility of the original researcher to provide the data base that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability was achieved in this study by providing sufficient thick description that

allows readers to decide whether this study has implications for their own studies or interests.

Confirmability

Confirmability, parallel to objectivity in quantitative research, establishes the fact that the data and interpretations of research were not figments of the researcher's imagination (Schwandt, 2001). Procedures identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) such as auditing, member checking, and peer debriefing, link assertions, findings, and interpretations in discernible ways. In this study, I ensured confirmability by employing the use of an audit trail, consistent peer debriefing in formal settings as well as informal settings, triangulation of methods, and the maintenance of a detailed researcher's journal.

Summary

This naturalistic study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) occurred over a 6-month period in an elementary school receiving Reading First grant funding. Fifteen teachers, along with me as a participant observer and investigator, examined reading-writing perceptions and classroom practices as we worked together in a voluntary teacher study group. An open-ended questionnaire, various semi-structured interviews, audiotapes of teacher study group sessions, and field notes and audiotapes from classroom observations were utilized to record a point in time that we all were experiencing together. These data were then analyzed for pertinent themes. In Chapter 4, I present the findings for each of the three research questions for the study. In Chapter 5, I discuss conclusions, implications, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

An introspective look approximately 3 years ago into my own definition of literacy resulted in this naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) examining the relationship between reading and writing as it relates to young children. A quest to give voice to the individuals who actually work day in and day out with these children, offering them the best literacy instruction possible while trying to adhere to the guidelines of a federal Reading First grant, was the impetus for this study. A group of teachers with whom I have worked on a daily basis for 2 years accepted the opportunity to work collaboratively in a teacher study group to examine their own beliefs about the reading-writing connection as it was juxtaposed against a federal Reading First grant's guidelines. Approaching the study through the lens of a social constructivist, I invited teachers to engage with me in this inquiry and to discuss the reading-writing connection with peers who were experiencing the same phenomena (Creswell, 1998).

Three research questions served to guide this process of inquiry:

1. What are primary teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection for students in kindergarten through third grade?
2. How does the context of a school wide Reading First grant affect primary teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection for students in K-3?

3. In what ways does a voluntary teacher study group focused on the reading-writing connection influence primary teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection and their literacy instruction?

For a span of 6 months, I collected and analyzed data using a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Data were gathered from 10 teacher study group meetings, 3 individual semi-structured interviews conducted with each of the participants, field notes from my time spent observing in participants' classrooms, and a final focus group interview for member checking and closure. As a participant observer in all aspects of the study, I spent time observing and taking part in discussions, but primarily I invited 15 teachers to voice their successes, frustrations, and questions associated with a federal Reading First grant that controlled instruction for 135 minutes of their school day. All of the teacher study group sessions were audiotaped and selectively transcribed following each session to allow me to examine the data in light of emerging themes. Participants were also asked to complete an open-ended questionnaire detailing demographic information about themselves and their perspectives; they were also interviewed about their own perceptions of the reading-writing connection along with their own interpretations of the Reading First grant. While I initially introduced the book, *Classrooms That Work* (Cunningham & Allington, 2006) as a springboard for the discussion of the reading-writing connection in the teacher study group, the book quickly took a backseat as teachers began to share their own understandings of the reading-writing connection and their perceptions of the influence of the Reading First grant on their literacy practices.

As this chapter unfolds, readers will encounter a vivid portrait via the use of thick description (Geertz, 1983) of 15 teachers of kindergarten, first-, second-, and third-grade

students who examined their own perceptions of the reading-writing connection while trying to come to terms with a federal grant that outlined very specific parameters for literacy instruction in their primary classrooms.

Findings presented in this chapter are organized around the three research questions that serve as the focus of this study. In accord with my first question, findings related to primary teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection for students in kindergarten through third grade are presented. Secondly, findings are discussed concerning the ways in which the context of a school-wide Reading First grant affected primary teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection for students in K-3. Finally, the concluding section of the chapter contains a detailed overview of the ways in which a voluntary teacher study group focused on the reading-writing connection influenced primary teachers' perceptions of this connection and their subsequent literacy instruction.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Reading-Writing Connection

As I embarked on this study, I had certain ideas about the reading and writing connection in the early childhood classroom, but I wondered what other teachers thought about this connection. My first research question sought to examine what the teachers with whom I worked perceived to be the connection between reading and writing for students. As I listened to them tell the stories of their experiences with reading and writing, certain themes began to rise to the forefront of discussion. These themes were very apparent during the process of data analysis. They include teachers' own background and experiences with reading and writing as students themselves, a view of reading and writing as a united strand, the roles of reading and writing as part of the

literacy equation, and, finally, the role that drawing plays in the literacy lives of young students.

Educational Background and Perceptions of the Reading-Writing Connection

An analysis of data from the questionnaire as well as responses from the second semi-structured interview revealed a group of teachers who in many cases had not experienced reading and writing as a connected entity during their years as a student in the younger grades, as high school students, or even as postsecondary and graduate students. Except for the younger participants in the study, reading and writing had often occurred as a disjoint, with reading garnering the most attention and writing coming in at a distant second. Joy, a veteran first-grade teacher stated, "In the 'olden days' I was taught phonics. Plenty of drill was included, often using 'drill sticks.' I also met Dick and Jane. It was a long time ago, but I do not remember writing instruction" (Q, p.2). According to Hope, another veteran second-grade teacher, "Wasn't the ideal! We read from a Sadlier Reader and there was no connect between reading and writing" (Q, p.2). Rachel, a kindergarten teacher, explained, "Often Round Robin reading in a group with a teacher was the norm and handwriting was the only writing experienced" (Q, p.2).

For some participants, a connection between reading and writing did occur in their formative educational experiences. Third-grade teacher Caroline penned on her questionnaire, "Many years ago, when I was in elementary school, I had to read every day, and I wrote every day. Reading and writing were always connected. I had to read and write. There was not one day when I only read and vice versa" (Q, p.2). Nannette, a first year second-grade teacher, remembered writing often and many times writing new endings to stories, (Q, p.2). Ryan, who teaches first grade and is one of the youngest

teachers, experienced the reading-writing connection through a phonics-based curriculum as she shared that "reading was phonics-based, learning the sounds of letters and learning how to decode the myriad of combinations they can make. Writing always fed off reading, reinforcing the skill you just unlocked" (Q, p.2).

Presentation of reading and writing as equal components of the literacy equation was again not the norm as participants recounted their experiences in preservice classes to prepare them for the classroom. The majority of the teachers had participated in reading methods classes, but not in classes highlighting the writing aspect of literacy. Classes focusing on children's literature were commonplace as Diane, a second-grade teacher (I1, p. 1), and Ryan, a first-grade teacher (I2, p. 1), reported, while the teaching of phonics was also included for some participants (Lee, I2, p. 2; Ryan I2, p. 2). Nanette, also a second-grade teacher, (I2, p. 1) mentioned the experience of working with writing workshop instruction, but only one participant mentioned classes where reading and writing were both taught as aspects of literacy. Willa, a third-grade teacher, praised one of her professors who "actually did reading-writing workshop and was a firm believer in the reading-writing workshop" (I2, p. 1). While most of the participants were not steeped in a curriculum emphasizing the reading-writing connection, they reported that such experiences did not shape their practices as early childhood educators. As described below, the participants' prior educational experiences were not always an indicator of their future beliefs about reading and writing.

Reading and Writing: United

There was a pervasive sense of connectedness in discussions of reading and writing throughout the study. This connectivity was evident even as early as the first

teacher study group (TSG, 1.31.07). Participants most always spoke of reading and writing as united, rarely referring to one in isolation. When queried about the connection between reading and writing in literacy development, Rachel, a veteran kindergarten teacher stated,

> I don't think you can have one without the other. Children in kindergarten have so many concepts that they have to learn and if they begin to see the connectedness of reading and writing from the beginning that you know, I sound it out in my head and that allows me to be able to write it and then I can read what I wrote. You know it all goes together. (I2, p.4)

Quillion, another kindergarten teacher, described the benefit of the reading-writing connection when she shared in the first teacher study group, "When kids have new material and they have a chance to use the material right away, it is stored in a different way . . . and writing is one way to use it" (TSG, 1.31.07, p. 1). Another participant added, "We teach with a variety of methods. Sometimes you teach for those who can hear it and learn it. Sometimes you teach for those who have to touch it. Sometimes you have to write things for those who need to see it" (Ryan, TSG, 1.31.07).

The connection was also spoken of as reading and writing reinforcing one another: "Like the writing will reinforce the reading and the reading will reinforce the writing because you need the same skills for both" (Ryan, TSG, 1.31.07, p. 1). Lee, a third-grade teacher, described the connection when she shared,

> I think with the reading part, they see the process; they see the right mechanics and if they're readers and they are observant with that then it comes into their writing and it makes it a whole lot easier for us because we don't have to teach that as much. It becomes a natural for them and with the writing I think they are able to use the things they've learned through their reading, whether it's the informational part or the mechanics part or whatever. (I2, p. 6)

Kim, who teaches first grade, succinctly stated this connection by defining literacy as, "combining reading and writing in order to communicate" (TSG, 1.31.07).

In one case, the reading-writing connection was discussed as an act of thinking. Addie, a first-grade teacher, painted a picture of reading and writing as occurring in conjunction when she shared, "Writing causes you to think. You have to think before you write and the reading comes with the words, the vocabulary that you know that you've put together that you can assimilate into something that is coherent" (I2, p. 10). Another first-grade teacher voiced this same thought in a teacher study group session referring to the reading-writing connection as developing thinking as well as organizational skills for reading and writing (Hope, TSG, 1.31.07). Addie also stated, "If you want to produce, we're supposed to be producing thinkers, good readers and good thinkers, the writing causes them to think about what they have learned and the reading, being able to recognize the words and understand what you are reading" (I2, p. 11).

The reading-writing connection was also discussed as enriching for students in their understanding of content and in their reading comprehension. Ryan described the connection as enriching for the students when she said,

> In a lot of ways it would probably save time in the day because they already have some frame of reference for what you're writing about. When they've read the story then they have something from that story as opposed to you trying to explain all the day long about who was Paul Bunyan and what did he do and why did he do it and why was his ox blue? (I1, p.3)

Laila, a first grade teacher, described this same type of connection when she said,

> I would like to see reading and writing that goes together easily. You're reading about what you're writing. You're writing about what you're reading because it covers what you're doing in science and what you're doing math and everything just kind of pulls together. It's not bits and pieces that you kind of have to make fit. (I2, p. 6)

She also stated, "They go hand-in-hand. You're not just reading first and then we're going to do writing. They should do them throughout the day" (I3, p. 4).

When kindergarten teacher Shelley was asked to talk about the lesson I observed in her classroom, she explained that she thought the students garnered a deeper understanding of the book she read aloud to them by writing about their own experiences related to the experiences of the characters in the book. She went on to say, “It made them think about the book and think about activities. Not just, oh, we hear it and we’re in it for a second and then we’re gone and don’t have any other thoughts about the book” (I3, p. 2). She also said, “I think that actually made them think about it and think about the activities and start really brainstorming what they do with their dads or that special male person in their life” (I3, p. 2).

As participants spoke of the reading-writing connection, it was almost like the connection was a given and why was there any need to discuss the point? In these teachers’ views, literacy classrooms required balance in order for students to be offered the best possible opportunities for success. A thought shared by Quillian, a kindergarten teacher, in the first teacher study group aptly stated the balance between reading and writing in a classroom as “keeping things in perspective, not putting too much emphasis on one thing and not enough on another, but emphasizing things with honor to all” (TSG, 1.31.07.).

Literacy: Reading and Writing

Throughout the study, when participants were queried about their conception of the term “literacy,” their responses always included reading and writing as quintessential aspects of literacy. When asked to define literacy, participants stated that it was the ability to read and to write (Lee, Q, p. 1; Hope, Q, p. 1; Rachel, Q, p. 1; Shelley, Q, p. 1). Literacy was never solely defined as just reading. Ryan, who teaches first grade,

suggested that literacy was "the ability to understand and comprehend written and spoken language" (Q, p. 1). Others expanded this view of literacy to include communication, the ability to read, write, and speak without taking any one component away (Jane, I3, p. 3). In many cases, literacy often included other components, as explained by Rachel as "being able to communicate one's thoughts and ideas through writing, reading, speaking, and listening" (Q, p. 1).

One third-grade teacher in particular, Lee, developed an expanded definition of literacy as she took part in the study. I had the opportunity to interview Lee, a veteran teacher, early in my doctoral work long before the initiation of the present study, and one of the things I questioned her about was her view of literacy. She was very confident in her response that literacy was the ability to read. We worked together over the next year and when asked at the beginning of this study what the term literacy meant to her, she explained that literacy was the ability to read and write (Q, p. 1). During her second interview, when asked if she believed that reading and writing were connected in literacy development, she replied,

> I don't think I used to think that writing was a part of it at all. When I would hear the word *literacy* or *literate*, I immediately thought they can't read. That was totally it and then when computers came into existence, you know they'd say, "Well, she's really computer literate," and I'd think, "Computer literate, what does that mean? Oh, she's good at the computer." So I kind of had to revamp my thinking because it was interesting that when you gave us the survey I thought, I think you interviewed me a long, long time ago for something else about literacy and that was the first question you asked me, what do you think of when you hear the word literacy? And I know in that interview I talked only about reading. I remember that I only talked totally about reading so I went to the dictionary and it said excelling in reading and writing and I just thought that was very, very interesting. Boy, I have to change how I think. (I2, p. 5)

Lee went on to say, "I don't see how you can separate them [reading and writing]. I really don't" (I2, p. 6). Lee's view of literacy expanded over the course of the study. Beginning

with a narrow view of literacy, she continued to make adjustments not only in her beliefs, but also in her classroom practices as she worked diligently to provide her students with activities that included not only reading as literacy, but writing as literacy, as well.

Literacy and Drawing

Several of the participants, especially the ones who worked with the youngest students, included *drawing* as a component of literacy. Again and again, they pointed to the idea that drawing connects reading and writing for some students. This theme cut across grade levels, with participants teaching the youngest children all the way up to the oldest ones, discussing this phenomenon. Shelley, who teaches kindergarten, pointed out that for some students; drawing is the beginning of writing. She stated, "You know, they can draw. We may not be able to tell the drawing, but they know the drawing. And that starts the very beginning but as far as actual words, that comes a little later once they have some more vocabulary and feel more comfortable with that" (I2, p. 15). Shelley also stated that "drawing is a way of expressing themselves because it is a form of writing and includes their thoughts; drawing is a way to express those thoughts" (I2, p. 16). Jane spoke of this same type of expression in a teacher study group session. She said, "I think some children can express themselves better in a picture as far as their favorite part of the story and then put the words that go with it better than they can just do the words. They need that to help them say what they're trying to say" (TSG, 1.31.07, p. 10).

Jane, a second-grade teacher, stated, "Some of the students can draw a picture and then tell you about it whereas without the picture, they don't have the focus or the thoughts to tell you about it. . . . Some of them really need the picture to work with to help them to get the ideas to put down on paper" (I2, p. 5). Quillion, another kindergarten

teacher, also addressed a need for the students to draw as part of literacy. Quillion shared, "I worry about letting the kids draw some yet I feel like that's something they need to do because it's part of how they learn to organize themselves through written expression" (I1, p. 2). Shelley corroborated this idea when she shared,

> Drawing is writing in the beginning stages of writing to me and it's putting your thoughts and your ideas on paper. You may not can put it in words just yet and that might be the first form of even brainstorming or even thinking about it actually, just drawing a picture and getting your mind going and then write about whatever picture that you write might help you get the words into writing. (I3, p. 4)

Drawing was not only expressed as writing, it was also expressed as reading. At the second teacher study group meeting, I asked the participants to bring examples of things in their classrooms that were examples of the reading-writing connection. Shelley passed a piece of paper around the table for the group to examine. It looked like a picture consisting of a number of circles drawn on a page, but Shelley explained that this was a child's rendition of writing a story to share with the class. Shelly told of the little girl's confidence in standing before her peers and "reading" the story to her classmates. Shelley shared, "It didn't appear to be a story to me, but in her eyes, it was a story, and it was writing. It was symbols on the paper that represented a story" (TSG, 2.7.07, p. 2). Kim who teaches first grade added, "If you take all that creativity and say, oh, you can't do that. You can't draw a picture. You can't illustrate that. Then how can we expect them to write and to come up with things when we've been telling them all along to forget it, not to do it" (TSG, 2.7.07, p. 27). Ryan also spoke of the narrowness of literacy when we don't allow students to draw. She argued,

> I think it's important to think about that all of the kids don't have strengths in every area, and they can't express themselves in the same way in every area. There are some kids who can read, but they can't write. There are some kids who can write but they can't read. They can draw pictures.

> They can express themselves but you have to allow them to be able to do it. I think the way we are set up now, it's like *read, read, read, read, read*, but if you're not strong in that area, you're at a loss. (TSG, 1.31.07, p. 9)

Shelley summed up drawing as a component of literacy at the final focus group interview when she said, "Their first reading is writing; it's drawing; it's illustration. They can't read. They start off by making up their own stories from pictures. Then they can draw pictures to express themselves" (FG, 7.1.07, p. 9). In the many participants' perspectives, drawing was sandwiched somewhere between or included with reading and writing as a way for students to achieve literacy in the early childhood classroom.

Conclusion: Reading-Writing Connections

As I analyzed the data, a clear picture emerged of teachers' perceptions of reading and writing as inseparable processes. Despite the fact that they had not been schooled in the idea that reading and writing were connected, they had very definite beliefs that reading and writing go hand-in-hand in the early childhood classroom. Data analysis also revealed that reading and writing were both a part of the literacy equation; however, the participants also added an important dimension to literacy and that was drawing. Concerning the first research question related to teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection, perhaps the most surprising theme that arose was the teachers' strong belief that drawing is an important part of literacy and should reside somewhere in the early childhood classroom housed between reading and writing.

Reading, Writing, and the Influence of the Reading First Grant

Exploring the reading-writing connection through the lens of the Reading First grant was the focus of my second research question. I wondered how the context of the Reading First grant affected teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection. Not only was I interested in how teachers viewed the reading-writing connection, but I also

wished to delve more deeply into whether or not this perception was shaped in any way by the time they spent working within the parameters set by the grant. As I explored this area of the study, I found four major themes to be at the forefront of this questioning: (a) what Reading First allowed concerning the reading-writing connection, (b) what Reading First barred concerning this reading-writing connection, (c) the resulting disconnect and discord experienced by the teachers, and (d) an attempt to reconcile the reading-writing connection regardless of the grant parameters.

Squeezing Writing into the Reading First Classroom

While there appeared to be a definitive line between what Reading First allowed and what Reading First disallowed as it pertained to the reading-writing connection, that line appeared to change during the course of the grant funding at Riverview Elementary. An example of this was stated by one of the kindergarten teachers, Quillion, when she stated, “At one point I wasn’t sure how much writing it was OK to do” (I1, p. 1). First grade teacher Ryan spoke of this dynamic as she discussed her experiences with reading and writing since the implementation of the grant. She shared, “This year we’re allowed to write and last year we weren’t” (I1, p. 11). Restrictions placed on the teachers during the 135-minute reading block varied at certain points during the 3-year span of the grant. At the beginning of the grant, writing was strictly forbidden during the 135-minute reading block. Lee spoke of her frustration when she said, “We were told absolutely no writing, and then later during the year we were told that it would have to be outside the reading block, and then later we were told that in center time we could use [writing] if we used it as response to literature, and we were given permission to use like book report forms, that kind of stuff” (I1, p. 1).

One activity that was allowed as part of the grant was having students write in response to literature. Even so, including this activity within the reading block brought some trepidation. Diane, a second-grade teacher, shared, "At first I was so scared to doing the wrong thing with the Reading First grant, but I think that now I do more with response to literature and things like that, so I've learned ways to fit it [writing] into the reading thing" (I1, p. 1).

Laila, a first-grade teacher, presented the Reading First reading-writing connection as, "We do a lot of reading response type writing in the reading block itself or if the curriculum says well they should write about this book, that's what we write about, but that's really hard to fit into what's on there because there's so much else they want us to get in" (I2, p. 15). Willa characterized the allowed reading-writing connection with Reading First as "response to literature." She explained, "I'll read a story and the kids can tell me or write if they were a specific character, how would they react in the situation from the story. We use that" (I2, p. 3.). Teachers spoke of using the stories from the Houghton-Mifflin reading series as springboards for writing letters, persuasive paragraphs, journal entries, and alternate endings (Rachel, I2, p. 2; Diane, I1, p. 3; Willa, I3, p. 1). Because a writing center was allowed, some of the teachers took advantage of this opportunity to address reading and writing. Diane acknowledged this when she said, "We have a writing center every week and it usually goes along with what we're doing in Houghton Mifflin" (I1, p. 4).

Summarization as a reading-writing connection was also allowed within the parameters set forth by the grant. Nannette, who teaches second grade, explained that she

used summarization as a way to measure comprehension and intersperse writing activities with reading activities. She explained,

> Sometimes I'll have them write. I feel like even though they don't write a paragraph, if they write a few sentences, that's still writing. Sometimes I'll have them write on a ticket out the door like two sentences, two predictions if we stop early and that to me is still writing. Journaling, I'll have them journal in different perspectives of the characters. Sometimes they write different endings (I1, p. 5).

When Jane, a second-grade teacher, was asked about specific examples of how she incorporated writing into her literacy instruction, she said, "A lot is response to something they read. This is allowed writing and this is what I'm trying to do more of even though I won't teach the writing process with it they will still be putting their thoughts and ideas into words onto paper. And this will be something then that they will share. And it will also help them with their retention of what they have read because they have had to put it into their own words" (I1, p. 6).

Reading First No-Nos

There were many activities that were forsaken because of the restrictions placed on the reading-writing connection by the Reading First grant. Shelly, a kindergarten teacher, described the situation when she said, "Writing has been limited!" (I1, p. 1). According to some, "Writing took a backseat wayyyyy in the back" (Addie, I1, p. 2). Willa, who teaches third grade, (I1, p. 1).described the reading-writing connection during the Reading First grant as "no writing." She went on to say, "I have not taught writing until this year, so for two years my kids have not had writing other than the little bit I could plug into other subjects." In some cases teachers were afraid to write. Laila, a teacher of first grade students, found that "with so many commands saying, 'don't, don't, don't,' that you didn't want to break the 'don't barriers,'" and she just didn't have her

students take part in writing activities (I1, p. 14). As one participant who teaches third grade so succinctly explained it, “Coming into Reading First and being so limited and feeling the constraints almost puts out any fire or excitement you have” (Willa, I3, p. 4).

While writing as a response to literature and summarization were eventually allowed activities during the reading block, writing as a process was totally prohibited. Over and over, participants spoke of their frustration with trying to teach literacy while not only limiting the reading-writing connection but totally eliminating process writing of any type. Lee, a veteran third-grade teacher, summarized this as “having the kids respond to what they had read but with no teaching of writing process” (Lee, I1, p. 1). Laila, a first-grade teacher, explained that while the Houghton Mifflin series has a section that is on process writing, she just skips it because of the guidelines set forth by the grant (I1, p. 6). Over and over teachers said that the teaching of the writing process was forbidden (Nannette, I1, p. 1; Jane, I1, p. 1; Lee, I1, p. 1). When I queried Jane, a second grade teacher, about this restriction she stated, “Well, that’s come from our discussions during reading, during meetings when we’ve been discussing the Reading First program, that it’s too timely to go through the entire writing process to do that during our reading time” (I1, p. 1).

In some cases, opportunities were lost because of grant restrictions on the type of writing allowed. Nannette, who also teaches second grade explained,

> I feel like there’s many, many times when I could stop and have a teachable moment about the writing process, but I’m not supposed to teach it during reading, so sometimes I might say one or two things but I can’t have a lesson so I just kind of let it go. I’ll talk to that one child, but the rest of it, I just try to remember and save it for later to bring it up as an example when we’re doing writing outside of the [135-minute reading] block [required by the grant]. (I1, p. 1)

These restrictions also encompassed scheduling and even when teachers tried to be creative with the linking of reading and writing, the clock often constrained them because they were not free to adjust their schedules (Jane, I1, p. 2). Kindergarten teacher Quillion spoke of squelching a "teachable moment" when she described how she tried to adhere to the schedule and work within the parameters set forth by the grant:

> I think there are times when there's some excitement building about a particular topic or a particular thing and maybe I don't run with it as much as I normally would because I worry that, if I'm doing that and somebody comes in, that I'm not doing what I'm supposed to be doing. I think the excitement of those kinds of things really help kids want to do what it is we're encouraging them to do, like a cooking activity or a science activity. (I1, p.5)

Quillion's fear of someone coming into her classroom and finding that she is "not doing what I'm supposed to be doing" prevents her from engaging students in writing when the opportunity occurs. Quillion also described her limitations with carrying out reading-writing activities with her kindergartners when she shared, "Maybe I can but I wouldn't be doing a recipe during reading block because I would be hoping that wouldn't be the day somebody came in to observe me" (I1, p. 5).

Activities such as drawing were also affected by the Reading First guidelines. Shelley, a kindergarten teacher, expressed her concerns about drawing, a developmentally appropriate activity for kindergarteners when she explained,

> We've been discouraged from drawing in Reading First. We need to be writing, but in the beginning we don't know how to write. Drawing is our writing. In the writing center, instead of them just drawing and maybe attempting to write some letters to go with their drawing, we're told that they should be using magnetic letters and matching letters or maybe tracing letters. We've been told not to use markers or crayons. (I2, p. 16)

Shelley and other participants revealed that they were required by guidelines set forth in the Reading First grant to prevent students from writing by withdrawing the tools necessary for writing.

Discord, Frustration, and Doubt

As the teachers participated in the study, they began to give voice to the discord that resonated within them as they tried to reconcile the requirements of Reading First with their own views of literacy. Jane, a second-grade teacher, found herself frustrated that she did not have enough time to teach writing even though she was a firm believer in students' desires to read what they had written. She described this relationship between reading and writing when she said, "You need to be able to have a reason for reading and sometimes, particularly with the weaker students, the best reason in the world to read it is because it's their own story" (I1, p. 4). This discord placed her in the uncomfortable position of having to devise other ways to teach writing without teaching the whole process of writing and finding ways to integrate much of the writing into content material without going through the writing process. With the restrictions placed on her, Jane found, "I don't think the Reading First program has had a focus on the writing component. I think any writing that I've done, I've done simply because I felt like it needed to be done" (I1, p. 9). She also stated,

> My experience in teaching tells me children need to write. It's so easy to say, "Well, that's not part of the program," because there's so many things to do that are required that it is difficult to get in some of the more optional things that may be a bit more difficult to teach because they're not as structured into your day. But the writing needs to be there. (I1, p. 9)

This sense of discord and frustration was expressed by teachers regardless of their experience level. Nannette, a neophyte second-grade teacher, stated, "We should be able to do one [read a story] and then write about it and then do something about it, and then

flip-flop. It's kind of like you have to do reading here and do writing there, and you can't integrate the two" (I1, p. 7). Addie, a veteran first-grade teacher, spoke of her own dissonance as she discussed her experiences with reading and writing since the implementation of the Reading First grant:

> At the beginning I found it was rather difficult because I realized that reading and writing go hand-in-hand. We were told that we could not do writing in the block and when you are trying to integrate, that was difficult, especially when you know that children need to see a word in more than one avenue. (I1, p. 1)

The dissonance continued as she discussed the difficulty she had in finding time to teach writing and the writing process for the past three years. She stated, "I have not really had the time, and from the research that I have done, it pointed to the idea that reading and writing go hand-in-hand. You don't necessarily read before you start writing" (I1, p. 2). She also discussed the lack of creativity in her teaching as a result of the grant when she shared,

> We have to go by the script, and when we are reading somebody else's words and that's their thoughts and that's kind of difficult because there are many things that I want to do that could really heighten the lesson, but I couldn't because of the guidelines. (I1, p. 4)

Even teachers who did not have a strong background in the reading-writing connection expressed dismay with the situation. Lee, a veteran third-grade teacher (I1, p. 4), found that even though she had never placed a strong emphasis on writing, she at least had more freedom with it before the implementation of the grant.

In some cases teachers found themselves second-guessing what they would have previously done as a natural part of teaching (Laila, I2, p. 6). One of the first grade teachers, Laila found that while "the reading ties into the writing and the writing ties into what we're talking about, they can't do that most of the time because it's now two

separate things" (I1, p. 3). When questioned about how the grant influenced her students' achievement in literacy, Laila said, "They can read whatever you give them, but I'm not sure they can write on what they read. Like read it, internalize it and give their opinion of what they've read. They can't" (I2, p. 13). Ryan concurred when she stated, "As long as you put it out there for them. they can take it in all day. It's the 'sit down and write down what you think'. They might even tell you. But to write it down, they can't do it" (I2, p. 13).

Ryan eventually threw caution to the wind because of her frustrations, and she shared the following excerpt that occurred in her classroom:

> It was pretty much, "Don't do writing or anything related." I would say this because last year I was the person that had two supplemental teachers in my room during the year. One left and another came in from another Reading First school, and I asked her during small group time to work with one of my children on sight words. She told me that she wasn't supposed to do that because it was writing related, but I asked her to do it anyway. (I1, p. 5)

Ryan also found that the grant narrowed her teaching and if it were not for the grant, she would "probably do a lot more in reading" (I1, p. 3). She also discussed the discord she felt as she found herself "sneaking" to offer students opportunity to write. She shares,

> They want to write. They want to color. They want to do all that stuff that we've been told that we can't do. And you catch them. I have one student that every day during reading I have to say, "We're not drawing right now; we're reading our book," because he'll go get a book, and he'll trace all the pictures and he's one of my strugglers. I think it burns them out a little bit on reading because it's so much. You get to the point that they don't want to read. You catch them doing their math work pages. (I1, p. 12)

Making a Way: The Reading-Writing Connection

Interestingly, the teachers found ways to keep the reading-writing connection alive regardless of federal, state, or local legislation. Over and over they shared ways that they were able to bridge the gap, and I also observed this connection in their classrooms.

One example was when a kindergarten teacher, Shelley, used a book about Father's Day to teach her students about the prewriting stage of writing. She initially began the lesson as a response to literature, but as she drew the students into the story, she was able to weave the beginning step of the writing process into the lesson as she taught these kindergarteners to use a graphic organizer to capture and organize their thoughts about a piece they would eventually write (CO, 6.6.07). She also used phonics as an inroad to bridge the gap. As she and the students would discuss letters and letter sounds, she would model writing sentences for the students. She described this process in an interview when she said, "Our sentences get a lot more complex and right now we're trying to transition from just writing a sentence to writing a story, you know a three to four sentence story" (I1, p. 4).

Ryan, a first-grade teacher, used a Junie B. Jones book initially as a response to literature but ultimately guided her students into a letter writing experience to share with the upcoming first graders. She shared,

> We had read two chapters out of the book, and we started talking about things that we had seen and experienced as first graders. We discussed how [Junie] was like us and how she was not like us. We tied it to writing because Junie B. Jones wrote about her first grade year in a journal in the form of a letter. We didn't write it in a journal, but instead wrote letters to the first graders who would be in this classroom during the upcoming school year. (I3, p. 1)

Addie, another first-grade teacher, said that she had to be creative in order to incorporate reading and writing into the classroom. She took the different themes from Houghton-Mifflin and had the students write about the themes. For example, she used a jeweled box as an introduction to the theme of "Surprise" in the Houghton-Mifflin reading series. She used this to incorporate a lesson on descriptive writing (I3, p. 4). Laila, also a first-grade teacher, would start a story with brainstorming. She would share

the topic with the students, set a timer, and have the students be quiet and think about the topic. They would then list the ideas that they came up with and segue way into a writing activity (I2, p. 3). Creating a book about first-grade experiences also allowed Kim, a member of the first-grade team, the opportunity to incorporate the five components of Reading First into a writing activity for her students. As they wrote their books she lead the students to use their letters and letter sounds to spell words for their books, introduced enhanced vocabulary to enrich their books, and then asked them to retell their stories of their first grade experiences to boost comprehension (CO, 5.16.07).

Jane, a second-grade teacher, utilized a cross-curricular connection to enhance the reading-writing relationship. She used a science theme to afford students the opportunity to write about what they had read. Using a story from Houghton-Mifflin about seeds as a tie to the topic of plants, she worked with the students to germinate seeds, write observations about these seeds in a journal, and sequence the events of germination and planting. She described the process as follows:

> We started off with drawing a diagram of the parts of the seed. We then went through an experiment where we took those seeds and put them in a Ziploc bag with a damp paper towel. They had to guess what they thought was going to happen and how many seeds they thought would sprout. Every day they wrote about their observations. Then we planted the seeds, and we talked about the plants going toward the light in the window. All that they wrote about and then they read to the class what they had written (I3, p. 1).

As I observed in the classroom, (CO, 5.8.07), the students seemed to have a much better grasp of words such as “germination,” “seed coat,” and “nutrients” than they would have if they only read the story because they could manipulate the actual seeds as they wrote their observations about the germination and planting process.

These types of activities allowed the teachers to incorporate reading and writing in the classroom despite the parameters for the 135-minute reading block that they were instructed to follow. What began as a response to literature blossomed into outstanding opportunities for student learning as the teachers used reading and writing to expand the learning opportunities.

Summary: The Influence of the Reading First Grant

The second research question examined teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing relationship as it pertained to the Reading First grant. The picture that emerged from this was one of discord, frustration, and doubt as teachers attempted to bridge the gap between what they knew to be best practices in literacy where reading and writing acted in tandem with parameters set by grant writers that seemed to have done everything possible to prevent this connection. Their attempts to squeeze a reading-writing relationship into a grant that saw process writing as not allowed forced the participants to find innovative ways to bridge the gap between reading and writing in a Reading First classroom.

The Teacher Study Group and the Reading-Writing Connection

Spending time with teachers in a teacher study group gave me a vantage point that I would not have occupied without having participated in this study as a participant. The honesty, genuineness, and candid discussions that took place during these times of discussion among peers brought a new light to teachers' perceptions of reading and writing, with or without the presence of a grant. Four themes emerged during the course of the study as a result of the teacher study group. Those themes were (a) validation for teachers, (b) a connectedness to their peers, (c) ideas garnered from association with these

peers, and finally (d) an influence on teachers' classroom practices with reading and writing connections in the elementary school classroom.

Teacher Validation

As teachers struggled with the different aspects of the Reading First grant, a common concern was whether or not they were doing the right thing as far as providing a literacy education for their students. A strand that carried throughout the study was the idea that participating in the study validated their previous perceptions of the importance of maintaining a reading-writing connection. While many of these teachers were veterans, some of the teachers in the study were neophytes. In many cases, the things that the novice teachers had been taught in preservice classes were not applicable at Riverview because of the restrictions placed on curriculum and teacher practices due to the grant. Veteran teachers who had been very successful in the past found themselves in a position of trying to remain within the parameters set forth by the grant while trying to reconcile within themselves what directions they should take with children's literacy education. One theme that emerged from the study was the idea of validation.

When Kim, a first-grade teacher, was asked about the impact of the study group on her instruction, she said, "I think it's given me a lot of validation. You know, hearing other people that have the same concerns that you have" (I3, p. 3). I had the opportunity to work with Kim at another school, and I knew that she provided a strong reading-writing connection in her first-grade classroom. She went on to say that the teacher study group, "fueled the fire" concerning her belief in implementing the reading-writing connection in her first-grade classroom, and she went on to provide more writing opportunities in her classroom after meeting with the other teachers in the group (I3, p.

4). Through her experiences with the teacher study group, Laila, a first-grade teacher with 2 years of classroom teaching experience, found validation for the things she had been taught in her preservice teacher education experiences that encouraged reading and writing as a united entity rather than treating reading as one component separate from writing. About the reading-writing connection, she said, "[The study group] made me a more firm believer that you can't separate the two" (I3, p. 3).While doubting her own confidence in her ability to teach language arts, after working with the teacher study group she shared,

> I think I became more aware that I have to make the two linked even though they weren't already together as far as the way that we were given to teach them. I tried to make them linked more effectively so that my kids could get a better understanding. (I3, p. 4)

Nannette, another new teacher teaching second graders, received validation from her experiences with the teacher study group. In her preservice teacher preparation, she was taught to incorporate reading and writing into a literacy program, but she struggled with how to accomplish this while working within the parameters set forth by Reading First. The study group served to validate what she had been taught as she explained, "I think it just made it more solid because I came in thinking it was writing and reading together and then it was pulled apart and I got to see it separated, and I always felt like my kids were struggling because it wasn't together so it [the teacher study group] made it more, refocused me. Made me think about it for sure." She continued, "First I thought it was really illegal and then it was like, 'I'm going to do it.' I mean in the beginning, being a new person, I didn't want to get in trouble or do something wrong" (I3, p. 4). As Shelley said, "You know other people had the same issues or things I am doing. You

know, they are right; it's not wrong. It gave me a lot of confidence in what I was doing; you know, it is the right thing to do" (I3, p. 4).

Making Connections and Building Community

The teachers approached any changes in the daily structure of the 135-minute reading block with trepidation because of the punitive issues associated with Reading First. If they chose to not follow the guidelines set before them, there could be repercussions, and the teacher study group not only gave them an opportunity to participate in a learning experience, but it also gave them a chance to discuss some of the other issues that they had maneuvered around for the previous 2 years.

The second theme that data analysis revealed was the sense of community and opportunity for connections with other teachers that the study group afforded. Several of the participants addressed this aspect of the group in discussions. Kim, a first-grade teacher, spoke the study group as helping her feel like she was not alone in this endeavor (I3, p. 3).

Several participants spoke of making connections with teachers with whom they might not have ordinarily done so, such as Laila, a second-year teacher teaching first grade, said, "I talked to people I don't normally talk to during the day mainly because I don't get to see a lot of people during the day. They are in different grades and doing different things." Willa, a third-grade teacher, was excited about the connections she made. She shared,

> I think we've had an excellent group to work with. They just—even in the hallways now, "Have you seen this?" you know different grade levels. We had a kindergarten teacher that brought in some writing activities that she found that she wanted to share that would not apply to her, but I went out and bought a mailbox for my center for next year. You know, I'm going to do letters.

She went on to say,

> I just think it's the excitement, and it's created a bond where I can run in the hallway and say, "I'm stuck. Somebody, pull something out for me. Help me!" It makes you want to keep going when there's someone there to go with you. And not even on the same grade level. . . . I love it because we work together. (I3, p. 4)

Reflecting what Willa shared about the importance of these connections for the teachers, Nannette, a new second-grade teacher, explained it like this:

> I would be in the hallway, and I would talk to kindergarten, first and third grade, not just a second grade teacher about it. Of course with the second grade teachers, we'd talk about all of our stuff, but when we'd talk about writing, one would say, "I tried this. Try this; it worked well," or "I just tried this and it bombed, but your class might do well with it." It was nice to get that relationship with everybody and everybody was working toward the same goal. (I3, p. 2)

Learning from Others

While many of these teachers had taught for years and many had just emerged from preservice educational programs and had definite beliefs about the reading-writing connection, there was still uncertainty about how to mesh these beliefs with the parameters set forth by the grant. Garnering ideas from others was something that this group of teachers discussed often and was pervasive throughout the duration of the study. Diane, a second-grade teacher, spoke of enjoying "just being able to talk to other teachers and find out what was going on in their classrooms and get ideas of things that I could use in mine" (I3, p. 2). Even veterans like Kim spoke of the good ideas she received from her interactions with other teachers. "I love hearing what they're doing and what's working in their rooms." She also added that after hearing about what they are doing, she decided maybe those things would work in her classroom and made plans to carry out these activities in her own classroom (I3, p. 3). Kim, who has always taught first grade,

shared after one of the study group sessions, “Y’all have a cool way to do that. I want to do that in my room!” (I3, p. 4).

Laila, a first-grade teacher, continued this strand when she said, “I felt more like I could take things directly from the meetings and use them” (I3, p. 2). Willa, a relatively new teacher teaching third grade for the first time, referred to others in the group stating, “Even the experienced teachers seemed to learn.” She spoke of the reciprocity among participants, also, when she said that “she wanted to bring something, but I want to go home with something, too” (I3, p. 4). Ryan, a first-grade teacher, not only spoke of tangible things as resources, but she also referred to other teachers as valuable resources when she said, “I think I have a lot of resources as far as people that I know I could go to now and really good ideas for people who can help me out” (I3, p. 3). She also spoke of all of the things she tried in her classroom as a result of her interaction with these “resources.”

These same human resources allowed the teachers the opportunity to gain knowledge about the reading-writing connection in other grades and the ways in which classroom practices might be related across grade levels. These conversations gave Ryan specific ideas and resources to use in her own classroom, information she learned from teachers of other grade levels (I3, p. 4).

Initially, we discussed *Classrooms That Work* (Cunningham & Allington, 2006), but as teachers become more involved in the group, the focus of the discussions shifted from what others in the field of literacy said about reading and writing to the participants in the group claiming their own knowledge about reading and writing. During the first two meetings, discussion in the teacher study group was based on the reading-writing

connection as presented by the authors in *Classrooms That Work.* As discussion unfolded in the second meeting, I realized that the participants were more interested in discussing their experiences with reading, writing, and Reading First than discussing the experts' points of view, so I suggested that we explore the topics as they related to them. From this point, we spent the next eight meetings examining lessons they taught in their classrooms highlighting the reading-writing connection, student work that resulted from these lessons, ideas that they brought to share with others in the group emphasizing the reading-writing connection, and lessons where the reading-writing connection was utilized in a cross-curricular approach.

The Teacher Study Group's Impact upon Classroom Practice

The final theme emerging from the analysis of data was the impact that the teacher study group had upon classroom practice. The details of this theme emerged not only from the participants, but also from my field notes as I spent time in the teachers' classrooms. In order to share these findings, I will present selected teachers' comments as well as my own findings as I spent time in the classrooms.

Jane, a second-grade teacher, was steeped in the reading-writing connection. In previous interviews (I2, p. 4), she spoke of her frustrations with trying to reconcile her own beliefs about children's literacy practices with what was required of her as a teacher in a Reading First school. Having taken part in reading-writing programs such as Spalding's Road to Reading, she believed that many times when students have the opportunity to read their own writing, it serves as the impetus for success, especially for struggling students. I spent time in her room when she invited me to observe the reading-writing connections that were provided for her students as she intricately interweaved

science, reading, and writing into lessons that culminated in the production of a science journal highlighting the students' experiences with the germination and planting of seeds (FN. p. 1). Jane initiated this lesson as a response to a story the students read in their Houghton-Mifflin reading series. She shared in her post-observation meeting with me,

> I never felt like I was teaching writing if I did not teach the process, and this [the teacher study group] helped me teach writing in a way that I was teaching it cross-curricular. We did not do the proofreading and some of the things that they will need to know how to do, but we were still writing, and I feel like my students learned more because they were required to take what they were seeing or what they read in a book previously and turn it around, put it into their own words, and put it down on paper. (I3, p. 3)

Jane went on to share that she actually did more writing as a result of her experiences with the teacher study group. Even though she did not teach the writing process during the reading block, she found a way to mesh reading and writing with results that allowed the students to understand more fully a simple story written in a basal reading series.

Another second-grade teacher, Diane, whose only teaching experiences were within the parameters of a Reading First grant, used her experiences with the teacher study group to overcome fears of doing the "wrong" thing as a teacher in a Reading First school (I1, p. 2). As a springboard to other learning, she took a story from the basal series and not only connected reading and writing but also incorporated drawing into the literacy equation. As I witnessed in Diane's room, the interweaving of in-depth student thought and the art of persuasion prompted second-grade students to find a "real" reason to take what they had read in a book and incorporate it into a persuasive writing piece attempting to convince their teacher to allow them to place something on their school mural (I3, p. 1).

After the observation, I met with Diane to discuss what had taken place in her classroom. When asked if her experiences with the teacher study group affected what she did in the classroom, she responded, “We definitely wrote more than we were doing because we were afraid to write during the [135-minute reading] block. I think I was able to pull in more writing experience whether they were just little things or full blown paragraphs.” Diane continued, “We were able to pull it in a lot more during the block. I think we just pulled it [writing] into the block just trying to find ways to connect it to reading” (I3, p. 2).

Other teachers told of the changes that had occurred in their classroom in an attempt to reunite reading and writing as a result of the teacher study group. Willa, a relatively new third-grade teacher with only 1 year of experience teaching prior to becoming a teacher in a Reading First school, allowed me the opportunity to observe a lesson connecting social studies, reading, and writing in her third grade classroom (FN p. 1). Again, taking a story from the basal reader, her students had the opportunity to experience several forms of writing as a result of reading a story about a group of Pilgrims who undertook a boat trip from England to the United States.

Willa’s students worked together in cooperative groups to write about the important components of a town, write laws, persuade others to vote for them for public office, and write to the winner about how they would support that person in their role as a leader. Instead of just reading a story from a basal reader and answering questions in a workbook, Willa took the story, connected reading and writing through a social studies topic and offered the students expanded opportunities for content and literacy learning. When queried in the post-observation about how the teacher study group influenced her

activities in the classroom, she shared, “Every time we read something, we look for some way to respond to it or some way we can put ourselves into that time frame” (I3, p. 5).

First-grade teacher Ryan spoke of the teacher group’s influence on her future teaching when she said, “There are a lot of things I tried this time around [as a result of her participation in the study group], and I think a lot of the things I tried, I will try next year” (I3, p. 3). Shelley, a kindergarten teacher, also found that the influence of the teacher study group affected the reading-writing connection in her kindergarten classroom. After I observed a lesson where she used a read-aloud to lead her students into writing, I asked her about the teacher study groups’ influence on the reading-writing connection in her classroom, and she said,

> I did more writing. I definitely did more writing the second semester than I did the first semester. Like I said once about the writing, I didn’t really know much about writing. Houghton-Mifflin doesn’t address writing [in kindergarten], and I’ve done writing in the past, but I didn’t really know much writing to do or how far I could really take them with writing. I think the teacher study group, and listening to other people and other ideas that people have, and just some other thoughts helped me to do more writing and bring in more writing and know more of what to do as far as writing goes. (I3, p.5)

Summary: The Influence of the Teacher Study Group

The teacher study group served as a support for the teachers as they worked together to bridge the reading-writing gap in the Reading First classroom. Working together as a team, they found validation for their beliefs about the reading-writing connection, as well as made connections with other staff members that they might not ordinarily have worked with forming a community of learners who could draw support from one another. From their associations with other participants in the group, they were able to take their experiences and implement activities in the classroom that benefited the students in forming associations between reading and writing as literacy processes.

Chapter 4 has focused on the findings of the study. Chapter 5 will focus on a discussion of the findings relevant to related professional literature; implications for educational leaders and policy makers; and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Three years ago, I became involved in a federal grant initiative to improve reading for students in kindergarten, first-, second-, and third-grades by accepting a position as an education program specialist for Reading First with the Georgia Department of Education. When my tenure as an education program specialist ended, I assumed the role of assistant principal in a school receiving Reading First funding, charged not only with implementing the curriculum as outlined by the Georgia Performance Standards but also with assuring that the curriculum for the "135-minute reading block" per day operated within the parameters set forth by the Reading First grant. In both roles, I was placed in a position to serve as a guide for teachers working with young children in the area of literacy. Little did I know that the influence of this federal grant would compel me to examine all that I believed about literacy and literacy instruction for students in elementary school. Additionally, my association with the Reading First grant encouraged me to examine professional development for classroom teachers with an eye toward authentic professional development and teacher empowerment rather than professional development as a mandated, predetermined script.

As I worked with a myriad of individuals associated with the grant, (i.e., architects of the grant, state and federal level officials, and, most importantly, the teachers working with young children), I began to question the things that I was expected to implement regarding literacy because of my association with the grant. The influence of

these personal experiences, along with the concerns of those teachers with whom I worked most closely, served as the impetus for this study examining literacy, and, more specifically, the reading-writing relationship within the literacy equation.

Additionally, because the Reading First funding was only recently made available, little research exists related to the Reading First grant. Studies examining the effectiveness of the grant and possible "side effects" of the grant have yet to be published. With the amount of funding and attention paid to this grant, we should take an in-depth look into how this grant affects literacy instruction in the early childhood classroom. In 2002, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) sounded an alarm regarding Reading First concerning the fact that "the federal government has increasingly attempted to define what reading is, to limit what counts as research on reading, and to dictate how reading should be taught in classrooms" (NCTE, 2002, ¶2). With the federal government essentially deciding for us, as educators, what methods of reading instruction are "allowed," often limiting us to a uniform model of reading instruction, it is imperative that we as literacy educators and researchers, delve more deeply into what is happening at the heart of the matter—the classroom. Teachers are often finding themselves in classrooms where they are expected to use a mandated, scripted program that crowds out of the curriculum time for important literacy activities such as writing, discussion, independent reading, and in-depth exploration of literature. Often, such mandates limit educators' professional judgment and decision-making and replace their planning and instruction with pre-packaged materials (NCTE, 2002, ¶6).

This final chapter presents a summary of the design, methods, and findings of the study that began when I started to question who the "experts" in the field of literacy

really were. This chapter also provides important conclusions drawn from the findings that were presented in detail in Chapter 4 as well as discussion concerning the implications for action and my recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Study

In this study, I sought to examine the perceptions of elementary school teachers concerning the reading-writing relationship. While doing so, I also sought to investigate the reading and writing relationship within the parameters set forth by the Reading First grant. Additionally, I explored the ways in which a professional learning community or teacher study group might influence the reading-writing connection and perhaps keep this connection intact in an elementary school receiving Reading First grant. The following three questions served as a guide for the study:

1. What are primary teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection for students in kindergarten through third grade?
2. How does the context of a school wide Reading First grant affect primary teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection for students in K−3?
3. In what ways does a voluntary teacher study group focused on the reading-writing connection influence primary teachers' perceptions of the reading-writing connection and their literacy instruction?

My research and work with a group of 15 primary teachers—in-depth interviewing, observing, and discussing the relationship between reading and writing in a teacher study group—yielded several findings that are discussed in the pages that follow.

Overview of the Problem

In 2000, the National Reading Panel (NRP) released the findings of a study examining reading instruction. From these findings, a report was published that served, along with a study commissioned by the National Academy of Sciences (Snow et al., 1998), as the basis for the federal initiative entitled Reading First. Reading First was developed to supply to schools a vast amount of monetary support for the enhancement of the teaching and learning of reading over a 6-year period (NICHD, 2000). According to the NRP report, the five major components of reading are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension; thus, these components provided a framework for reading instruction in Reading First. Also, according to the NRP, there were not enough "scientifically-based" research studies to constitute the inclusion of writing in the report, so *writing* as a component of *literacy* was ignored in the parameters of Reading First.

Donald Graves's (1973) concern about the exclusion of writing, expressed in his dissertation and early published writing years ago, echoed in my mind as a literacy educator trying to reconcile the same issues today. Just because one group of people deemed writing research insufficient or unimportant, did that mean that all writing was to be excluded from literacy programs? Reading, according to the National Reading Panel, was narrowed to the point of including only five components, and writing was once again relegated to the "stepchild" position in the eyes of the policy makers that set the guidelines for grant funding. Unfortunately, this stance has resulted in writing being largely ignored in some schools receiving Reading First grant money because of the parameters set forth by the grant. Fortunately, for the students at Riverview Elementary

School (the site for the current study), 15 teachers had a broader view of literacy than the five components discussed in the National Reading Panel Report (NICHD, 2000) and had a strong belief that a reading-writing connection must be maintained in the early childhood classroom.

Summary of the Research Methodology

Over the span of 6 months, 15 teachers and I took the time to examine the reading-writing relationship in general as well as specifically as proposed by the Reading First parameters. We also worked together as a teacher study group to flesh out our beliefs and knowledge about the reading-writing relationship and to determine how we could work to keep the reading-writing connection alive in the elementary school classroom and still adhere to the parameters set forth by the Reading First grant.

During the time of the study, each of the 15 teachers spent time answering open-ended questions in an initial questionnaire, talking with me in three separate in-depth interviews, and working together as fellow participants in ten teacher study group sessions where we each posed questions requiring us to take an introspective look at what we believed and knew about the reading-writing relationship. I also took part in observations of the reading-writing connection as it was implemented in twelve of the 15 teachers' classrooms, and finally we worked together as participants in a concluding focus group session in June 2007. From these endeavors, findings emerged that painted a picture of teachers' understandings and implementation of the reading-writing connection in kindergarten, first, second, and third grade classrooms.

As we worked together, several themes emerged that were relevant to the research questions. In the following pages, I will discuss these findings in relation to previous

research and other professional literature that examined the reading-writing connection and the role a teacher study group might play in fostering children's literacy development.

Findings Related to the Professional Literature

Teachers' Perceptions of the Reading-Writing Connection

Reflecting what we know about reading and writing prior to the 1970s when reading and writing were not often conceptualized as being integrated (Langer & Flihan, 2000), many of the participants were also not steeped in the reading-writing tradition by their own educational preparation. Nevertheless, they worked to provide this connection for their students. Even though the only writing that many of the teachers had participated in previously in school consisted of handwriting practice such as students during the colonial times experienced (Nelson & Calfee, 1998), their discussions and subsequent actions in the classroom proved otherwise as they worked to provide their students with opportunities to connect reading and writing. Some of the younger participants in the study had experiences with reading and writing workshops in their teacher preparation courses, but the more mature participants experienced literacy learning as phonics, basal readers, and drills with very few (if any) opportunities to write themselves. The teachers had a strong perception of reading and writing as a united entity even though historically, reading and writing have often been presented as a disjoint, with reading garnering the majority of the attention and more often than not writing being presented as an afterthought (Nelson & Calfee). While this study did not investigate specific reasons teachers chose to incorporate reading and writing as one entity, I believe that their experiences as teachers of young children encouraged this natural connection.

In 2001, in a paper commissioned by the National Reading Conference, Michael Pressley shared, “literate people also can write” (p.16). The teachers at Riverview Elementary emphasized this statement over and over during the course of the study by the comments they made, as well as their efforts in the classroom to unite reading and writing. They echoed Spiegel (1998) as she espoused a “comprehensive view of literacy” (p. 118) which was inclusive rather than exclusive. Spiegel’s view of literacy consisted of at least six major components:

1. Literacy involves reading and writing.
2. Reading is not just word identification, but word identification is part of reading.
3. Readers must be able to take different stances in reading: aesthetic and efferent.
4. Writers must be able to express meaningful ideas clearly.
5. Writing is not just grammar, spelling, and punctuation, but those are all part of effective writing.
6. A comprehensive program develops life-long readers and writers. (p.117)

Participants emphasized this multidimensionality of literacy and expressed their beliefs that if a person is literate, he or she has the ability to interweave these components and communicate with others. Study participants such as Lee, a third-grade teacher, spoke of her expanded notion of literacy as more than reading (I2, p. 6). In discussions, she shared how her definition of literacy had changed over the course of two years, and she displayed the confidence she had obtained that allowed her to decide for herself the meaning of literacy without depending on an “expert” to define literacy for her.

The Reading-Writing Connection and the Influence of Reading First

Even though the Reading First grant proposed a rigid blueprint for literacy practices during the 135-minute mandated reading block, the teachers did not embrace this limited concept of literacy. This narrow and incomplete conception of literacy, encompassing only the five components of reading set forth by the report of the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000), was rejected by the teachers, and echoed by others in the field. For example, Yatvin, Weaver, and Garan (2003) shared their concerns about the inadequacy of the NRP report not addressing an adequate range of the scientific research on reading and ignoring many important topics by limiting its research to only five components. While the teachers made valiant attempts to abide by the rules of Reading First, they recognized that the narrow conception of literacy set forth by Reading First limited the types of literacy practices in their classrooms. Seeking a balanced approach to literacy, teachers desperately wanted to

> create young readers, writers, thinkers, and communicators—once they are given the opportunity to develop—within an integrated, comprehensive, and seamless learning environment that teaches the mysterious unraveling of words for the purpose of making and conveying meaning through exciting literacy adventures. (Cowen, 2003, p. xi)

By narrowing the field of literacy to five components and basing funding on the delivery of these five components only, the Reading First framework made it difficult, if not impossible, that varied literacy opportunities would be offered for diverse student populations. As we worked together in the study group, the teachers were able to find a way to stretch the boundaries of the Reading First grant in order to provide as many reading-writing connections as possible.

Throughout the course of the study, participants' views of literacy included a much broader view of literacy than that of just phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency,

vocabulary, and comprehension. They proposed the inclusion of a reading-writing connection as a vital component in a student's literacy acquisition. When discussing literacy, a consensus among the participants was a view of literacy as broader than just reading. Their view encompassed a more *balanced* approach to literacy, such as the one stated by Cowen (2003):

> A balanced reading approach is research-based, assessment-based, comprehensive, integrated, and dynamic, in that it empowers teachers and specialists to respond to individual assessed literacy needs of children as they relate to their appropriate instructional and developmental levels of decoding, vocabulary, reading comprehension, motivation, and sociocultural acquisition, with the purpose of learning to read for meaning, understanding, and joy. (p. 10)

As the findings of this study demonstrate, when one report is used to set the standard for literacy for all students in kindergarten through third grade, some loss in the literacy opportunities for our neediest students was inevitable. However, even though the Reading First grant proposed a very constricted lens with which to view literacy, the participants worked to discover ways to offer their students many more opportunities for literacy experiences other than those dictated by Reading First.

While the goals of Reading First were perhaps laudable in some ways (helping children learn how to read, providing materials, etc.), the effects of the narrow conception of literacy defined by the grant resulted in limiting the literacy practices that the teachers in this study viewed as possible. The 15 primary teachers' attempts to reconcile the Reading First view of literacy with their own attempts to meet the needs of their students without getting into "trouble" for straying from the grant parameters initially led to a conception of literacy instruction that was often narrow and incomplete. Restrictions placed on the teachers during the 135-minute reading block varied at certain points during the three-year span of the grant, and as teachers worked to understand what types

of instruction were possible, they became filled with doubt and frustration. For example, Quillion, a kindergarten teacher, stated, "At one point I wasn't sure how much writing it was OK to do" (I1, p. 1). Lee, a third-grade teacher, spoke of her frustration when she said, "We were told absolutely no writing, and then later during the year we were told that it would have to be outside the reading block, and then later we were told that in center time we could use [writing] if we used it as response to literature, and we were given permission to use like book report forms, that kind of stuff" (I1, p. 1). However, as the study progressed and as these teachers had more opportunities to talk together and share their professional concerns and insights in the teacher study group, they began to gain confidence in their own professional decisions and to take more and more liberties in the classroom to assure that their students had the opportunity to use reading as a springboard for writing and vice versa.

A somewhat surprising theme that emerged during the course of the study was the participants' strong belief that drawing played a role in the acquisition of literacy. The participating teachers' reaction to the banning of markers and crayons during the 135-minute reading block, and more specifically their belief in the importance of drawing as a necessary part of this section of the school day, was the most surprising finding for me as a participant observer in the study. Regardless of grade levels, participants' outcries against the mandated negation of this aspect of literacy were heard over and over. Participants could not seem to reconcile within themselves that young children could not use the instruments of expression such as crayons and markers to explore literacy and to engage in learning. Children come to school and they just want to write, to make meaning through multiple literacies. As Dyson (1989, 1993, 2003) argues, children are driven by

an interest in meaningful participation in classroom life, and their meaning making takes multiple forms and diverse directions (e.g., graphic symbols, oral and written language, performative play). Children believe that they can write (Graves, 1973), but at Riverview, they entered kindergarten, and for a large part of their day, they were not allowed to pick up the implements of writing, such as markers and crayons, to begin this journey of literacy. Instead, any writing that was allowed in primary classrooms was pigeon-holed as something that was to be done far away from the reading arena. Describing the way that the "basics" are receiving increased attention in the current context of accountability and standardization, Dyson (2007) suggests that in the early grades "tests . . . emphasize reading skills more than writing" and with writing, she argues, "emphasis is placed on transcription (e.g., spelling, capitalization, and punctuation, and grammatical usage)" (p. 153). In her published research, she warns us repeatedly that the official sphere of school—as in the present study with the focus on a narrow view of literacy as set forth by Reading First—often strips away the complexity of child literacy and limits children's opportunities for authentic meaning making. Arguing for a "reimagined basics" in the current political context of No Child Left Behind legislation (a context in which Reading First was born), Dyson says, "I am not going to argue against children learning the "basics." But I am going to argue that stripping away human meaning and values from those basics is, in practice, impossible" (p. 153).

Much like the first-grade teachers in the study conducted by Martin et al. (2005), the teachers involved in this study realized that writing extended across the curriculum and could be interwoven into content areas such as science, social studies, and health, especially in the area of reading. This theme of writing across the curriculum rang loud

and long. Even though the participants in the present study were not allowed to use process writing as the participants in the Martin et al. study were, these fifteen teachers found innovative ways to provide reading-writing connections through various activities for their students. One participant in particular who is a third grade teacher, Willa, stated that her students wrote for any reason they could find (I2, p. 14). Participants demonstrated that if students are to learn to read and write, a more inclusive view of literacy and literacy instruction allowing reading and writing to carry equal weight was needed—a view that encouraged more than the use of worksheets and teaching students to read quickly must be employed. Additionally, their classroom activities demonstrated that "reading assignments should have a writing component and writing assignments should involve some external reading" (Rasinski & Padak, 2004, p. 98) in order for reading and writing to benefit each other. Over and over, participants worked diligently to provide activities that brought a leveled playing field to the reading-writing game.

Ralph Fletcher (1993) once noted that the reading-writing connection occurs when we provide students with opportunities to make connections between the books they read and their own writing, but that this connection is not accomplished through a worksheet or a read-aloud. As the findings from this study suggest, it would seem that the designers of the Reading First grant had no intention of there being a reading-writing connection because opportunities for writing, except in limited amounts and only as a response to literature, were removed from the 135-minute block of time relegated to the "reading block." Time and time again, participants shared how writing was not allowed during the block, and their discord and discontentment with this situation was prevalent throughout the study. Students were eventually allowed to write in moderation as a

response to a book or a story from the Houghton-Mifflin reading series, and while the boundaries of this edict changed over time, the banishment of process writing from the reading block remained in tack for the duration of the grant adding to the frustration of the participants. While teachers did find ways to "squeeze" some writing into the curriculum, the genres of writing they did manage to squeeze in were limited. For example, they engaged students in some writing in response to literature (e.g., writing predictions, writing alternate endings to stories, writing from one character's point of view) and in writing to improve reading comprehension (e.g., summary writing, journal entries, exit slips), but typically writing was limited to one-draft writing of sentences or paragraphs. A few teachers "found a way" to integrate writing instruction across the curriculum and some writing process instruction did occur, but writing was largely absent in the 135-minute reading block set forth by the grant. On the whole, because of the Reading First grant guidelines, the writing of multiple drafts and student participation in writing workshop were largely absent at Riverview Elementary.

Despite these restrictions, many of the participants in this study believed that "writing is the making of reading" (Graves, 2004, p. 88). They shared how students, especially struggling students, could pick up the text they had just written and read it aloud with fluency and comprehension, something that did not often occur in a 1-minute probe of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment for these same students. While much of the funding from Reading First went into classroom libraries, multiple modes of assessment, and other facets of a core program to teachers, none of the monies were spent on resources that aided students in writing endeavors, much like in other historical occurrences in literacy education (Calkins, 1983). Partici-

pants explained that they were told that even the resources concerning writing that were provided by the Houghton-Mifflin reading series (especially process writing) were to be eliminated from classroom practice as not to detract from the amount of time devoted to "reading."

Participants shared, much like Calkins (1983) had in her ethnography of Susie, that when students were allowed to write, they encountered many of the same skills traditionally assigned to reading, such as selecting the main idea, developing conclusions, discovering cause and effect, and organizing supporting details. Just as Calkins herself admitted that she was wrong to view the two processes of reading and writing separately, the participants in this study had an understanding that reading and writing belonged together, but they were not "allowed" to interweave the two during a large block of their instructional day. Process writing has been shown by other researchers to be an extremely important aspect of effective literacy instruction. For example, in a study conducted by Pressley et al. (2001), one of the most important components evident in the classrooms of effective first-grade teachers was the use of process writing. The use of process writing in the classroom (during which time students were taught higher order thinking skills through planning, drafting, revising, and attention to writing mechanics) made for effective literacy instruction and learning. Pressley et al. emphasized from the findings of these studies that "a lot of skills instruction was intelligently integrated with voluminous reading and writing" (p. 50). The participants in the present study were cognizant of the role that reading and writing played in the elementary classroom and worked diligently to incorporate the connection, despite rigid requirements that made it difficult to do so.

The Influence of the Teacher Study Group

Working with the teachers in the teacher study group was one of the most rewarding and informative aspects of this study for me. Each week, the unity of the participants became more and more obvious as they were invited to claim their professional voices. The excitement of the group grew as their confidence in their own abilities to teach children what it means to be literate was expressed in words as well as in their classroom practices. Three specific findings related to the teacher study group pointed to a picture of excellent teachers who found (a) validation in one another, (b) a connection with others as they formed a learning community, and (c) a way to have an impact on their students through the incorporation of reading and writing into their literacy experiences throughout the curriculum.

Birchak et al. (1998) discussed the power that occurs in a teacher study group as a result of the collaborative nature of the group. As the teachers in the present study shared, complained, discussed, cried, and laughed together, a sense of the power that these individuals found within themselves surfaced as they worked toward a positive outcome despite the restrictions set for them by the Reading First grant. They listened to their peers and found validation for their concerns about the lack of writing allowed in Reading First. As they talked without fear of censure, they validated each others' efforts to provide a reading-writing connection in their classrooms regardless of the possibility of being told that something was "not allowed." Teachers shared that the rigid restrictions of the Reading First grant created an atmosphere of fear for even the most knowledgeable and experienced teachers and, in some cases, almost "killed" the joy in teaching and learning.

The teacher study group meetings served as a place where participants could discuss their own thinking and at the same time support each others' thinking, and it was never a place where change was imposed upon the group or others decided on the needs of the other members. For 3 years, they had been told what was "right" and what was "wrong," but within the safety of the teacher study group, they could decide for themselves what was best for their students based upon their own beliefs and knowledge about literacy. In the midst of the atmosphere in the school that was created by the Reading First grant, the teachers at Riverview Elementary shared repeatedly that they did not feel empowered to use their own knowledge and professional decision-making to construct literacy activities that knew were sound and based on best practices in the primary grades. As in the study that Florio-Ruane and Raphael (2001) conducted investigating teachers' participation in a book club, the participants in the present study reported that their participation in the study group not only affected their understating of literacy, but it also allowed them the opportunity to develop a sense of professional agency. The findings of this study demonstrated that teachers are hungry for opportunities to be validated in their professional knowledge and skills. Professional learning and discussion within a setting such as a teacher study group offered teachers the opportunity to claim this sense of agency, develop confidence in their beliefs, and extend their knowledge about teaching and learning.

The study group in the present study was not the work of one person, but it was the work of a group of educators attempting to gain some understanding of issues that were very important to all members of the group (Birchak et al., 1998). The group served as a support for the teachers who were just beginning the journey with Reading First or

for those who had been entrenched in the grant for three years. When they came together as a community, they were on equal footing through talk and discussion. They were all experiencing the phenomena of Reading First. These discussions were identified as important aspects of the dynamics, because through talk and discussion, colleagues could converse in a learning community and help build the professional culture that was so vital to the academic success of the students (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001). While these individuals had been steeped in professional development, the teacher study group worked to build a culture of professionalism because the teachers were invited to share their own voices and perspectives and encouraged to form their own interpretations of the things they had been exposed to as they worked together to understand what they had experienced.

The teacher study group served as an interactive approach to learning. Everyone was an expert rather than having one "expert" who exposes others to new ideas and trains them in new practices. The participants in the teacher study group were given an opportunity to engage in a constructivist approach to learning where they created their own knowledge structures rather than receiving them from others. Learning was constructed in the minds of the learners as they were given ample opportunities to discuss and collaborate with their peers (Sparks & Hirsch, 1997). The individuals who took part in this study brought their own knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, and assumptions to the group. They were given the opportunity to construct new knowledge or refine previous understanding to gain a deeper meaning about what the reading-writing connection meant in a Reading First school. As they worked together, learning from each other, as well as learning from within as they refined their understandings about literacy, they took ownership of the process (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001).

Most often teachers spend most of their time isolated from each other embedded in a system where day-to-day experiences are governed by external forces. This had been the case previously for the participants involved in the current study. The only professional learning associated with Reading First that was allowed occurred in scripted professional development presentations directly from the "powers that be" in Reading First. Even though there were many teachers at Riverview Elementary who had a vast amount of knowledge about literacy, they were not allowed to share this knowledge and thus reported that they had lost the empowerment they had once held. The teacher study group worked as a vehicle that supplied the participants with a venue to allow them to break free of their isolation and engage in powerful collaborative, participatory learning. Participants reported that they craved communication with one another in order to seek answers to questions by talking with their peers, to share ideas for instructional strategies within and across grade levels, and to take charge of their own professional growth and learning. Clark (2001) describes how teacher study groups can enable teachers both to reflect critically and take informed action:

> Good conversation feeds the spirit; it feels good; it reminds us of our ideals and hopes for education; it confirms that we are not alone in our frustrations and doubts or in our small victories. . . . A conversation group, in the best of circumstances, becomes a social context for doing the work of reflective practice . . . a means for organizing for future action in our classrooms and schools. (pp. 172, 180-181)

The teacher study group provided such opportunities and initiated a culture of community among the primary teachers that ventured beyond the study group itself.

Implications

Having spent the past 3 years associated in some way with the Reading First grant, and having spent 9 months focused specifically on investigating the Reading First

grant and its relationship to reading, writing, and professional development, there are several implications for educators, policy makers, school administrators, and professional development leaders that I pose for consideration.

The first implication concerns a definition of what counts as literacy and how quality literacy instruction may be described. Who has the power to determine for all students in kindergarten, first-, second-, and third-grade across the United States what constitutes "proper" literacy instruction? Do all students have the same needs? Should all teachers be equipped for instruction in the same way? For the students and teachers at Riverview Elementary, as well as other Reading First schools across the nation, literacy has been relegated to phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Because of a report that was adopted whole-heartedly by those in positions of power, the reading-writing connection has almost been obliterated from the literacy landscape for some students, especially those children who are from families with incomes below the poverty line, since Reading First funds were allocated toward this population.

In a recent analysis of data completed at the end of the grant period, we determined that there were 57 students who had attended Riverview Elementary for the three year duration of the grant. For these 57 students, writing during the time known as the "reading block" has been an enigma because it is likely that they have rarely experienced this phenomenon. These students are now third graders who are faced with a state assessment that will "grade" their writing abilities. Whether or not they had a teacher who found another time or place in the curriculum to bridge the reading-writing connection for them remains to be seen. This situation may translate into a great deal of

learning for these students that must occur during 1 school year, as opposed to 4 school years, in order to prepare them to understand and implement the process of writing from which they were shielded for more "important" components of literacy. How can we reconcile the possible loss of 3 years of instruction for some students in the area of writing with a grant that was derived from an "incomplete and flawed research base" that totally left writing out of the literacy picture (Yatvin et al., 2003, p. 28)? What excellent teachers of literacy believe about best practices has been reduced to what a few "experts" say is best practice concerning literacy. Policy makers, county-level administrators, school administrators, and professional development leaders should reconsider this narrow view of literacy and work to expand it to include writing and writing workshop as essential components of literacy instruction.

Secondly, educational leaders and policy makers need to take a hard look at the unintended consequences of federal mandates for major school reform initiatives (Allington, 2002; Shannon, 2007). As this study shows, even given the good intentions that perhaps launched Reading First (i.e., to improve reading instruction and students' ability to read), the strict parameters caused untold damage because of Reading First's limited conception of literacy and the rigid guidelines for instruction which had a specific negative effect on the amount and types of writing used at Riverview Elementary. Teachers who participated in the current study who had previously gone "above and beyond" to meet the needs of their students were afraid to do what they knew was best for students. They didn't include the "extras" in their instruction that served to meet the needs of a diverse group of students, instead opting, out of fear, to do exactly as they were told which was to only use Reading First approved materials and methods of

instruction. They were virtually stripped of any decision-making capabilities about what happened in their own classroom. Consequently instruction that did not fall within the parameters set forth by the grant was left "on the shelf" and if the programs deemed acceptable by Reading First did not meet the needs of the student, then so be it, much to the frustration of the teachers and the loss in instruction for the student.

Along these same lines, policy makers must consider the filters through which their mandates pass on the way to the classroom. Each of these filters has the potential to significantly influence what is actually mandated at the school level where teaching and learning take place. While policy makers may be likely to believe that policy is simply handed over, the events, players, and conditions with which it is handed down all shape the outcome (Valencia & Wixson, 2004). As I consider the reading-writing connection as it applies to Reading First, I wonder if the disjoint occurred as the guidelines of the grant passed from one "filter" to another. Could it be that process writing was removed from the equation by the architects of the grant in Georgia, and as a result the teachers at the school level reacted out of fear or uncertainty to remove writing completely? Regardless, for a time, writing at Riverside Elementary for students in kindergarten, first, second, and third grade was greatly limited. However, as teachers worked together in unity, they were able to reconcile this disjoint eventually.

In their position statement on Reading First, the National Council of Teachers of English (2002) warned

> [Reading First's] mandated scripted programs are crowding out of the curriculum the time needed for reading aloud, independent reading of enjoyable and informational texts, writing, discussion, and in-depth exploration of literature. In short, the Reading First Initiative seeks to remove professional judgment and decision making by educators and to replace it with packaged materials marketed by corporate publishers. This

> process imposes a standardized methodology upon teachers and children, which is an inevitable recipe for failure. (¶ 6)

There is "no quick fix" when it comes to assisting students with literacy acquisition (Allington & Walmsley, 1995). Requiring teachers "to use scripted, one-size-fits-all, commercial reading programs that are neither scientifically based nor suitable for all the children in their charge" (Yatvin et al., 2003, p. 28) seems ludicrous, yet that is what occurred over a 3-year span at Riverview Elementary. It would be much more advantageous for teachers and students if comprehensive literacy programs that included more than just the five components of reading were included (Yatvin et al.). All of the language arts and processes are interdependent and supportive of each other (Pressley et al., 2001). Therefore, the materials and instruction required should be based upon the premise that integration of all components is required to meet the diverse needs of our student population.

Additionally, in the realm of educational policy and professional development, we need to view educators as intellectuals who are capable of making sound decisions. We need to offer them the opportunity to learn and grow in an environment that honors their intellect, their teaching skills, and their professional judgment. In the current political context, professional development endeavors, such as the teacher study group reported in the present study, seem to be increasingly important, as Fox and Fleischer (2003) suggest:

> Especially in a time of standards-based reforms, high-stakes testing, mandated teach-to-the-test curricula, and top-down imposition of pre-packaged programs, the "luxury" of authentic discussion and dialogue among educational professionals must be protected and indeed promoted as one of our most important means of professional support and growth for beginning and experienced teachers and teacher educators alike. (p. 4)

Teachers' professional development endeavors should allow time for talk and sharing together. Opportunities to study what teachers and teacher leaders decide upon as they work to "get smart" together about educational issues that specifically affect their professional lives should be at the heart of all professional development initiatives. When teachers are placed in situations where they are forced to spend countless hours with someone telling them what to do, when to do it, and how to do it without opportunity for input, little room is left for teacher learning or effective models of professional development. Teachers need to have an atmosphere for professional development where they can gain a well-informed, theoretically-sound confidence in their judgments about what is best for their students and can express these judgments without fear of being ostracized or marginalized because of their beliefs. Providing professional development for teachers only in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, as in the Reading First initiative, does not address all areas of literacy, especially the need for a high-quality teacher (Pressley et al., 2001).

Finally, an implication regarding the children taught at Riverview Elementary must be considered. Policy makers need to consider the effects of their mandated programs on the nature of daily life in these primary classrooms. How do their policies translate into practice? Without the constant input and inquiry of teachers as professionals, teachers are reduced to little more than script readers. The gifts that they bring to the classroom, along with their experiences and knowledge in teaching young children, are often totally removed from the picture. The majority of teachers know what their students need to be successful, and they work diligently to meet those needs. When policy makers mandate a "one-size-fits-all" curriculum and really expect it to fit, they are stripping

professional educators of their voices, their intuitiveness, and essentially their power to teach (Ohanian, 1999). What about the children? They are individuals with unique needs. There is not—nor will there ever be—one way to meet these needs. Why are we trying to do so with Reading First?

At Riverview Elementary, we were very discouraged to hear and read that so much controversy continues to surround a grant that our school was invested in heart and soul. Allegations of mismanagement, favoritism, and mistakes have surrounded the grant from the onset, and I wonder what the impact of the findings of these investigations will ultimately reveal. Professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English have consistently sounded the alarm about government intervention in the literacy arena in statements such as their position on the Reading First Initiative:

> The Reading First initiative is the culmination of a recent trend, as the federal government has increasingly attempted to define what reading is, to limit what counts as research on reading, and to dictate how reading should be taught in our classrooms. As a consequence, the government is channeling education funding to a few corporate purveyors of a limited set of methods of reading instruction. As a professional community actively involved in literacy research and instruction, NCTE has systematically opposed these mandates, partly through resolutions (1997, 1998, and 1999) on government intrusion into professional decision making. (2002, ¶1)

Interestingly, the International Reading Association has also expressed concerns about Reading First. On the organization's website, they discuss the details of an audit of Reading First by a branch of the U.S. Department of Education and provide a link to the full report of the audit (IRA, 2007). The audit by the U.S. Department of Education found several violations in the handling of certain aspects of the grant, such as funding, the provision of technical assistance, and assessment instruments (IRA). In addition, a federal

audit cited problems with the administration of Georgia's "Reading First" programs (U.S. Department of Education Office of the Inspector General, 2007).

For some children, the past 3 years of their educational experiences have revolved around what was mandated by the federal government through the guise of a beneficient grant. These students will not have the opportunity to experience the most important years of their literacy foundation again. I hope that when the dust settles from the Reading First fallout, we do not find that a great disservice was done to our students because of the narrow-minded views of "experts."

Recommendations for Further Research

As I examined the literature, I realized that quite a bit of time has elapsed since the reading-writing connection in the classroom was investigated. Many of the studies date back 30 years. Like the teachers involved in the study, reading and writing are often connected, but this area of research has not been examined to determine exactly how these two entities work together in the last ten years. Is it a waste of time to teach writing before a student learns to read? Are students' first scribbles their attempt at reading? Where does drawing fit into the literacy picture? Do students comprehend and retain more information if we tie writing activities to reading activities? These are the types of questions that I feel could be explored through further research.

In regards to Reading First, I believe that it is imperative that we design studies to examine whether or not Reading First has been effective for individual students. As I analyzed the data at Riverview Elementary, it was amazing to me that there were great disparities in scores for teachers on the same grade level who where supposedly operating within the same parameters set forth by the grant. Passing percentages on the Georgia

Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT) ranged from 50% to 100% in some grade levels. How could this be? Students had the same materials for use, the teachers experienced the same professional development activities as well as had access to the same literacy coach for further professional development, yet there were still disparities in the scores. A study specifically following the literacy progress of the students who were involved in the Reading First grant would paint a picture of the effectiveness of limiting literacy learning to such a confining definition. I find it ironic that the two years before the Reading First grant was implemented, Riverview Elementary made adequate yearly progress, and the last two years of the grant, those educators at Riverview found themselves in a "needs improvement" status. The disparity of test scores across classrooms and the "needs improvement" status call into question the effectiveness of the Reading First model.

Finally, the area of professional development must be investigated. We continue to struggle with the question of what constitutes effective professional development for educators. It is amazing to me that years after Joyce and Showers (1980) presented findings that "spray and pray" and "sit and get" methods for teachers' professional learning do not work, this is the professional development model that continues to be utilized, and was the model adopted and used by the architects of Reading First. In the professional development activities afforded by the grant, the participants reported that book studies were bastardized to little more than assigning pages from Reading First mandated books to read and answer questions. Little if any discussion time was allotted and then only in relation to how the items under discussion fit into the Reading First equation. Where does teacher talk fit into the arena? How can teachers effectively

implement “best practices” when they don’t even have time to discuss with each other what works and what doesn’t work in the elementary classroom? A study examining the most effective ways to implement professional learning concerning literacy instruction is definitely warranted in this day of constant professional learning opportunities. An examination of the long-term effects of a teacher study group model could help us better understand the potential of this form of professional learning.

Conclusion

As a literacy educator, my experiences with Reading First have proven invaluable. While I have learned a great deal about literacy instruction, I have also learned how to sit quietly and listen to all the voices around me. When I initially started working with the Reading First grant, I stood in awe of the “experts”—the people who knew so much more about literacy than I ever hoped to comprehend. These voices were voices of prominence that captured my attention. As I concentrated my attention on these boisterous voices who were so sure of what was “right” and what was “wrong” in the field of literacy education, other voices began to echo in my ears. I began to listen to outstanding teachers like Penny who kept asking why there was no writing in Reading First. I tuned in to conversations among educators all over the state as they pondered why they were being subjected to rote learning activities that we strive to prevent our students from experiencing. The attention to conversations continued with the teachers at Riverview Elementary who wanted to know where the crayons and markers had gone. All of these voices struck a chord of dissonance in me as I looked up to the “experts” in the field.

Realizing that we are all in this together with the ultimate goal of providing sound, meaningful literacy opportunities for our students, I heeded the voices of those around me and began to incorporate the "significant" voices along with the seemingly insignificant voices to take along with me on this journey of inquiry. From this journey, I found that we are all experts in the field of literacy in one form or another. Regardless of background, teachers know what works in their classrooms. Regardless of federal mandates, teachers are still going to teach, and students are still going to learn. Despite the isolation that we may feel in the classroom, we will find a way to communicate with those around us in order to find answers to our questions.

Grants such as Reading First will offer great resources, multiple opportunities for professional development, and "expert" guidance, but an untapped wealth of knowledge rests in those individuals who work with students on a daily basis to teach them regardless of program, or mandate, or politics. The teachers at Riverview Elementary proved that, as they listened to their own and each other's voices, they could find a way to bridge the gap between what they were instructed to do and what they knew they should do to take care of the valuable possessions—the children—who had been entrusted to them.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Open-ended Questionnaire

Name:

E-mail address:

Gender:

Years taught: Grades taught:

Certification:

Degrees:

Colleges/Universities Attended:

Any classes or workshops about reading and/or writing your have completed since you graduated from college:

Please answer the following questions. The purpose of this questionnaire is to help me learn more about you as a teacher. I would like to read about your thoughts on teaching children to read and write and any experiences you have had concerning the teaching of reading and writing. As you answer these questions, please answer them from your own perspective. Please don't write what you think I would like to read. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. How do you define literacy? Give examples of things you do each day in the classroom that you believe fall under the category of "literacy."

2. How do you define the terms *literacy*, *reading*, and *writing*? What do you believe are the differences between these terms?

3. When you think about teaching reading, where does writing fit into the picture?

4. When you think about the teaching of writing, where does reading fit into the picture?

5. As a student yourself in the early grades, what do you recall about the way you were taught to read and write?

6. What have been the most meaningful professional learning experiences you have had as a teacher (i.e., inservice workshops, PLUs, courses, etc.)? What made these experiences meaningful to you?

7. Discuss any experiences you have had working with other teachers in a collaborative setting.

8. Please describe your experiences with the Reading First grant. What have you found to be positive? What have you found to be negative?

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Interview One: Perceptions of Reading First Grant

1. What do you believe is the overall purpose of the Reading First grant?
2. Please discuss your experiences with reading and writing since the implementation of the grant at this school.
3. In what ways, if any, has the Reading First grant affected what you do as far as the teaching of reading?
4. Can you give me an overview of what you try to accomplish in the 135-minute reading block?
5. When have you found time to teach writing and writing process for the past three years? In what ways have you taught writing and the writing process during the past three years?
6. In what ways, if any, has writing been affected in your classroom since the implementation of the Reading First grant?
7. Can you give me some specific examples of how you incorporate writing into your literacy instruction for your students?
8. In what ways has the Reading First grant supported you as a teacher and/or your students' literacy development? In what ways has the Reading First grant limited you as a teacher and/or your students' literacy development?
9. How do you believe the Reading First grant program has influenced your students' achievement in reading? In writing? In literacy?
10. How would you describe your experiences with professional development since the implementation of the grant?

Interview Two: Reading-Writing Connections

1. Tell me about your preparation as a preservice teacher to teach reading and writing.
2. Describe for me how you approach the teaching of reading in your classroom. Could you take me on a virtual "tour" of a typical lesson or unit?
3. Describe for me how you approach the teaching of writing in your classroom. Again, could you take me on a virtual "tour" of a typical lesson or unit?
4. Please outline for me how you would set up a literacy program in an elementary school such as Riverview Elementary.
5. What do you think about the new Georgia Performance Standards for language arts and literacy instruction in primary grades—or more specifically, in your grade level?

6. As you've worked with the new Georgia Performance Standards for the past two years, what if any, changes have you made in your classroom instruction to accommodate these changes?
7. How do you believe that reading and writing are connected in literacy development? If so, how would you describe the relationship between reading and writing in a primary classroom?

Interview Three: Debriefing on Classroom Observations and Teacher Study Group Process

1. Let's talk about the day I visited your classroom. Let's walk through my field notes together and talk about what happened in class. Looking back, how do you feel about these lessons? What did you like best? What would you change?
2. What were your experiences with a teacher study group prior to this experience?
3. Describe your experiences as a member of this teacher study group.
4. Did your experiences with the teacher study group impact your view of literacy? If so, how?
5. How did your experiences with the teacher study group affect what happened in your classroom with literacy—that is, your instructional practices?

Focus Group Interview: Final Reflections and Member Checking

1. Discuss your experiences over the past semester as we met together in a teacher study group. What was this experience like for you?
2. Based on your experiences this spring, how would you now define the purpose of a teacher study group?
3. Discuss the positive experiences you've had. What did you like best about the teacher study group?
4. Discuss the negative experiences or frustrations you've experienced. What might have made the professional learning experience better or more productive for you as a teacher?
5. How, if at all, has your relationship with others in the group been affected?
6. What did you learn about the teaching of writing in the study group?
7. What did you learn about the reading-writing connection in literacy education in the study group?
8. What is your perception of the goals for literacy instruction in the 135-minute reading block as set forth in the Reading First grant?
9. If you could send one message about literacy education to the architects of the Reading First grant, what would you want to say? To county administrators? To Georgia Department of Education leaders? To federal policy makers?

APPENDIX C

Invitation to Join Teacher Study Group

Please Join Me for a Teacher Study Group

Reading / Writing Connections
and
Reading First

When:
Jan., Feb., March, April, May, and
June (one meeting)
(Total of 11 meetings)

What time?: 3:30-5:30
(Dates to be determined by group)

Where: Porterdale Elementary Media Center

What's in it for you?
Networking with other teachers, refreshments, and 2 PLU's

Please see Kim Coady if you would like to take part in this exciting exploration!!!
(Open to the first 15 teachers who volunteer.