INTEGRATED CURRICULUM IN THE PRIMARY GRADES: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE
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Abstract

The demand to teach skills and content in the instructional hours of a school day is a tremendous pressure that teachers face daily. Teachers look for ways to integrate curriculum as a way of being efficient. The idea of integrating two of the most important content areas, reading and writing, as a way of streamlining the teaching and learning is not something new. Through this literature review I have found that reading and writing can be integrated to a degree, but daily instruction is needed in each area individually as well. More importantly than the how a curriculum is integrated seems to be the classroom teacher’s methods of instruction, management, and organization. These key teaching methods seem to help deliver instruction in an effective manner. The teacher’s effectiveness has just as much impact on the learning as does what kind of curriculum the teacher is using.
Chapter I: Introduction

Statement of Problem

Many children are not reading well enough to keep up with the demands of school (Campbell, Donahue, Reese, & Phillips, 1996; Donahue, Voelkl, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1999), let alone the demands of society or their personal dreams. The national report published in 1998 titled, Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children, a National Academy of Science committee concluded that “quality classroom instruction in kindergarten and the primary grades is the single best weapon against reading failure” (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998, p. 343).

According to Ferris & Snyder, researchers call for the integration of elementary reading and writing instruction as a way of improving reading achievement, but too often the recommendation has been supported by only one or two specific teaching suggestions. While the activities are usually worthwhile, they fail to provide for integrating reading and writing throughout the instructional program. No wonder teachers are often surprised when their writing activities have not discernible impact on reading ability, despite authoritative promises (Ferris & Snyder, 1986).

Research Question(s)

What are the characteristics of effective integrated reading writing curriculum in the primary grades?
Chapter II: Review of Literature

Early Reading Instruction

In the *Literacy Dictionary* Harris & Hodges (1995) identify thirteen different definitions of the word reading. The definition of reading has changed along with time. The earliest definition begins with Plato who defined reading as “distinguishing the separate letters both by eye and by the ear, in order that, when you later hear them spoken or see them written, you will not be confused by their position”. As assumptions about learning changed, so too did the definition of reading. In the early 20th century, an associational, behavioristic concept of learning dominated definitions. Later that view shifted into viewing language as a developmental process, leading into a definition from Robeck & Wallace who define reading as “a process of translating signs and symbols into meanings and incorporating the new information into existing cognitive and affective structures”. Early reading instruction is also a topic of debate going back all the way to the 1700’s. Since then there have been numerous swings back and forth between phonics based instruction and whole language or whole-word approach to reading instruction. Currently, in today’s reading instruction programs are attempting to balance the two approaches (Mayer 2003).

Phonics Instruction

Results from a 1998 national survey of elementary school teachers found that 99% of K-2 teachers considered phonics instruction to be essential to reading instruction (Baumann, Hoffman, Moon, & Duffy-Hester, 1998). Phonics instruction is instruction in which students learn the relation between letters and sounds (Mayer, 2003). Phonics research first began in the
1920’s and continues to be one of the most politicized topics in the field of education (Adams, 1990). Phonics instruction follows seven basic principles (Stahl, Hester, & Stahl, 1998).

The first principle is phonics instruction should develop the alphabetic principle. The alphabetic principle is the idea that letters in words stand for very specific sounds. This principle begins with the understanding and recognition that words have an initial sound. The second principle is good phonics instruction should develop phonological awareness. Phonological awareness is an important concept arisen out of the past 20 years of research in reading (Stanovish, 1991). Phonological awareness is the awareness of the sounds in spoken words. It is the understanding of most sounds cannot be said alone; words have a continuous sound. Many activities are used to assist students in learning phonological awareness such as rhyming, sound to word matching tasks, initial/final sounds, segmentation of words, blending, and deletion and/or manipulation of words. The third principle is good phonics instruction should provide a thorough grounding in the letters; being able to recognize capitol and lowercase letters automatically without effort. Students should be able to recognize all capitol and lowercase letters individually, in any order. The fourth principle is good phonics instruction should not teach rules, need not use worksheets, should not dominate instructions and does not have to be boring. Many of the English language rules do not apply to words that are taught in the early grades of elementary school. Direct teacher instruction and reading of connected texts is more effective than individual practice on worksheets. Phonics instruction is only part of any reading instruction program. It should be short and to the point so as to not make it boring. The fifth principle is good phonics instruction provides sufficient practice in reading words. Three kinds of practice may be included in phonics reading programs: reading words that are in isolation, reading words that are in either expositive or narrative texts, and writing words. All successful
phonics programs provide practice in reading words that include the letter-sound relationships being taught. The sixth principle is good phonics instruction leads to automatic word recognition. Comprehension suffers when students are unable to decode words quickly and automatically. Activities with the previous principle are intended to teach children to recognize a large number of words that have a regular pattern. Practice should also include repeated readings. Repeated readings are reading the same piece of literature multiple times until the student is able to read it fluently. The seventh principle of good phonics instruction is phonics is one part of reading instruction. Phonics instruction is not designed as a standalone program. It is meant to be a part of larger total reading program.

**Whole Language Instruction**

Whole language is not a practice *per se*. It is a set of beliefs or a perspective. It must become practice, but it is not the practice itself (Altwerger, Edelsky, & Flores, 1987). Whole language was developed in the early 1980’s in Australia and New Zealand. Whole language is a point of view about language, literacy, and learning. It is a theory based on acquiring language. Whole language is an approach that moves from the “whole” to the “part”; whole books to whole paragraphs progressively moving down to whole words. There is the assumption that students learn differently and students should be given the opportunity to acquire knowledge in many different ways including visual, oral, games, and dramatic play to name just a few. Whole language includes a set of beliefs about how students gain language to make meaning of things and to accomplish a purpose. Those beliefs include: children learn language by using it to express ideas and accomplish meaningful tasks. The approach to reading and writing is based in the oral tradition where everyone learns to talk, reading means constructing meaning from clues,
students respond when reading and writing for real reasons, handwriting is meaningful, building self-esteem is the most essential piece to begin the process, the teacher’s role is of a facilitator, and concentration is placed on the process rather than the product that is produced (Stanek, 1993).

In the whole language classroom an emphasis is made for reading and writing to be real reading and writing and not merely exercises in reading and writing. Whole language classrooms are full of a variety of print material; material one would find in the real world such as signs, posters, cake mix boxes, telephone books, etc. Because whole language believes that language is considered a tool for making sense of something else subjects such as science and social studies take a prominent role in the classroom. These subjects also provide much of the real reading and writing material that is used within the classroom. The school/local library is a very important resource for the teacher using whole language because one topic often leads to connections to other related topics of interest.

**Writing Instruction**

Writing instruction also has a long history of debates and reforms about how it is best taught in our schools. Research in the past three decades has caused a shift from studying the products from writing to studying the process of writing the products. The shift to a process approach helped teachers to understand how to support students’ writing development and inspired change in the writing curriculum (Strickland, Bodino, Buchan, Jones, Nelson, & Rosen, 2001). One such change is the development of the National Writing Project.
The National Writing Project

The National Writing Project emerged from the struggles of a young English teacher, Jim Gray, trying to teach literature and composition to teenage students with a disappointing outcome. He began to experiment within his classroom with teaching methods to get his students interested and excited about reading and writing. In his process he and other teachers began to resist some standard professional development. Experts were being brought in from outside the school to provide professional development. Gray, and others, thought there were many of their colleagues within their school who knew their students better than anyone else who had come up with effective means for teaching their students. Gray thought colleagues should be sharing their ideas with their peers. Gray went on to provide organized ways for teachers to learn from one another. In the summer of 1974 Jim Gray started the Bay Area Summer Institute for the teaching of writing (Lieberman & Wood, 2003). The purpose of this project was to create a different form of professional development for the teachers attended. The project provided a range of professional development services for teachers and schools who were interested in improving the teaching of writing. The foundation of the professional development was to use the “teachers-teaching-teachers” model and to improve the teaching of writing as a tool to learning across the curriculum. The Bay Area Writing Project grew into the National Writing Project with sites serving all fifty states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and it continues to grow today (Lieberman & Wood, 2003).

Every summer thousands of teachers, kindergarten through college, attend summer institutes for the National Writing Project (NWP). NWP does not promote one single approach to teaching writing; it shares what is known about the teaching of writing both from research and effective practice (Bratcher & Stroble, 1994). Participants in the summer institutes share through
presentations, selected readings, participants are also expected to engage in writing themselves. Participants will write to learn firsthand what they are asking their students to do in the classroom, as well as, write to engage in the writing process by sharing their own writing with their peers and in writing groups.

The core principles that NWP is founded on in all sites include: teachers are the agents of reform with universities and schools as partners for professional development, knowledge of teaching writing comes from a variety of sources, effective professional development provide frequent opportunities for teachers to write and examine their writing, and there is no single “right” approach to teaching writing.

**Integrated Reading and Writing Curriculum**

The idea of integrating content areas is not a new idea. This is something that has been done with various content areas. One area that is of great debate on how to integrate is the integration of reading and writing. These are two important content areas and are subjects vital to any student’s academic career, as well as a student’s life. The question is to how best integrate the two content areas for maximum success.

**Skills-Based vs. Whole Language**

Student interpretations of learning to read and write are very important in the context of current debates about differing instructional approaches. In order to provide productive instructional contexts for beginning readers and writers in inner-city schools, educators must know how these children experience skills-based and whole language programs and what consequences may arise (Dahl & Freppon, 1995).
In a cross-study comparison involving eight classrooms in two Midwest cities, schools were matched across studies using three socioeconomic indicators. A majority of the students in each school were children from urban families with low income levels, most families received public assistance, and the schools’ mobility rates were high. Only two comparable whole language classrooms could be found to match the skills-based classrooms; one skills based classroom was not included in the report of the original study. School populations were representative of the racial and cultural mix typical of urban low-income populations in the Midwest (African American, and White Appalachian students). Three indicators were used to validate if each of the two skills-based classrooms and whole language classrooms were reasonable exemplars for the study. The indicators were teacher interviews, classroom observations, and teacher self-report data using the Theoretical Orientations to Reading Profile. A gender-balanced sample of twelve students in each school site was randomly selected from the classrooms of kindergarten and first grade students who qualified for the free or reduced lunch program. In total 24 students from skills-based programs and 24 from whole language based programs were selected for a total of 48 participants. With high mobility rates at each of the schools the initial sample of students would serve as substitute students if a focal student moved. Six focal learners were chosen in each of the two sites; all focal learners remained to the end of the first grade. Each study was conducted separately and then a cross-curricular comparison was conducted. In each study researchers generated field notes in twice-weekly classroom visits across the span of two years. One focal learner was monitored closely and wore a remote microphone so that spontaneous utterances could be captured and recorded. Copies of all learners papers, writing samples and ditto sheets, were included. Learners completed an array of six tasks assessing various aspects of written language knowledge; tasks were administered at the
beginning of kindergarten and at the end of first grade. The six tasks were administered in three sessions spaced over a three week period of time. In each study, coding systems were established to categorize both learner behaviors and the context in which they occurred. Once scoring was complete pre- and posttest results for each study were analyzed for within-group and between-group finding.

The findings of the cross-curricular study cover three general areas: patterns of learner sense making, written language knowledge measures, and contrasts among reading processes and writing events. Students in both types of classrooms were interested in the accuracy of their work often times erasing multiple times until the student was satisfied with the product. This behavior was evident in both kinds of learners and across various levels of reading and writing. Cross-curricular analysis of reading and writing behaviors in January, February, and March showed that the first grade students showed differing strategies for using letter-sound knowledge. Both skills-based and whole language learners showed that they were gaining awareness of phonics and experimenting with letter-sound relationships, but the whole language learners were using more strategies that demonstrated application of their letter-sound knowledge. Learners in both studies showed enjoyment of literature. Two main differences between the studies were noted in the area of nature and amount of experience that students had with trade books, and the insights that students demonstrated about the books. Children’s literature played a much smaller role in skills-based classrooms as those in whole language classrooms. In both studies the least proficient readers and writers developed various ways of dealing with teacher expectations and instructional demands. Both studies showed increases in student understanding and achievement when working in small groups or in one-to-one situations with a teacher, however, a difference in coping behaviors between the studies appeared when those same students worked
independently. In general, in skills-based classrooms students experiencing difficulties seemed to be intent on just getting through the assigned reading or writing activity. Rather than taking on a task students tended to avoid it or find ways to “get by”. In the whole language study students interacted with their peers when they did not know what to do. Students also tended to go along with other groups of students to try and figure out what to do; essentially making their own support system. In whole language classrooms and in skills-based classrooms students had a sense of self as readers and writers, but only those students who were the most proficient made statements regarding being a reader or writer. In contrast students in the whole language classroom consistently had thought of being readers and writers and frequently make impromptu statements regarding being a reader or a writer.

In the pretest results on written language studies showed that both studies had a very restricted view of written language. Kindergarten students in the whole language classrooms scored slightly lower in almost every measure than those in the skill-based classroom. Both studies tended to view written language as something for school and were unfamiliar with print as a way to convey meaning, print conventions, alphabetic principle, and concepts of writing. By the end of first grade all learners in both studies demonstrated considerable improvement.

The analysis of reading processes involved a proficient reader, an average reader, and a less experienced reader from each of the curriculums. The first result was reading behaviors differed between teacher-directed and independent reading contexts for the skill-based student. The student used strategies independently that they did not use when working with the teacher. In contrast, the whole language students read in similar ways in both contexts. The second result was that whole language students at each proficiency level demonstrated greater extents of strategies in both teacher-directed and independent contexts. The third result was regarding
levels of engagement, meaning student persistence, effort, and interest in reading. Students who were average or less experienced readers in skill-based curriculums did not demonstrate involvement by staying with reading tasks independently where their whole language counterparts were persistent in their reading.

During kindergarten, students in the skills-based curriculum classroom produced written answers on assigned worksheet as their writing activities; for the student in the whole language curriculum classrooms writing involved exploration. The contrast between curriculums became more pronounced in the first grade. In general, the differences reflected the function that writing served. In skills-based classrooms writing the students completed teacher-assigned writing tasks designed to provide practice in skills, producing some stories but mostly students worked on completing workbook assignments or on text written by the teacher on the board. In the whole language classroom writing times were student generated and student exploration of written language producing words at the sentence, paragraph, and story levels.

Contrasts among the curriculums for learning opportunities were evident. Three areas resulted where qualitative and quantitative data converged together. First, with written narrative register both the qualitative and quantitative findings were in favor of whole language. Second, in phonics knowledge, the findings were not in agreement. Qualitative data found more application of letter-sound knowledge in daily writing in whole language, but the difference was not supported in the quantitative alphabetic principle results. Third, in writing production; quantitative results indicated greater sustained writing experiences in the whole language classrooms but quantitative tasks showed no significant differences in the kinds of writing that students produced. The disagreements about phonics may be due to the curriculums not differing widely in what the students actually gain in knowledge.
Comparison in these two studies was limited to urban, low socioeconomic status students. There was not standardized measure of phonemic awareness, so researchers noted phonics growth was limited to patterns documented in field notes and classroom observations. This study focused on learner’s perspectives, therefore codes and categories used came from learner behaviors. The difference in classroom procedures and structures was noted as a factor noted by researchers as having a direct effect on learner’s behaviors and experiences. This study does not necessarily answer my research question. It compares the two approaches to reading instruction in primary grade classrooms, but does little to demonstrate the characteristics of effective integrated curriculum.

A Balanced Approach

The relationship between reading and writing clearly overlap, that is to say that they both depend on many of the same cognitive elements (Shanahan, 1997). Shanahan explored this relationship trying to discover if reading could be taught through writing and vice versa. He attempted to find out the specifics of the overlap in order to determine how exactly reading and writing should be combined in the classroom. If reading and writing were so similar then their instructional combination would not be as valuable and there would not be need of instruction in each. Instruction in one would be enough to accomplish both the goals of reading and writing.

Shanahan found that reading and writing could be thought of as two separate, but overlapping, ways of thinking. He deemed that integrating reading and writing would not automatically lead to learning; learning is only likely to happen if reading and writing are combined in appropriate ways. Through Shanahan’s research connections were found to be developmental. Shanahan believes that the real test of integration of subject area is to consider
whether integrated instruction actually accomplishes the purposes for which it is adopted. Shanahan has given some guidelines to keep in mind for integrating instruction. First, it is essential to know what integration is supposed to accomplish. Without a clear goal of what integration is supposed to accomplish it is impossible to plan, teach, and assess in clear ways. Second, integration requires a great deal of attention to the separate disciplines; both reading and writing need to receive instructional attention. Third, curricular boundaries are social and cultural, not only cognitive. Finally, integration does not do away with the need for direct explanation; there is still a need for mini-lessons and guided practice.

Shanahan proposed seven instructional principles, along with instructional techniques, based upon research on reading-writing relationships to help better understand how to combine reading and writing in the classroom to best enhance students’ literacy learning (Shanahan, 1988).

The first principle is both reading and writing need to be taught. Reading and writing are not as similar as once believed. Many studies have been conducted on the premise that reading and writing are so closely related that their curricular combination could have a positive outcome in both achievement and instructional efficiency. As obvious as it is that reading and writing are closely related, it is also obvious that they do not overlap enough to warrant complete reading and writing development through an emphasis on one or the other. Teachers need to provide as much reading and writing instruction as they can; both should be taught daily.

The second principle is to introduce reading and writing from the earliest grades. Activities such as parent-child story reading and reading of environmental print are important because they introduce children to important reading concepts long before students arrive in school. Introduction of writing has often been delayed until students have entered school and
learned about reading. This delay is based on the notion that reading knowledge is prerequisite to writing development. Children can be successful writers with very little knowledge of reading, and are often interesting in writing long before schooling begins. Encouraging children to pretend to write or spell, having paper and various writing tools available for use, and allowing children to explore writing are all ways to foster interest in learning how to write.

The third principle is instruction should reflect the developmental nature of the reading-writing relationship. Reading and writing are developmental processes. They are learned over time. The reading-writing relationship is always changing as students grow and change developmentally; instruction has to change as the students change developmentally. Writing can be used to replace or supplement many of the activities from reading workbooks.

The fourth principle is to make the reading-writing connection explicit. Instruction that focuses on non-overlapping features of reading and writing will not result in much transfer of learning. The transfer of knowledge that is taught during reading instruction does not automatically relate to knowledge in writing. To improve the possibility of transfer, instruction should encourage students to recognize the similarity of reading and writing. Teachers should discuss with students how reading and writing might relate to each other, and how specific skills and information could be used for other processes. One productive way of having children work with reading and writing simultaneously is to have students replicate the language patterns of literary models. Another common practice is to use an “Author’s Chair” as a place for students to practice reading their own writing to an audience.

The fifth principle is that instruction should emphasize content and process relations. Teachers should be aware of the distinction between product and process knowledge. Product knowledge refers to facts, propositions, or principles; it can be substantive or structural. Research
agrees that reading and writing share product knowledge. Reading and writing share process knowledge as well. Process knowledge refers to the strategies and procedures for solving problems or for carrying out complex activities. Instruction in language arts should take advantage of both product and process relations. Story maker activities lead children to write more elaborate and organized stories, writing expository text teaches students about organization and structure of report writing and content area reading. A strategy to emphasizing process relations is to have process conferences. Process conferences are meetings with the student to discuss how they planned, drafted, or revised their writing.

The sixth principle is emphasizing communication. The communications approach treats the connection of reading and writing as a reader-writer relationship. Research has considered the types of knowledge, awareness, and flexibility that readers and writers must have in order to communicate. Reading and writing instruction designed to enhance reading-writing relationships needs to emphasize the communication process. Reading discussions can examine stories and consider who did the writing and why, read multiple works by the same author to discuss the author’s voice, and composing critical responses. Students need real audiences for their writing, pen pals, companies, authors, sports stars, or government agencies make excellent audiences.

The seventh principle is to teach reading and writing in meaningful contexts. Knowing how to read and write means knowing how to apply these abilities for various purposes. One purpose of literacy is communication, but there are countless others. To insure that children gain the maximum benefit from reading-writing relations it is necessary to provide a wide range of literacy experiences; students should be encouraged to read and write in a variety of ways. By writing and reading for multiple purposes it helps to refine students’ skills and gain a clear picture of how literacy can be used.
According to Walmsley & Walp (1990) there are two primary aspects of literacy—reading and writing. Many new approaches to teaching reading and writing seem sensible when looking at the program alone; however, there are some challenges that are not discussed. First, new programs tend to ignore what is already in place within a school or grade level. Second, they tend to only deal with one or two components of language arts. Third, new approaches tend to ignore the limited time that is available for language arts instruction. Finally, approaches are not sensitive to the balance of language arts programs across all the elementary grades. What works in one grade does not always work in another grade.

Walmsley & Walp (1990) worked with the North Warren Central School District in New York studying the teaching of writing that was identified as a need for in-service support. After discussions about how exactly to integrate writing with the other components of language a team of third and fourth grade teachers, remedial reading teacher, principal, and a consultant decided to develop an integrated language arts program starting in 1985. In the following years the newly revised language arts program has been extended all the way through the sixth grade with plans of also revising the kindergarten through second grade program. The original program took three years to implement fully. Regular classroom teachers, remedial teachers, and curriculum specialists participated fully in the design of the curriculum. The team of teachers who designed the language arts program, with the help of the consultant, started to unify the various components of language arts by using themes to define the content of the reading and writing activities. Once appropriate reading material is chosen according to the theme writing was added into the program. A process model approach to writing (compose, revise, edit, share and publish) was applied. Integrating reading and writing means that students will be reading and also writing within the same topic or theme. A variety of writings are done within each theme such as: short...
answers, extended pieces based on read-aloud readings, or independent reading, extended pieces of the student’s choice related broadly to the theme, and in addition students sometimes write about things that are not closely related to the theme. Strategies to implement this kind of integrated language arts program rely heavily on well-established routines and procedures. Students conference with their teacher about what they are reading independently and their writing.

Assessing the cumulative effects of the program has been difficult because there is no control classroom or grade level. The major purpose of this study was to investigate what gains have been made on traditional reading and writing achievement and what experiences the students have using the integrated approach. The North Warren school district routinely administers reading achievement tests to all of the students and overall students have made good progress in reading according to the tests. This project was designed for long-term curriculum development not aimed at demonstrating the superiority of one approach over another, but rather at solving some specific problems in an elementary language arts curriculum. Effects of this program are therefore difficult to assess. The major purpose was to investigate not only what gains are made on traditional measures of reading and writing achievement but also to describe what literary and composing experiences students have using this approach.

Limitations to this study include not having pretest and posttest scores to compare. It can be assumed that the district is seeing improvements in language arts instruction based on the spread of the program to other grade levels and plans to expand to lower elementary grades.

Stevens, Madden, Slavin, & Farnish (1987) studied the effects of Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC). CIRC was a comprehensive program for teaching reading, writing, and language arts in grades three and four. CIRC was developed to focus simultaneously
on curriculum and instruction methods in an attempt to use cooperative learning as a vehicle for introducing state-of-the-art curricular practices derived primarily from basic research into the practical teaching of reading and writing. CIRC is based on a cycle of activities that include teacher instruction, team practice, individual assessments, and team recognition. In the first study conducted, 461 third and fourth grade students in 21 classes in a suburban Maryland school district participated. The 11 experimental classes in six schools were matched on the California Achievement Test Total Reading scores with 10 classes in four control schools. Student population ranged from 6-29% minority students and 0-8% disadvantaged students. Teachers in both the experimental and control classrooms volunteered to participate in the study. Treatment was tested during a 12 week period of time during the spring semester of 1985. The same amount of time was allotted for language arts/writing instruction; third grade allotted 2 hours to reading and 45 minutes to language arts per day; fourth grade allotted 90 minutes to reading and 60 minutes to languages arts per day. The control teachers continued using their traditional methods and curriculum materials. The experimental groups were trained in the CIRC program and received a manual which described the components of the CIRC program. Teachers were observed 3-4 times per week to help teachers effectively implement the program. To assess the initial performance level of students, scores were taken from the Total Reading and Total Language scale of the California Achievement Test. All students were given the reading comprehension, reading vocabulary, spelling, language expression, and language mechanics subtests of the California Achievement Test, Form D upon the completion of the 12 weeks of the study. Students were asked to complete writing samples based on a writing probe. Writing was scored by two raters and then discussed to increase rater-reliability.
The Pretest information found that the control group had slightly higher scores in Total Language and pretest writing samples for mechanics. The results of the post test favored the experimental group in five of the standardized test categories: reading comprehension, language expression, reading vocabulary, language expression, and spelling. The results of the study show that the effectiveness of using the CIRC program. The results of the first study indicate that the CIRC program has promise as a means for improving the outcomes of reading and writing instruction.

The second study was a replication and extension of the first study. The main differences between the two studies were the duration and the demographics of the participating students. The time of the study was increased from 12 to 24 weeks and a more diverse ethnic and socioeconomic background of the students who participated. The students were 450 third and fourth grade students in 22 classes in a suburban Maryland school district. The 9 experimental classes were in 4 schools matched according to the California Achievement Test score for Total Reading and Total Language, with 13 control classes in five schools. Student population ranged from 4-47% minority students and 1-31% disadvantaged students. All participating teachers volunteered to participate in the study. All testing and scoring procedures for reading and writing were the same as in the first study. No difference was found between the control and the experimental groups on the Total Reading or the Total Language pretests. Similarly there was no initial difference in the writing pre-samples between the experimental and control groups. The post test results showed differences in scores favoring the experimental group in the areas of language expression, reading comprehension, and language mechanics. The experimental group also showed favorable scores on the writing samples. Overall, the experimental classrooms where CIRC methods were used also showed gains in standardized test scores.
While good progress was made to integrate reading and writing in this study another problem arose. The problem is not only integration of reading and writing into language arts curriculum, but a problem of how a language arts program is organized in the whole elementary school curriculum. There is a separation of the subjects that exists in many schools. Another limitation of longevity arose. Many curriculum reforms have a short life expectancy; thus researchers asked will there be enough longevity to this curriculum reform to see any long term results?

The National Reading Panel Report (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) concluded that instruction in systematic phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, and comprehension strategies was important in a complete reading program. These findings are consistent with the Pressley et al (2001) findings that outstanding teachers taught skills, actively engaged students in a great deal of actual reading and writing, and fostered self-regulation in students’ use of strategies (Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, & Rodriguez, 2002).

Eight schools with high poverty rates (70-95% of students qualifying for subsidized lunch) were included in the study. Across the eight schools 2-68% of students were nonnative speakers of English, and 67-91% members of minority groups. The schools’ population represented demographic and geographic diversity of the rural southeast, a large Midwestern city, and a large southwestern city. Five of the schools had implemented the CIERA School Change Framework and three were comparison schools. Two teachers per grade (kindergarten through sixth grade) were randomly invited to participate in classrooms observations. Teachers divided their classes into thirds, high, average, low, based on reading performance. Two students from each level were randomly selected to be assessed in the fall and in the spring. Students were given various assessments such as, Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests (grades 1-6), assessments of
letter names and sounds (K-1), phonemic awareness (K-1), word dictation (K-1), concepts of print (K-1), and fluency (grades 1-6) from the Basic Reading Inventory. On three scheduled occasions, fall, winter, and spring, each teacher was observed for one hour during reading instruction to document classroom practices in the teaching of reading. The observation system combined qualitative note taking with a quantitative coding process of the kinds of events that were taking place during instruction, teacher style of interaction, materials used, grouping patterns, and expected responses of the students. The study was conducted over the course of the entire school year. The data accumulated allowed the researchers to compare the data that was collected to data collected two years earlier in their study of low income, high-performing schools. Many of the same teacher/classroom trends still held true to their previous research.

In the current study whole group instruction was coded more than small group instruction; two years ago it was found that the most effective schools were using small groups at a much higher rate than was noted in the current study. More word-level instruction was given to students in grades K-1; as students moved through 2-3 the amount reduced and then reduced again in grades 4-5. In the same manner comprehension work increased as students progressed up though the grades; as word-level skills decreased comprehension work increased. Across all grade levels a small amount of higher level questioning or writing related to stories read was observed, a finding that was similar to the earlier study. The interaction style of teachers was observed to be telling and recitation in the current study where as the interaction style of coaching was dominant in earlier studies. It was noted that teacher interaction style varied by level of teacher accomplishment; coaching was an interaction style often exhibited by more accomplished teachers. In the current study, across all grade levels, students were engaged in passive responding (taking turns oral reading, round robin reading, or listening to the teacher). In
contrast, the previous study found that exemplary teachers had their students actively engaged in reading, writing, and manipulating.

To take a more in-depth look at the relationships between teacher practices during literacy instruction and teacher practices during instruction researchers conducted Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) analysis. The outcome measures for these analyses were reading fluency (number of words read correctly in one minute on a grade-level passage) and comprehension (measured by the comprehension subtest of the Gates-MacGinitie reading test). The HLM for grade 1 indicated the incidence of students actively responding was positively related to spring fluency scores. For grades 2-3 the HLM showed that the instructional style of telling had a significant negative relationship to spring fluency scores. Classroom level HLM for grades 4-6 showed significant differences related to reading comprehension; time spent on higher level questions had a positive relationship and telling had a negative relationship regarding the spring scores.

The results in this study were meant to find out “how” and “what” effective schools were doing to be effective in their language arts instruction. Some practices of instruction were consistent in the previous study conducted and remain consistent in the current study conducted. Instructional style is directly related to student growth in language arts. The style of telling has its place in language arts instruction, as it does in all instruction, but other styles produce more growth in students and lead to independent thinking. The instructional style of coaching allowed for more student independence and growth. Similarly, students showed more growth in reading fluency when students were coded as actively responding to reading activities. In addition to what teachers are teaching in the classroom how they are teaching is just as important when seeking to make a change in reading instruction for the growth in reading achievement.
Limitations of this study include sample size used. It was interesting that the researchers compared their current study to one previously done. No notation was made as to why some of the instructional practices have not been upheld since the previous research. This study matches most of my research question. The study gives several characteristics of effective teaching practices of reading and writing found from this study and the previous study.

In Kentucky a sweeping education reform effort has resulted in dramatic changes in instructional practices across the state. Prior to the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) instruction was teacher centered and skills-based; students were expected to achieve relatively standard sets of grade-level expectations. Primary teachers were encouraged to adopt practices advocated by the National Association for the Education of Young Children which included active involvement of students, multiage/multiability groupings, interaction, exploration, and an integrated approach to teaching reading and writing that emphasized process writing (Cantrell, 1998). Conflict among schools was found regarding how much implementation was taking place in each school.

Eight teachers were chosen for this study from a sample of 72 teachers whose adherence to recommended practices had been previously evaluated as part of an earlier study of KERA’s effects. Four of the teachers had been classified as “high implementers” of this primary program and four of the teachers had been classified as “low implementers”. The four high implementers also practiced a meaning centered approach to teaching reading and writing where as the low implementers used a skills-based approach to teaching reading and writing. The eight teachers taught in six schools located in various parts of Kentucky. At least 50% of the student population in each school was classified as low income based on eligibility for free and reduced lunch. Most of the teacher’s classes were multiage/multi-ability. Classes included students who were in their
fourth-year of primary school (traditional third graders). All of the fourth-year students, who had been members of the teacher’s class the previous year, were assessed to ascertain the cumulative effects of the entire primary program. The study had two parts. The first part involved comparing the reading and writing achievement of 22 students in classes in which teachers implemented practices recommended for primary programs with the achievement of 19 students in classes with teachers using more traditional practices. Both of the groups’ achievement was compared to the national norms. The second part was designed to provide insight into the kinds of instruction that the teachers provided in a typical day. Therefore a daylong observation was conducted in each classroom, and each teacher was interviewed about instructional practices. Student reading achievement was assessed through standardized tests, and through oral and silent reading of a piece of children’s literature. Students’ reading comprehension ability was assessed in three ways: scores on the comprehension subtest of the Stanford Achievement Test, a multiple-choice test on the piece of children’s literature read, and student written recall of the story. Student reading fluency was assessed through a words per-minute and an errors per-minute measure from their oral reading of the children’s literature piece. Students’ word analysis abilities were assessed through the word study skills subtest of the Stanford Achievement Test. Writing achievement was determined through performance on the Stanford Achievement Test and the Stanford Writing Assessment which requires students to create a piece of writing on demand.; scores on four domains including: ideas and development, organization, unity, and coherence, word choice, and sentences and paragraphs were assessed. Language mechanics was scored through the grammar usage and mechanics, and the spelling and language subtests of the Stanford Achievement Test.
Scores on the reading and writing measures showed higher achievement for the students in the meaning centered classrooms compared with those in the skills-based classrooms. Students who were in classrooms of high implementers outperformed the students in the low implementer’s classroom on every measure of the literacy achievement. Significant differences in the groups reading performance were evident in the areas of comprehension and fluency. A significant difference in groups’ writing achievement was evident in the content of students’ writing as well use of language mechanics. Little difference was noted on scores in the area of word analysis. Scores on the Stanford Achievement Test were compared to the national norms to help ascertain achievement on a national level. Students taught by the high implementers achieved scores that fell between the 50th and the 76th percentile on the national norms tables in reading comprehension, spelling, and language. Students taught by low implementers achieved scores that fell below the 50th percentile.

The observation/interview part of the study provided valuable insight into the specific kinds of literacy instruction and activities that effective teachers were using to strengthen their students’ reading and writing abilities. The four effective teachers taught in relatively large schools serving a high percentage of students from low-income families (50-68%) and a low percentage of minority students (0-5%). The four high implementers had some common classroom practices that they shared. All four of these teachers centered their language instruction around the use of children’s literature. Teachers read aloud with active engagement from their students, read children’s literature in large and small groups, and encouraged students to read independently for extended periods of time. The second commonality of the four teachers was the grouping of students for instruction. Students were often in flexible mixed ability groups that changed frequently. The third commonality among the teachers was the use of open-ended
writing activities. Few tasks were assigned to students to copy off the board; students were primarily engaged in open-ended writing tasks requiring students to craft longer written pieces. All four of the teachers used journal writing, and teachers commented back to students with written questions or thoughts. The four teachers also engaged students to write about content area topics by using open-ended questions. Not only did these teachers have their students writing, but they also taught self-evaluation of writing. The last commonality among the four teachers was the appearance of explicit and implicit instruction in both reading and writing skills were present while students were immersed in children’s literature. At times skill instruction was isolated, but skill instruction often occurred within meaning-centered literacy instruction.

A noted limitation of the researchers was the fact that teacher characteristics may influence student learning than the set of teaching practices under investigation. Teachers who are considered effective are often times more receptive to implementing new instructional practices (Guskey, 1988). This is another study answering most of my research question. The study is based on primary grade level students and it explains characteristics of effective instruction in reading and writing.

**Is Integration Appropriate?**

In the primary grades a large portion of time is spent on language arts related activities. There are conflicting opinions among educators about whether to integrate subjects or to not integrate subjects. In an examination of teacher beliefs and practices related to integration of language arts and reading instruction a consideration for how teachers’ practices and beliefs about integration seem to be related (Schmidt, Roehler, Caul, Buchman, Diamond, Solomon, & Cianciolo, 1985). This study broke integration in classrooms into three kinds of integration. The
first, language and reading skills are the major emphasis of the lesson or activity and some other content area is also taught; only as a minor focus. The second, non-language content is the major focus of the lesson with language being a minor focus. The third kind of integration is when language and reading skills are integrated in instruction. Five areas of language instruction were identified: reading, language instruction, writing mechanics, oral expression, and library study skills.

Data was collected in six elementary classrooms from three districts in a metropolitan mid-Michigan area. The lower elementary classrooms were two-second grade, one-third grade, and one-second/third grade combination class. The two upper elementary classrooms were one-fourth grade and one-fourth/fifth grade combination classroom. Teachers had an average of seven years teaching experience and at least one language arts methods course; none with more than four courses. The districts were mostly middle to upper-middle class suburban neighborhoods. Teachers kept logs for three months recording the beginning and ending times of all instructional periods, instructional intents, and materials used in all these periods. Each classroom was also observed eight or nine days during the same three months, using structured field notes. Interviews were conducted with each teacher to determine their propensity to maintain traditional boundaries between subject matters when planning their teachings. Teacher’s logs were the primary data source for the study. The logs were used to determine the major and minor content for each lesson. Not surprising was among the six teachers there was a large variant of the kinds and the amounts of integration that was used in classrooms. Data collected seemed to say that upper elementary teachers provided overall twice as much integrated language instruction involving content as the teachers in lower elementary. The six
teachers that were interviewed favored integrating language arts instruction, but only minimal amounts could be documented throughout their logs.

Schmidt, Roehler, Caul, Buchman, Solomon, & Cianciolo (1985) questioned the effectiveness of multi-focus instruction for different groups of learners. Integrating language arts and reading instruction with other content areas, seemed clear to the researchers, provided all students with a richer content exposure to all students. Questions regarding the lack of opportunities for low ability students are a place for future research for the team.

**Characteristics of Effective Primary Grade Teachers**

For any instructional program to be effective the teacher is an integral part of making instruction effective. In general, in effective primary grade classrooms, students are academically engaged and working productively. Greater engagement often translates into higher achievement with more advanced reading, better writing, and higher standardized test performances (Bohn, Roehrig, & Pressley, 2004).

Six primary teachers from 5 schools participated in the study. Two taught kindergarten, two taught first grade, and two teachers of second grade. All of the participants were Caucasian women with between 7 and 47 years of teaching experience. All of the participants have teaching certificates; five have had some graduate work. They teach in schools that serve middle-class to upper-middle-class students. Class size ranged from 14 to 25 students. Three of the teachers taught in Catholic schools and the other three taught in public schools. All of the schools are located in the same Midwestern area. The socioeconomic status of students attending the private Catholic school is higher than those of the students attending the public school. The six teachers were identified through a pilot study where principals nominated participants as exemplary
teachers based on criteria given to them. The list of criteria listed the many teaching practices that promote student engagement. The six teachers participated in the study for one year. One teacher at each grade level was identified as more effective and the other teacher at the same grade was identified as a less effective comparison teacher. This was determined by completing some pilot observations to see engagement of the students and appropriate grade level student progress. The teachers were observed during the course of the 2001-2002 school year. Their teaching during the first three days of school was videotaped; teachers were also videotaped throughout the school year from November 2001 to March 2002. Teachers were taped for three to four hours at a time. Videos were watched by two researchers and transcribed to develop categories that would describe the teaching. Each video was watched approximately four to five times, or until no new categories needed to be created and both researchers were in agreement. Once all video observations had been analyzed researchers also used the Classroom AIMS (Atmosphere, Instruction, Management, and Student Outcomes) instrument. Classroom AIMS is an instrument used to rate teacher consistency of using 161 aspects of effective teaching practices. All teachers were interviewed; questions were tailored to each teacher according to the classroom practices she used to better understand rationale for their use. Interviews were coded similarly to the video tapes. An effective teacher was defined in this study as one who exhibits teaching behaviors characteristic of effective teachers in previous studies, specifically when observed in November through March and consistently producing high engagement in students during those observations.

Two of the six teachers were consistent with the teaching of very effective primary grade teachers in other studies. Not only were these two teachers being effective, the students in these classes were doing better academically than the students in the same grade level comparison
class. Analysis of all observations and the interviews indicated that the effective teachers did some things different from the rest that made huge impacts on their classrooms for the entire year. First, they spend more time teaching and use diverse instructional techniques in which to teach. Teachers taught varying the groups from whole group, to small group, and/or individual support, but they were almost constantly teaching. These teachers used the teacher-as-coach model of teaching more consistently in their practices. Second, effective teachers motivate their students. Teachers frequently praised students for specific accomplishments, being independent, and being a model for other students; special notice was made of student achievements related to student efforts. The third major difference between effective and non-effective teachers was classroom management. Classrooms that can function smoothly have more time to devote to learning and teaching.

Sample size is very small in this study. The location of the study may also have an effect on the outcome. This study relates to my research question because the study integrates reading and writing instruction, and it also names some of the characteristics of teachers and their practices that were attributed to making them effective in reading and writing instruction. Earlier studies used samples from classrooms that were among the later elementary grades whereas this study also includes students and teachers in the primary grades.

Instructional practices do not exist independently. By examining some of the instructional and organizational factors that might explain how and why some schools are attaining greater-than-expected primary grade reading achievement with students at risk for failure (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000).

Fourteen schools geographically dispersed throughout the country participated in this study. Schools ranged from 28% - 92% poverty and included four rural, four small town, and one
suburban school, as well as, five inner-city schools from three large metropolitan districts. Schools were chosen based on the characteristics of having recently implemented reform programs to improve reading achievement, and those with a reputation for producing higher than expected results in reading with low-income student populations. Eight schools were selected because of the kind of externally developed model of early reading intervention that they had recently adopted. One school adopted Book Buddies, two adopted Early Intervention in Reading, three adopted Right Start in Reading, and two adopted Reading Recovery. In six of the participating schools the reform program was set into the schools self made reform program in reading. Additionally selected, were two schools who had implemented externally developed, nationally recognized school wide reform programs; Success for All and Core Knowledge. One other school was selected where the school had created its’ own early intervention program. Three additional typical schools were recruited for comparison purposes. The comparison schools had similar populations, but had no history of either exceptionally high achievement or reform activity. Two of these schools were in large urban districts and one was in a rural area. However, as with other studies, schools that were thought to be exemplary were not always so. Rather than using reputation, this study defines exemplarity empirically by using a combination of gain scores from classroom reading measures and scores on whatever achievement test the district normally used. Based on this index, four schools from the study were determined to be most effective. These schools were doing as well as or better than others in our sample in reading growth and/or doing better than average for their district, considering poverty level. Six schools from the study were identified as moderately effective, and four schools were identified as least effective. The principal in each school was asked to identify two good or excellent teachers who would be willing to participate in the study. A similar notion was found that not all teachers who
were identified as exemplary actually are exemplary. A total of 22 kindergarten, 23 first-grade, 25 second grade, and 22 third grade teachers volunteered to participate in the study. All teachers were female with the exception of two male second grade teachers and two male third grade teachers. Information in this study is only for grades 1-3. Each principal was asked to participate in the study by recruiting teachers, respond to a survey, completing an interview, and providing demographic information about the participating students.

Teachers were asked to divide their classes into thirds; high, average, and low achieving students based on teachers’ perceptions of reading performance. From these groups of students two low and two average students were selected at random for the pretests. Only four children per class were tested due to resource limitations. Students were tested in November and again in May. In the fall, the first grade students were individually tested on letter name identification of upper and lowercase letters, phonemic blending, phonemic segmentation, and a list of pre-primer words. In the spring, the first grade students were individually tested on specially constructed word reading test and reading passages from the QRI-II. An instructional level (highest level with 90% accuracy or better) was determined. Each student was asked to read a grade 1 passage to determine a common fluency measure of words correct per minute (wcpm). Students were also asked to retell each passage they read. A four-point holistic scoring rubric was used to score the retellings. Finally a reading words test was developed. Half of the words on the list came from the QRI-II and half were decodable words. Twenty words were chosen for each grade level, pre-primer through third grade for a total of 100 words.

In the fall, second grade students were tested individually on the reading words test for grade 1 and a grade 1 passage from the QRI-II. The number of words read correctly in one minute was recorded as well as the student’s word recognition accuracy on the passage. Each
student was asked to retell about the passage and was scored on a four-point rubric. In the spring students were tested individually starting with the reading words test. Next, each student began with at QRI-II grade 1 passage and continued until an instructional level was found, after which each student read a grade 2 passage to gain a fluency measure. Each student was asked to retell the instructional level passage and was scored according to the four-point rubric. Third grade students followed the same procedures of the second grade students except for the passages read: in the fall, they read a grade 2 passage and word list, and in the spring they read a grade 3 passage to obtain a fluency measure.

Beginning in December a one hour observation of teacher and student behaviors and instruction during the basic reading program in every classroom was conducted once a week for five months. Observational notes included comments about classroom activity, children’s involvement in the lesson and other events that seemed noteworthy. The observer recorded what the teacher was saying during the lesson as well as what the students were saying and doing during the lesson. Additionally, every five minutes the observer recorded any of the following behaviors: coaching/scaffolding, modeling, engaging the children in recitation, explaining how to do something, telling, or engaging the children in a discussion. At the end of the hour long observation a summary of the lesson was written including: overall impression, teacher instruction and teacher-student interaction, activities and materials, student engagement, classroom management, and classroom environment.

Teachers were asked to keep logs of daily instructional activities for one week in February and one week in April. Teachers were asked to note how long they spent on various activities, including reading instruction (teacher-directed reading of narrative and expository text; instruction of phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension; literature circles) student
independent reading, writing in response to reading; other written composition; spelling; reading aloud to students; and other academic activities. Teachers also indicated the groups of students for each activity: students working as a whole class, working in small groups, or working independently. The teachers recorded activities in 15-minute intervals and could include more than one activity during a time period.

In April or May, the principal and teachers completed surveys. Across the 14 schools, the return rate of the surveys was 88%. All principals and at least three teachers from each school were interviewed. For every school a common outline was followed to guide the research team in creating a case study. Major topics within each case study included: school demographics, history of the school, primary grade reading performance data, community/home/school relationships, school factors, grade-level classroom practices, other factors believed to enhance beginning reading achievement, challenges, and advice to other schools. Two kinds of analyses were conducted in the study; analysis at the school level for what makes it effective, as well as, analysis at the classroom level to determine what is effective. School effectiveness ratings were made up of two school based measurements: students’ growth on project measures of reading and students’ performance on district measures of reading. The scores were combined to create a general rating of effectiveness.

The results from this study show that the most effective schools are doing some things that other school are not doing, or they are not doing them to the extent to which is being done in effective schools. Parent links were positively and statistically significantly related to the school effectiveness rating and to all measures of student growth. The most effective school reported more links with parents; three of the four most effective schools in this study reported having an active site council on which parents served with teachers and other school staff and helped to
make decisions concerning the practices of the school. Additionally, effective schools reached out to parents in other ways such as phone surveys, focus groups to learn how to better meet parents’ and students’ needs, written surveys, at home reading partnerships, and administrator communication directly with parents. In all four of the most effective schools from the study some form of systematic assessment of student progress was in place. At least three times throughout the school year teachers administered some form of common classroom-based assessment to all students and shared the information about classroom-level performance with the principal and fellow teachers. The assessments were all curriculum-based with a goal of monitoring student progress and to shape individual and classroom curricular and instructional decisions. Sharing the data publicly was important in all four of the most effective schools. The building communication and collaboration rating was positively related to the fluency measure and retelling. All four of the most effective schools reported collaboration within and across grades as a reason for their success, along with peer coaching, teaming within and across grades, working together to help all students, and program consistency. Collaboration plays an important part in delivering of reading instruction in effective schools. In three of the most effective schools in the study special personnel, such as the Title 1 teacher, reading resource, or special education teacher went into the classroom for an hour a day to help provide instruction for small, ability-based groups. A considerable amount of time was spent on reading instruction daily in effective schools. Reading was a priority at these schools and their time allocation to reading was very strong evidence of this commitment. Interventions used in the three most effective schools included small group, locally or regionally developed, and implemented across the primary grades. Teachers and administrators in the most effective schools felt strongly that early intervention in place in their schools was a key to their success. During interviews, teachers
and/or principals in three of the four most effective schools in this study stated a yearlong staff
development effort related to their early intervention program as being a tribute to their success.
Three of the four most effective schools said that visits to schools with innovative programs
followed by sharing observations with colleagues as an effective approach to staff development.
Also mentioned was district and school-sponsored year long workshops, or graduate level
courses.

Some of the same effective approaches that entire schools were doing were being done on
a smaller scale in classrooms. To investigate the relation between school effectiveness and
classroom instruction a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with the school
effectiveness rating serving as the independent variable and eight teacher variables serving as
outcome measures was conducted. Only those classroom factors that were statistically
significantly related to one or more of the measures of student or teacher’s accomplishment were
included. A statistically significant MANOVA let to follow-up univariate analyses of variance.

Teachers in most effective schools communicated more with parents/caregivers than
other teachers through letters, newsletters, or calling home. In one of the most effective schools
in this study teachers made a rigorous effort to call home with positive comments. The ANOVA
regarding time in small-group instruction revealed a statistically significant effect for school
effectiveness. In addition to spending more time in small group instruction, the ratio of small
group to whole-class instruction was important; in the most effective schools students spent more
time in small-group instruction than in whole-class instruction by a ratio of 2:1. The basis for
forming small groups in all of the most effective schools was ability grouping with the
understanding that using the internal school-based assessment would keep groups flexible by
moving students when performance warranted the move. In three of the four most effective
schools early interventions were in place across the primary grade classrooms to provide high-quality, special assistance to those students who were struggling to learn how to read. The ANOVA regarding time spent in independent reading was statistically significant. Students in the most effective schools spent more time in independent reading activities. In three of the four most effective schools teachers noted that providing time for students to read authentic texts as a factor leading to their school’s success. The ANOVA for the student time regarding task rating was statistically significant. The most accomplished teachers had a high rating for maintaining student on-task behaviors. During the last two observations, observers were asked to interrupt their normal responses, but every five minutes scan the room quickly and record the proportion of children in the class who were perceived to be on-task (productively engaged in the assigned task). Teachers who rated as the most accomplished were found to have an average of 96% of their students on-task with the counts were taken.

This study was focused on both classrooms, as well as, schools for a richer picture of what was happening in high poverty schools that excel in promoting growth in reading among their students. While encouraged by the findings of their work, the authors noted that they were examining natural correlations between program and teaching factors on one hand and student performance on the other. Due to limitations of funding not all students could be assessed per classroom. Information regarding the schools in the study could be misleading. Schools that were expected to be at the top of achievement scales, because of their reputation, were not; vice versa, schools that were thought to be ordinary in achievement and reform did better than our information would have thought.

The task of teaching beginning reading effectively receives so much attention because the failure to develop basic reading abilities during the first few years of school leads to
a host of later academic, economic, and even social-emotional difficulties. The current debate focuses on the importance of literature and composing versus an emphasis on skills development. At one extreme are the advocates of the whole language model and at the other end of the extreme are those who advocate for the phonics-first approach, or skills-based approach (Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Mistretta Hampston, 1998). An emerging theme, in the language arts education community, of balancing, or integrating whole language and skills instruction has great potential for developing competent readers and writers.

Four suburban school districts volunteered to participate in the study. Three of the districts described themselves as serving mainly middle-to lower-middle class families. The first district is urban/suburban with little racial diversity and a range of parental educational levels. The second district serves upper-middle class suburban families where the majority of parents are college educated. The third district is technically suburban, but is sandwiched between two small-city districts. It is the most racially/ethnically diverse district of the four. The other district is considered locally to be a rural district with varying parental educational levels; it is not unusual to have students whose parents cannot read. In the participating districts, language arts coordinators were asked to nominate one or more first-grade teachers in each of two categories: teachers considered to be exceptional at helping their students achieve literacy and teachers who were perceived to be similar to their peers and were more “typical” or average in promoting student literacy. Importantly noted, these were not to be weak teachers, but rather teachers who represented typical literacy instruction in the district. Among the nominated-outstanding teachers, the average number of years teaching was 8.2 with a range of 2-25 years. The nominated-typical teachers had an average of 12 years teaching with an identical range of 2-25 years. All of the nominated-outstanding teachers were female; three of the four teachers
nominated as typical were women. The final analysis of effective instruction was based on a subset of three teachers (two outstanding and one typical) whose student demonstrated consistently higher levels of reading, writing, and engagement than students of the other teachers.

Twice per month from December to June of the 1994-1995 school year classroom observations during literacy instruction were conducted for a time period of one to two hours. Information gathered from the observations was documented in field notes throughout the observational periods. Maps were drawn of each classroom indicating the relative space and location of students, teacher desks, chairs, books and other available materials were noted. Twice during the study, in-depth ethnographic interviews with each participating teacher took place. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The first interview was semi-structured, following an outline developed from information emerging from the observations. The purpose of the first interview was to explore teacher beliefs and purposes for the methods they used in literacy instruction. The second interview’s purpose was to serve as a member check on the individual models of instruction emerging from the data. The teacher was presented with an individualized model of literacy instruction developed from the observations, interviews and artifacts collected throughout the school year. Each teacher was asked to review the model and critique the model from their perspective. Classroom artifacts were noted and collected. Such items included: writing journals, posters, charts, home work assignments, student projects, and lists of books read among other student works. Initial data from interviews and observations was gone through line-by-line and categorized to describe the data.

Once all teachers had reviewed their teacher models and confirmed them during the second interview the attention shifted to the analysis of outstanding versus some typical teaching
practices. During the study, achievement differences between classes became obvious. Three types of information were noted about the academic progress of students: reading levels, writing levels, and student engagement. In the cluster of teachers with the highest-achieving students, most students were reading at or above grade level; most students were writing compositions that were typically a page or longer with accurate capitalization and punctuation. Low achieving students in these classes had also made significant progress. Low achieving students were reading at the mid-to-late first grade level. These students were also writing coherent compositions at least a page in length. Typically, in the classes with the highest-achieving students, all or nearly all of the students, including the low achievers, were engaged in activities and at no time was engagement observed to be less than 65%.

At the other end of the spectrum were a cluster of three classes in which students’ reading and writing were unimpressive compared to the cluster of the three strongest classrooms. Half the students in these weaker classrooms ended the year reading at an early to mid-first-grade level. The writing in these classrooms tended to be unorganized, poorly punctuated and brief in length. Engagement for these classrooms was either extremely variable or consistently low. A cluster of three more classrooms were in the middle, with students performing better than those in the weakest cluster but not as uniformly well as those in the strongest cluster. When the data had been collected and the three achievement groups designated, the next step was to examine the data again to identify characteristics that most teachers had in common, as well as, practices and beliefs that distinguished the teachers in the highest achievement groups.

Among the characteristics that most teachers had in common were: using a mixture of direct skills-based instruction and whole language type activities, using the writing process model and including some type of writing daily, using some form of weekly spelling program,
using worksheets at least occasionally, desks in the classroom arranged in small groups that changed from time to time, conducting some lessons in small groups, regularly asking students to read and write independently, using positive attention, teachers having a caring nature for their students, and recognizing the importance of parental participation in children’s literacy development. Characteristics of high-achievement teachers include the characteristics listed above taken one step further. The instructional balance between skills-based instruction and whole language was deliberately planned throughout the language arts activities and whenever the opportunity presented itself. Students in the high-achievement classrooms were taught decoding skills with individualized instruction and review for the students who needed it, mini-lessons were incorporated into other subject areas, and opportunities were made for students to engage in authentic reading and writing activities. One of the most striking characteristics of instruction in high-achievement classes was the density of instruction. Teachers integrated multiple goals into one lesson and teachers never seemed to do just one thing at a time. The teachers were not only aware of the multiple goals, they were planning for them. Teachers in high-achievement classrooms used the scaffolding technique to help their students learn. Teachers monitor student progress and only steps in to provide assistance on an as-needs basis. Teachers in high-achievement classroom teach students to monitor themselves. Teaching students to know when to use and apply strategies to help themselves in their reading and writing when they encountered difficulty. Not only did these teachers encourage self monitoring of their work, they encouraged self monitoring of their behavior as well. In high-achievement classes reading and writing were often interwoven. Students wrote about the things that they were reading about and vice versa; reading and writing was also integrated with other subject area content as well. Teachers used the writing process consistently. Teachers in the high-
achievement classrooms had high expectations for all of their students both behaviorally and academically. Teachers were masters of classroom management; often preventing misbehavior before it could occur. Teachers in high-achieving classrooms were well prepared with lessons planned ahead of time and all materials gathered and on hand; teachers expressed the importance of routine and predictable patterns of activities and expectations in their classrooms, but not to the point of rigidity.

Some limitations of the study are noted by the researchers. The population of the students participating in the sample was limited; more research with a wider variety of students and settings needs to be done. There was an absence of any pretest measures in the classrooms. Another future consideration is how district and school policies may affect both teacher practices and student outcomes.
Chapter III: Results and Analysis Relative to the Problem

Instruction in reading and writing is not an easy feat. There are a multitude of programs and approaches available to schools and teachers for use. Each program has information and research behind it saying it is the best for producing positive student outcomes. When all of the programs are reduced to a common level, two main reading approaches emerge, skills-based and whole language. Now that the kinds of reading approaches have been narrowed down, how do they apply to the teaching of reading and writing effectively?

Skills-Based Instruction versus Whole Language Instruction

When first comparing whole language instruction and skills-based instruction to each other researchers found when the approaches were used individually both instructional practices had their benefits and drawbacks. Researchers identified a number of similarities in their learning outcomes. When compared directly to each other for performance in a study the whole language approach to instruction rated with higher student outcomes (Dahl & Freppon, 1995). Researchers found that students made different senses of their reading and writing based on their instructional experiences. Whole language learners gained much more from their exposure to and interaction with storybooks and expository text than did skills-based learners where exposure was typically much less.

Balanced Approach to Literacy Instruction

There are many schools and teachers who still are on opposite sides of the spectrum of language arts curriculum. There are many supporters of skills-based instruction and there are just as many who support the whole language instruction. Even more are the supporters who are beginning to support a balance, or integration of the two kinds of literacy instruction to gain the
academic results they are looking for when teaching students. Researchers who compared the use of skills-based curriculum or whole language curriculums individually versus using a balanced approach or an integrated instructional approach to teaching language arts have found that the balance approach to language arts instruction shows greater academic results in students (Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, & Rodriguez, 2002; Schmidt, Roehler, Caul, Buchman, Diamond, Solomon, & Cianciolo, 1985; Cantrell, 1999). In classrooms where students were exposed to whole language instructional techniques and a skills-based instructional approach blended into a balanced approach students seemed to reap the rewards of both kinds on instruction.

The Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, & Rodriguez study relates to my research question by fitting the integrated curriculum piece. The study shows that integration of reading and writing instruction had a positive effect on the participating students. The study does provide details or characteristics as to how reading and writing were integrated.

**Characteristics of Effective Primary Grade Teachers**

Researchers have identified an important contributing factor in the use of a balanced instructional approach to teaching reading and writing to students, effective teachers. The curriculum alone does not have as much of an impact on student outcomes without effective teachers in classrooms (Bohn, Roehrig, & Pressley, 2004; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000; Stevens, Madden, Slavin, & Farnish, 1987; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Mistretta Hampston, 1998). Characteristics shared by effective teachers in classrooms were just as important to the kinds of curriculum used to teach the students. Some of the shared effective characteristics of effective teachers included: using a balanced approach to literacy instruction, writing every day, excellent classroom management skills, communication with parents/families
of students on a regular basis, use of small flexible group instruction, positive reinforcement, multiple goal, dense lessons, print rich classrooms, extensive use of scaffolding, modeling, and coaching teaching techniques, early intervention and support of struggling readers, collaboration with colleagues, high expectations for all learners, high student involvement, and internal assessments for use in flexible groupings. It does not matter how good the curriculum is, if there are not effective teachers teaching it the desired outcomes are not produced.

The Stevens, Madden, Slavin, & Farnish study goes along with my research question in regards that it is looking at the integration of reading and writing. It explains a study where both subjects appear to be successfully integrated. This study does not answer the part of my question regarding characteristics of effective integrated reading and writing curriculums. No characteristics of either the methods of instruction or curriculum procedures were discussed.

The Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole study is very close to answering my research question. The study was conducted with primary grade students and many characteristics of teaching practices and school organization and practices are examined. The part of my research left unanswered is in regards to curriculum characteristics. Through the study I am still not clear on what kinds of curriculum were used in this study.

The Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, Mistretta Hampston study answers most of my research question. It discusses a sample that was taken from the primary grades, and it describes characteristics of effective teaching practices of reading and writing in an integrated curriculum.

**Summary**

While many classrooms use each kind of language arts instruction individually more classrooms and schools are adopting an integrated or balanced approach because of the countless
benefits that are offered to students. Students gain the benefits of both kinds of instruction, but not without effective teachers to help guide them along the path of reading and writing.
Chapter IV: Conclusion

Recommendation

When young teachers enter their first years of a teaching position, often times it is a very overwhelming time in a young teacher’s career. There is so much that only real classroom teaching experiences can teach; these learning experiences cannot be learned in a college lecture hall. There is a lot of information to learn in a short period of time. While the curriculum and state standards will be important for guiding instruction the teaching techniques a teacher uses to be effective in teaching students may be more important. Curriculum materials and methods vary between grades, schools, districts, and states, but the effective techniques to teaching can be applied to any curriculum. When you are comfortable with effective teaching techniques, then individualizing a personal balanced approach to reading and writing will emerge.

Areas for Further Research

To further answer my research question I would want to perform more research including students from a wide variety of geographical locations, socio-economic backgrounds and diverse cultures, in settings of traditional, magnet, charter, and alternative schools at specific grade levels to determine effective reading and writing curriculum and specific reading and writing activities that are most effective. Now that National Standards are emerging all schools will have the same benchmarks to meet, making it easier to compare students’ performances in the variety of locations and kinds of schools. The study would have to be over a long period of time and track the same students and teachers over multiple years of schooling through standardized test scores and other assessment, observations, and interviews. With the results being able to influence teacher preparation programs for best practices used in classrooms.
Conclusion

Reading and writing are among the most important and debated subjects to teach in schools today. There are two main approaches to instruction, skills-based and whole language. Both approaches have opposing views on how actual instruction should be taught, however, the outcome for both instructional approaches is the same, fluent and knowledgeable readers and writers. Many teachers have adopted an integrated or balanced approach to literacy instruction. The balanced approach to literacy lends some flexibility to the teacher for the desired amount of each instructional approach while reaping the benefits of each. To deliver the most effective and beneficial instruction to students, effective teachers must be in place in classrooms. Effective teachers are the first defenses against failing readers. Teachers who practice effective teaching techniques help make the incredible process of learning how to read and write easy and fun to the students being taught.
References


