

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING WRITING

by

Connie Monaghan

A Project Submitted to the Faculty of  
The Evergreen State College  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree  
Master in Teaching  
2007

This Project for the Master in Teaching Degree

by

Constance Monaghan

has been approved for

The Evergreen State College

by

Scott Coleman, Member of the Faculty

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Acknowledgments

Thank you to Scott Coleman, Sherry Walton, and the faculty members of The Evergreen State College MIT 2006-2007 cohort.

## Abstract

Because the success of students in school, in their personal lives, and in the work world is in large part dependent on their ability to communicate in written words, it is vital that teachers know the most effective means of teaching writing. The history of the teaching of writing is described, including controversies. The review of literature on the topic of teaching writing is organized into six areas: teaching in context vs. teaching discretely, connecting school literacy to home and community, the importance of relevance in student engagement, process vs. product, and classroom discussion. A central finding of the literature review is that despite teachers' intentions to employ constructivist methods, pressure to meet state and federal goals influences their decisions to teach in a more traditional manner. Other conclusions are that effective teaching strategies include cohesive curricula, a collaborative social environment, connection to a student's personal life, and classroom discussion in which questions are open-ended, all hallmarks of constructivist teaching methods. Implications for teaching include consideration of the effect that preparing students for standardized testing has on choosing the most effective strategies for teaching writing.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE.....	i
APPROVAL .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT .....	iv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
Rationale.....	1
Definitions .....	3
Controversies .....	4
Limitations.....	5
Statement of Purpose.....	5
Summary.....	6
CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND .....	7
Pre-1800s .....	7
1800s .....	9
1900s-Present.....	10
Summary.....	12
CHAPTER 3: CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	14
What Makes an English Teacher Effective?.....	14
Summary.....	29
Teaching in Context vs. Teaching Discretely.....	30
Summary.....	35

Connecting School Literacy to Home and Community .....	36
Summary.....	49
The Importance of Relevance in Student Engagement .....	49
Summary.....	56
Process vs. Product.....	57
Summary.....	74
Discussion.....	75
Summary.....	80
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS .....	81
Effective Writing Strategies .....	82
Considerations in Choosing Writing Strategies.....	83
Conclusion .....	84
Implications for Further Research.....	85
REFERENCES .....	86

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Rationale

“It is by means of [literacy] that the most important and the most useful of life’s business is completed – votes, letters, testaments, laws, and everything else which puts life on the right track. For who could compose a worthy encomium of literacy? For it is by means of writing alone that the dead are brought to the minds of the living, and it is through the written word that people who are spatially very far apart communicate with each other as if they were nearby. As the treaties made in time of war between peoples or kings, the safety provided by the written word is the best guarantee of the survival of the agreement. Generally it is this alone which preserves the finest sayings of wise men and the oracles of the gods, as well as philosophy and all of culture, and hands them on to succeeding generations for all time. Therefore, while it is true that nature is the cause of life, the cause of the good life is education based on the written word.”

– Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, circa 63 B.C.E. (Fischer, 2003, p. 96)

With writing seen as so important for so long, the best methods of teaching writing become vital. It is safe to assume that not long after writing was invented, the means to teaching writing came into play, and now, some 7,500 years later, educators have yet to settle on the most effective classroom strategies for teaching writing.

“What are the best strategies for teaching writing in a public high school English class?” has been answered in many different ways through historical trends, conflicting research, public debate, the exigencies of instituting standards, and unyielding tradition over the last 100 or so years. Showing the complexity of this question are related questions about writing such as “What about process vs. product?” “What role does environment play?”

The basis of human interaction is communication. Writing is a principal form of communication, necessary in everyday life, in business, in creativity, in scholarly pursuits; in short, it is not a just tool of living, it is a tool of survival. The more clearly one can write, the more easily one can survive, thrive, and navigate the world.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon teachers to search out and institute methods of teaching writing that enhance these abilities.

### Critical Thinking

In addition, writing is thinking on paper. One can argue that the more adept one is at expressing oneself through writing, the more adept one is at thinking.

Therefore, the teaching of writing, is the enabling of thought. By expressing thoughts on paper, we are ordering and analyzing our own ideas. The effects of writing on thinking suggest that students learn better when assigned work conducive to critical thinking. The effects of writing on learning started to be documented in the mid-'60s (Newell, 1984). Nostrand (1979) found that the act of writing about an idea fostered new thoughts, while Weiss and Walters (1980), as cited by Newell (1984) concluded that concepts became clearer to the student when written about. In order to better teach thinking, then, it is important that we learn better ways to teach writing.

Despite its great importance, however, our schools appear to be failing students with regards to writing. Albertson and Billingsley (2001) found that improved teaching techniques were needed, as shown by a lack of student improvement in writing in both elementary and secondary levels.

Lack of basic writing ability affects students in nearly all classes. Science students need to write results, social studies and history students require the ability to report their findings and form coherent papers; even students in art, vocational, music and math classes might occasionally be required to write about their work, and to communicate with their teachers in writing.

### Creativity

Beyond mere need, the art of writing and creativity can enhance one's life and further one's learning. Effective strategies of teaching expressive writing, then, can positively affect the quality of a student's life, possibly far into adulthood. Personal expression can also be seen as a bridge to more structured forms of writing, as pointed out by Butler and Mansfield (1995). Yet, in discussing their research on Florida high schools, Scherff and Piazza (2005) noted that little expressive writing, such as drama, poetry or responses to music – regardless of academic track or grade level – was being taught or assigned.

#### Literacy for All Students

Effective methods for teaching writing are necessary not only to serve middle-class, white students, but to educate a diverse, multicultural population that includes students of poverty, English-language learners, and students with learning disabilities. As Langer (1997) noted, minority and impoverished populations face additional challenges in literacy learning, making it incumbent on teachers to adopt teaching strategies that reach a multitude of students.

New technologies raise important questions in how writing should be taught, as Snyder (1993) noted. The influence of word processors on student editing and writing has yet to be fully examined.

The Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) requires students to be able to write, and for good reason.

#### Definitions

For the purposes of this paper, writing is defined as anything written, such as a literary composition, that has meaning (n.d. The American Heritage Dictionary of the

English Language, Fourth Edition); and the act of committing one's thoughts to writing. (n.d. Dictionary.com Unabridged, v 1.1). Teaching writing would include writing strategies, defined as methods of imparting necessary knowledge of the conventions of written discourse and the basics of grammar and syntax through various pedagogical methods. Ultimately, teaching writing means guiding students toward achieving their highest potential in communicating in words.

Progressive and/or constructivist learning refer interchangeably to a physical and social activity and that often includes collaborative and cooperative work. The instructor acts as a guide than a dictator. The students' present experiences are of value, and the education itself is based on relevant, lived experience. Social arrangements of a democratic nature are desirable, while rote memorization, drills and authoritarian methods are antithetical to learning (Dewey, 1938).

Process writing, per Applebee (1992), includes planning, prewriting, reflection and writing multiple drafts as well as more traditional methods.

#### Controversies

A significant controversy relates to a division in schooling philosophy that dates back to the 1900s: the traditional view espouses rote memorization in a strict environment, while the progressive, constructivist view pushes toward more contextualized, experiential education that has personal meaning for a student. The former is teacher-centered, while the latter focuses on the student. The former addresses students' deficits, the latter students' strengths. This argument is played out in the push for, say, reading/writing workshops in which students – while they may well be directly taught grammar and writing elements in short mini-lessons –

have freer choice of reading and writing assignments, and in which higher-order thinking and meaning-making are the goals, vs. the traditional model in which students read, write, and respond according to the formula of answering factual questions, searching for themes and writing to create them, all of it teacher-directed, with little control in the hands of the students. While constructivist methods have been largely embraced as being effective, there are a variety of reasons as to why teachers stick to the tried-and-true of drill-and-kill, and work that requires little critical thought, one being the current emphasis on state standards and testing.

Two additional controversies relate directly to the above: first, there is the question of whether and how much to teach toward standardized tests, forgoing more constructivist methods that may be more intellectually challenging in order to teach discrete skills in a traditional manner in order to prepare students in passing, for instance, the WASL. Second, there remains a question about how explicitly grammar and mechanics should be taught in an English class.

#### Limitations

I limited my research to studies on writing conducted in secondary classrooms.

#### Statement of Purpose

Strategies for teaching writing form a confusing array of choices, especially given the growing diversity of the student population. In this paper I review the literature about the teaching of writing with the aim of clarifying research regarding various facets of teaching literacy. I will look at: research that investigates the practices and classrooms of teachers who are considered to be outstanding; how

researchers believe skills and grammar should be taught; how important relevancy is to student learning; what is more important: the process or the product; the role of discussion in literacy learning; and at research into connecting school literacy to a student's home and community.

### Summary

There are multiple factors to consider when deciding the best way to teach writing, including the requirements of the school, the need to prepare students for standardized tests, decisions about what kinds of writing to focus on, the population to be taught, considerations about giving time to creativity vs. following a strictly academic curriculum, whether to teach in a constructivist or traditional manner, whether to teach grammar and writing structures discretely or in context or otherwise, what the social needs of the class are, how to structure lessons, and how to make learning relevant and meaningful.

In the next chapter, the history of education as it pertains to teaching writing will be looked at.

## CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the previous chapter, the question of how to best teach writing was introduced, including the reasons as to its importance and the controversies within its boundaries. This chapter outlines a brief history of teaching writing, as background to chapter 3, a review of the research. The arguments of the 19<sup>th</sup> century regarding curriculum and the best way to teach it directly affect the teaching of today and therefore are carefully examined.

### Pre-1800s

Even the Neanderthals wrote, in a sense, conveying meaning through notches on bones, or through cave paintings that told a story (Fischer, 2003). Later, in the Middle East, clay tokens marked with symbols were used to keep track of commodities (Fischer, 2003). It wasn't until Sumerian scribes, more than 5,700 years ago in Mesopotamia, created a system of symbols coordinated with sounds that writing as we know it came to be (Fischer, 2003).

Though the reasons for reading and writing have changed through the centuries – from the need to be able to record crop yields and business transactions, to the religious push toward literacy in service of reading one's Bible, to modern history, for artistic expression and scholarly pursuits – the methods of teaching them changed little for at least a few hundred years: Writing exercises and textbooks are known to have existed as early as the fifth century, A.D., in China, and by the time of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), there were elementary schools all across the country

where writing instruction was occurring (Fischer, 2003). As in much of the rest of the world, however, females were excluded from learning to write and other forms of formal education entirely until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

For hundreds of years, and in many cases today, students copied the alphabet, practiced writing words while learning to read them, and then were taught to write sentences and paragraphs by following the rules of grammar and the formulas for organizing thought. Although first Rousseau, followed by Johann Pestalozzi and others in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century advocated for experiential education – a radical change from the traditional schoolroom – it wasn't until the 1900s that much change was seen in methodology (Spring, 2001).

The populations being taught, however, did change. Looking only at Western culture, writing was once the exclusive preserve of male clergy and scribes, scholars and the upper class (Spring, 2001). It wasn't until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century that educators in the United States recognized that a basic education should be available to all. Prior to that, the Protestant Reformation, in 16<sup>th</sup>-century England, emphasized the learning of Godly principles and proper behavior, which were taught through reading and writing in what were called petty schools, which might be held in homes or churches as well as schools (Spring, 2001). In the colonies, dame schools taught reading and writing through alphabet verses and stories from popular primers that featured themes of religion and obedience to authority. Writing schools focused on more advanced writing instruction, and were a prerequisite for grammar school admission. Unlike petty and dame schools, the purpose of grammar schools was to prepare students for college and public life; thus they learned Latin and Hebrew and

read the Greeks. It became a status symbol to be well-educated, and the continuing modern emphasis on the discrete teaching of grammar and rules has its roots in those days (Spring, 2001).

### 1800s

In the 1830s the common schools were started by Horace Mann to educate both elites and paupers equally, schools that were supported by the government (Spring, 2001). Schooling was standardized, teaching all children the same moral and political philosophies in order to lessen frictions between various ethnicities, and rich and poor. McGuffey Readers, similar to the earlier primers, taught reading through stories and poems that featured religion or morals.

As the 19th century progressed, the industrial revolution required workers who could read and write (Spring, 2001). Women, too, were encouraged to learn reading and writing, not for their own edification so much as to be able to nurture their sons. That said, the teaching of reading and writing was outlawed for African Americans in many states until Reconstruction, the idea being that education would allow slaves to band together, agitate and rise up against their masters. In short, the ability to read and write would give them power by allowing them to understand politics and their own situations, and thus they would be able to respond to their oppressors by organizing using the printed word. Writing would also give them a public voice in newspapers and broadsheets, and would allow them to participate fully in public life.

Throughout the 19th century, a variety of interest groups competed for control over the curriculum and, at different times, held power. Langer (2001) noted that the

ongoing debate about teaching methods was essentially divided between those who espoused experience-based instruction as best for instruction in skill and concept learning, and those who stressed traditional, decontextualized practice. Each group was promoting a different curriculum and sometimes different teaching methods. The theories being feuded about, however, were of vital importance, and inform teaching methods, in the English classroom and others, today.

Notable was the appearance of Dewey, allied with the Herbartian Society, which emphasized child development and children's interests and promoted using a single subject as a jumping-off point for all subjects, in order to achieve coherence in the curriculum (Kliebard, 1987).

#### 1900s-Present

Dewey, at century's end, with his own ideas, was associated with progressive methods of education (Kliebard, 1987), including writing. By the 1920s, various forms of progressive schooling had become popular. Drills were out; a more social and holistic approach was in. The progressive emphasis on independence, creativity and self-expression contrasted sharply with the traditional structured curriculum, tightly controlled classrooms, and learning through repetition and memorization of discrete facts. One of the principles of the Progressive movement was continuity. Each learning experience should grow out of the previous one, as Dewey had theorized. Thus, rather than the copying and formulaic writing relied on in a traditional classroom, writing assignments would be tied to other subjects being learned. Progressive ideas and ideals, while not in general put into practice as a

whole, have yet informed specific approaches to writing instruction, and have fueled a great deal of research into best practice, as will be seen in chapter 3.

Snyder (1993) noted that since the mid-'60s, there have been major shifts in theory on written discourse, including a renewed interest in social context in the development of writing that harks back to the progressive era. In addition, there has been a realization that there are differences in how people write, that it is a recursive rather than linear process, that collaboration can enhance the process, and that discovery is an important product of writing for both the professional and novice.

Applebee (1992) found that in 1988, writing teachers reported using grammar or skill-based instruction almost equally; in 1992 that had changed considerably, as 71 percent of eighth graders had teachers who reported writing process as central while 49 percent stuck to the traditional methods.

Scherff and Piazza (2005) gave a great deal of thought to the recent history of the teaching of English in their research survey of Florida high school students. They noted that until the 1970s, classical rhetoric, formulas for correctness, and basic assignments such as the five-paragraph theme dominated English classes. Applebee (1994) noted that the '70s and '80s featured a sea change in instructional approaches and in the concept of schooling itself. Critical, independent thinking, open-ended activities and student-centered instruction were weighted more heavily than before, while the focus on fundamental skills, memorization, and basic content lessened. Scherff and Piazza (2005) pointed to Nanci Atwell, among others, as providing practical uses for process theories, such as literature circles, in which students often choose their own books and govern their own groups.

As with the theories of Dewey, however, these new practices were often not fully understood and were often misapplied (Sperling & Freedman, 2001, as cited by Scherff & Piazza, 2006). Langer (2001) pointed out that the distinctions between theoretically dissimilar teaching approaches tend to be blurred by teachers, resulting in a fusion of strategies.

Since 1993 the pendulum has swung again away from constructivist practices due to the demands of standardized testing, with No Child Left Behind leading the way. This was seen partially as a result of the realities of schooling, such as increasing diversity, lack of time, and heavier teacher loads (Scherff & Piazza, 2006). At its worst, Scherff and Piazza found that testing became the sole criterion for judging writing and that explicit instruction in the five-paragraph theme became the standard for teaching writing. Formulaic writing that followed prescriptive rules took the place of the writing process.

### Summary

For over a century, in writing education, as in education as a whole, visions of how and what should be taught have been polarized between those advocating for traditional, no-nonsense methods to be delivered efficiently in a teacher-centered classroom, and those who, like Dewey, believe schooling should be child-centered, experiential and social.

Nontraditional, progressive methods of teaching reading and writing have once again gained in popularity, having fallen out favor after the progressive era of the late 1800s (Schugurensky, 2001). There are a variety of novel writing approaches

to choose from, including email pen pals, computer composition, life-story writing, and creating monologues.

In the next chapter, a critical review of the literature examines some of these writing approaches as well as the attributes of effective teachers. Important considerations in the effective teaching of writing are also looked at: relevance, and the social milieu.

### CHAPTER 3: CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the preceding chapter, a survey of the history of writing was shared that included an overview of the progressive movement in teaching, which has strongly impacted our current ideas about how writing should be taught. In this chapter, I will first review research that investigates the instructional commonalities of English teachers deemed successful. Next is a section that reviews research on teaching in context vs. teaching elements discretely, followed by a section reviewing research on the importance of making learning relevant to the student; the next section reviews research on process vs. product. The final two sections are concerned with discussion in the classroom, and with connecting literacy learning to a student's home and community life.

#### What Makes an English Teacher Effective?

Ostrowski (2000) conducted a case study that looked at four English/language arts teachers in a middle school and a high school in order to determine what made these teachers effective. He discovered a number of attributes they had in common, such as connecting writing to the reading of literature, that were effective ways to engage the students in classroom activities, with their reading and writing, and with other students.

Both schools, in Dade County, Florida, were identified as exemplary by educators, state officials and local district leaders in 1995-96 and 1996-97. This case study took place over two years. The researcher attended classes, audio taped them

and took field notes during his observations. He also attended department and team meetings, faculty meetings and other pertinent meetings. He watched teachers as they interacted with students, colleagues, parents, administrators and others. When not present, he communicated by email and phone; he interviewed students singly and in groups and also emailed them. He also interviewed district personnel, administrators and other teachers.

The issues explored by the researcher (Ostrowski, 2000) were: teachers' professional and personal networks; where they got ideas for lessons, and how they adjusted them to the needs of their students; how they determined the needs of their students; what they thought was important for students to learn; how they taught literature and writing; how they prepared students for standardized tests; how they assessed student work; how they interacted with colleagues; how they were affected by being in schools affiliated with the Coalition of Essential Schools; how they changed as educators over time; and where they thought they were going as teachers.

The teachers had several things in common that caused them to stand out as highly effective: they were significantly influenced and aided by the Dade County District Language Arts Department; they were active within their schools; they exchanged ideas with one another; wasted little time; were extra-dedicated and spent extra time preparing and meeting with students and colleagues; had a positive relationship with the majority of their students that gave students a sense of inclusion in intellectual life and fostered a sense of trust in their teachers; used small group and large group discussion; students were always writing something; and these teachers appropriated some class time to the specific teaching of mechanics and vocabulary in

context and explicitly. Ostrowski (2000) found that the teachers saw writing as integral to the study of literature, to critical thinking, and to discussion. Connections were made between these components; the teachers recognized that learning to write well can empower students. Learning to write expressively, and mastering practical communication gave students a sense of personal accomplishment and ability.

What is not discussed is whether the resulting writing is better in any way than the student product from an average teacher. In addition, that these students were taught by exemplary teachers at exemplary schools begs the question of how well these strategies would work when implemented by the average teacher at an average school.

In another case study of high school English classes Langer (2001) sought to discover features of excellence in urban schools. She wanted to know why, in otherwise comparable schools, particular English programs produced higher scores on reading and writing tests. She looked at instructional and testing methods, strategies for curricular coherence, ideas of what learning is, and classroom organization.

The study participants were 44 teachers in 25 schools, teaching in 88 classes (2,640 students total) in four states: Florida, Texas, California, and New York. Fourteen of the schools were places where students were beating the odds: schools whose performance on the high-stakes literacy tests was markedly above that for schools serving demographically similar populations. The study schools were in rural, suburban and urban areas, with middle-class and urban poor populations. There was a great deal of diversity. Schools with poor and diverse student populations predominated. The teachers studied fit into three broad categories: beating-the-odds

(BTO) within a BTO school, BTO in a more typical school, and typical (good) teachers in typical schools (Langer, 2001).

Langer (2001) used a nested multicase design with each English program as a case, and the class, including the teachers and student informants, as cases within. Three major contexts were looked at: program, teacher, and students, as ideas for instructional change and delivery were considered, discussed and enacted. Field researchers followed each program, including classroom activities and interactions, as well as administrative staff, to develop an understanding of their roles in instruction. Researchers each studied one or more programs for two years, allowing them to follow the progress and planning of each classroom with two sets of students. Each field worker spent about five weeks a year at each site. They interviewed district personnel, teachers and students. Also, there were email accounts and phone talks. Over a two-year period, six students from each class acted as key informants, collecting the work and meeting with the researchers to discuss the work, classroom activities and what they were learning. Parallel sets of qualitative data were gathered, including field notes, emails, school artifacts, tape recordings and interview transcripts.

Three types of collaborations contributed to the database: full project team, collaborative dyads, and case study sessions. Coding was used to organize and index the data. Data was analyzed for patterns, leading to analysis, leading to identity of the features that differentiated the approaches of the three groups of teachers. Overall ratings were made of how each teacher dealt with the six features of instruction

looked at: approaches to skills instruction; test preparation; connecting learnings; enabling strategies; conceptions of learning; classroom organization (Langer, 2001).

Langer (2001) found that higher-performing schools were distinguished by the following attributes: skills and knowledge were imparted in a variety of types of lessons; tests were incorporated into less formal curriculum and instruction; coherence was maintained across content areas by making connections in curriculum; emphasis was placed on strategies for thinking and doing; classrooms were organized to encourage collaboration. The teachers believed in their students as eager learners, and they believed that all students were able to learn. Further, they were sure that as teachers they could make a difference.

This study included 88 teachers from four states, covering urban, rural and suburban schools. The inclusion of this many teachers from a wide variety of settings increases the potential applicability of the results. The biggest concerns about it are: potential sites were found through recommendations, though they were nominated by at least three professional sources as teachers working to improve student performance and test scores in interesting ways. The schools had to agree to be part of the study; thus, lower-performing schools and teachers may have opted out.

Applebee (1994) did a research project entailing eight classroom case studies in order to discover how curricular coherence and continuity were maintained over the course of a year in an English class. Applebee looked at decisions about curriculum the teachers made and why. He found that to be an effective English teacher was in part dependent on creating and maintaining curricular coherence.

Applebee (1994) pinpointed two areas that were important in contributing to curricular coherence: namely, the conventions of the discussion of literature and the structure in which discussions occur. Establishing rules about what was appropriate to discuss and how to manage a discussion were the first step in forging a sense of coherence. Once the students were aware of the teacher's expectations, a sense of purpose and direction followed. Forging a sense of direction was also accomplished by interrelating curricular elements. Discussion was deepened when prior experiences were related to new thoughts. The teachers' personal cultural and literary knowledge also played a part.

Deemed critical by the researcher (Applebee, 1994) was debate about important issues, such as those that raise questions about race, gender and ethnicity. Applebee noted that students' engagement was highest and their understanding apparently greatest when the conversations were relevant to their lives. Therefore, depending on the conversational domain at hand, a diversity of choices in literature, from comic books to classics and to modern romances would be appropriate.

One high school in suburban New York State and one in urban New Jersey were used as research sites. Both had multicultural populations with a substantial number of families living in poverty. Selection of participants emphasized diversity rather than representativeness. Eight master teachers – volunteers – were chosen from among a group of experience teachers who had been nominated by their peers and supervisors (Applebee, 1994).

The study took place over two years and included 19 classrooms representing 32 semesters of English teaching. Four classrooms at each site were studied each

semester in order to gather data on the personal and institutional contexts in which decisions about curriculum were made, why they were made and results of those decisions as seen in the classroom (Applebee, 1994).

Data included interviews with teachers and students, classroom observations and analysis of institutional and classroom artifacts (curriculum guides, departmental book lists, examinations, and samples of student work). Each classroom was treated as a case study. At each site, a university-based field worker developed a working relationship with the teachers he studied, including formal and informal interviews, classroom observations, and telephone updates (Applebee, 1994).

The research brought up several questions, however. First, that while the conventions of discussion were deemed as vital, for instance what was appropriate to discuss, Applebee (1994) never detailed those conventions. Second, the researcher did not define student engagement in this article. Third, the teachers were volunteers and it is not clear that the most effective teachers chose to volunteer for this study. The researchers mention that in one case study there were a significant number of students who seemed bored, apathetic and/or simply did not participate. The research report does not, however, consistently indicate the degree of student engagement, something that could have had a significant impact on the amount of learning occurring in each classroom. That the study lasted two years and covered 19 classrooms, however, lends it credence.

A two-year case study by Applebee, Burroughs and Stevens (2000) followed up on the prior study by investigating the two most significant factors found to create coherence and continuity in the curriculum: the structure of the conversations, both

oral and written, regarding significant issues; and the conventions of those conversations. In addition, this study sought to discover which factors underlay accomplished teachers' curricular decisions. They found that the curricular organization of a class, and the conventions that shaped participation were the two most significant factors in creating cohesion.

Applebee, Burroughs and Stevens (2000) noted that traditional literature-class teaching strategies focus on knowing factual content (giving the correct answers) rather than on writing and participating in discussions, which they deemed important. They defined discussion, for the purposes of their research, as “the day-to-day interactions through which curriculum is enacted” (p. 3); curricular conversation describes patterns that evolve over time. The researchers chose experienced teachers who taught in different settings, at different grade levels, and focused on different English subjects in varying tracks. They looked at both stated and unstated decisions about initiating and sustaining curricular conversations.

One high school in New York State and one in New Jersey were chosen for this case study. Each had a diverse population and substantial numbers of students living in poverty. Nineteen classrooms were selected to provide a range of experiences; teachers were chosen to represent diversity. Planned curriculum, enacted curriculum, and received curriculum were investigated through teacher interviews, observations and analysis of instructional materials, and student interviews and work (Applebee, Burroughs & Stevens, 2000).

The researchers (Applebee, Burroughs & Stevens, 2000) focused on two experienced teachers at each school each semester. The teachers were volunteers

who had been nominated by their peers, and who the researchers deemed would be candid. Each teacher was interviewed formally and informally at least once per three weeks in order to understand the teachers' decisions. A final interview looked into the teacher's overview of his work during the semester. In addition, the researchers followed a two- to four-week classroom unit in each course through daily observations and discussions with the teacher.

Each class was observed and tape recorded at least once per two weeks. Observations were made of how a teacher carried out curricular decisions; of materials used; classroom discussions and activities; and written assignments. Two to six students per classroom were interviewed to discover their perceptions of their learning and of the curriculum and class. Both high and low achievers were interviewed.

Case study reports were written for each class identifying A) the topics of conversation, and B) the degree of integration among assignments, discussion, and activities. Lastly, the conversations were analyzed as to whether they were more open-ended or in the nature of IRE.

Results showed that two sets of mechanisms were significant in fostering focus and continuity in classroom discussion and concurrently providing the context for diversity (Applebee, Burroughs & Stevens, 2000). The first had to do with the unit of study in a course, how it was organized and sequenced, and how the activities in that unit related to one another. The second was the ground rules of a class that specified acceptable methods of participation. The accomplished teachers set definite expectations about participation, which determined what students would learn and

do. While each teacher's class was different from the others, this commonality of known expectations gave each class a sense of coherence and continuity.

The researchers (Applebee, Burroughs & Stevens, 2000) were surprised at the variety of curricula in the various classes. Though topics covered were similar, such as the relationship of literature to life, and the texts used were often the same, the teaching methods of the teachers and subject of the conversations led to students learning very different things.

Applebee, Burroughs and Stevens (2000) found that a sense of direction forged by interrelating curricula prompted deeper discussions and a more pronounced level of engagement in students. Curriculum planning and review, therefore, should be reconsidered.

The fact that Applebee, Burroughs and Steven (2000) looked at a wide range of diverse classrooms and teachers over two years; recorded, observed and made case study reports of each class; analyzed the conversations and interviewed teachers and students gives one confidence in the findings. The question that it brought up was: Would it be possible to have both curricular coherence and well-understood ground rules for participation and still not have a classroom that was considered to be a good one?

In 1992, Applebee conducted the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a survey of writing samples of approximately 30,000 fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-grade students nationwide in both private and public schools. The purpose was purely to study the writing performance of children in American schools.

Applebee concluded from the results that persuasive, narrative, and informative writing continues to be a problem for many students.

Fifty thousand samples were taken of persuasive, informative and narrative writing, divided among the grade levels. Each was scored on a six-point rubric by a trained scorer. The inter-rater reliability, averaged across the tasks was 84 percent at grade 4, 80 percent at grade 8, and 79 percent at grade 12. Additionally, each student answered sets of questions relating to: his background, knowledge about the subject to be written about, and his motivation and familiarity with the assessment materials.

Beyond that, a subsample of fourth and eighth graders worked with their teachers on questionnaires, and submitted three pieces of their best writing to be analyzed.

Eighth-grade teachers and administrators also answered questionnaires (Applebee, 1992).

The top-performing third of the schools had teachers who reported placing greater emphasis on more challenging and extensive writing than those in the lower-performing schools. They also assigned papers of three or more pages more often, assessed students' achievement through long essays, and assigned more writing requiring analysis and interpretation as opposed to writing summaries or reports. Applebee (1992) found that successfully learning to write hinged in part on assignments that were more long-term, involving reflection, revision and multiple drafts. Still, 52 percent of the eighth graders and 37 percent of twelfth graders reported rarely ever being given writing assignments of more than two pages (Applebee, 1992).

Applebee (1992) stated that though research had shown that a school environment that values writing and places a premium on student achievement is most conducive to fostering effective writing, eighth-grade teachers reported that most of their students spent only about two hours a week on in-class and homework writing, while they typically spent about five hours a week on math.

The amount of homework assigned by teachers had an influence on the proficiency of their writing: in the eighth and twelfth grades, students who reported doing more than an hour of homework per night did best; students who usually failed to do their homework assignments averaged significantly lower in writing proficiency than students who did at least some homework every night. Still, 8% to 16% said that they never had homework assignments (Applebee, 1992).

Students who read less than six pages a day averaged lower in writing proficiency than students who read more than 10 pages a day. Yet a quarter of the fourth-graders and a third of middle- and high-school students reported reading five or fewer pages for schoolwork, including both homework and in class (Applebee, 1992).

The report (Applebee, 1992) showed that most teachers relied on a variety of instructional strategies, including such process-type work as planning, prewriting, reflection and writing multiple drafts as well as more traditional methods. A higher level of writing proficiency was associated with the greater level of process-oriented activities. Writing about literature was also associated with higher levels of writing proficiency.

While it is possible that teachers gauged their own teaching practices inaccurately, the vastness of this research seems to mitigate against results skewed by just a few. The portfolio aspect of the student assessment – in which students submitted previously written work – balances against the test-nervousness that may have occurred when students wrote for the research. It is possible that questionnaire items were interpreted differently, or that there were errors in scoring or compiling data. There may also have been factors that were not accounted for.

In an experimental study, Spaulding (1995) sought to discover whether writing to the teacher as audience produced a different effect than writing to a third party who had no power over the student. He also looked at the effect of a student's perception of self-efficacy. In Spaulding's study, the experimental variable was the degree of the teacher's psychological presence. Half the students wrote papers for their English teacher, while half wrote for the researchers. One hundred eighty-five seventh graders in an inner-city middle school in upstate New York participated; after dropping those who were absent one or more days, the total was 126.

Both Spaulding (1995) and teacher were present when the students received packets with instructions to write a paper explaining what they had learned so far in their English class. Those told to write the paper to the researcher were also informed that the teacher would not read their paper. Students' assessments of their linguistic abilities were measured on a survey in which students rated themselves from 0 to 100 on a variety of tasks. "Because self-perceived success experiences are known to be predictors of both future goals for similar tasks and higher levels of self-efficacy for similar tasks" (p. 5), students were asked to re-read their essays several

days later, and to rate their essay from 1 to 10, and also to rate the assignment on difficulty from 1 to 10, with the very high and very low scores indicating low levels of engagement. While writing, an observer coded students' behavior.

The most important of Spaulding's (1995) findings was that the presence of the teacher fostered writing-task engagement in some students while inhibiting others. The students who most needed the attention of the teacher were the students with the least self-efficacy. They were more engaged in the writing task when the teacher was their audience, and therefore may function better as writers and students when their teachers are more involved with them. Significantly, only students who perceived themselves as being capable of functioning independently flourished without the teacher's presence. These students, with high linguistic self-efficacy, were more engaged when writing to the researcher. An important conclusion of the researcher was that students who believed themselves to be less competent were just as engaged as their high-efficacy peers when the teacher remained present.

In critiquing this study, it is notable Spaulding (1995) does not report on the degree to which the students liked their teacher, nor did she say how long these students had been with their teacher. It seems that the methods of any particular teacher might skew this study either way; for instance, a well-liked teacher who practiced none of the behaviors that undermine motivation might be more motivational to high-efficacy students than this study indicated. Likewise, a poor teacher might be less motivational to the low-efficacy students.

In order for students to meet the expectations of teachers, and thus be perceived to have learned something, they must understand their teachers' criteria.

Beck (2006) looked at that problem using a case study that investigated the differences between a teacher's and students' understanding of criteria for successful literary analysis.

The study (Beck, 2006) was done at a 388-student urban high school with relatively high scores on the statewide language arts assessment in relation to district schools, but weak in comparison with the state average, because of which it had been targeted to standardize literacy instruction in the hopes of improving student performance on the assessments. Forty percent of the students fell into the Needs Improvement category. Half the students qualified for free or reduced-priced lunches. Fifty-six percent were African American, 20% Latino/a, 12% white, and 10% Asian American.

Beck (2006) spent 165 days participating and observing in the ninth-grade classroom of Mr. Redding, a literacy coach who was highly praised by his colleagues. Students were invited participate in the study, and their ability as writers was ranked by Mr. Redding.

Data collected were field notes, the teacher's written instructions and grading checklists, and audio tapes of both classroom instruction and interviews with Mr. Redding. Beck (2006) also interviewed each of five students four times over the year. Two additional students were interviewed twice. In the interviews, the researcher asked each student for a list of his or her criteria for the literary analysis essay. These lists formed a baseline of student knowledge about writing in addition to their goals, as the students produced them before having been introduced to their teacher's list of criteria.

Mr. Redding's method was to have the class read and discuss the literature to be written about, and he consistently explained how the discussion related to the essay assignment. Analysis focused on how closely the students' essays followed Mr. Redding's criteria (Beck, 2006).

Beck (2006) found that the more successful students' knowledge and beliefs allied more closely with the teachers' goals than did the other students'. Other students, however, didn't share Mr. Redding's value in the importance of proofreading, for instance. What students take for granted or assume to be true about writing, Beck said, can be seen as a function of prior knowledge. Minority students in urban schools are less likely than their mainstream suburban counterparts, according to Beck, to have prior knowledge of such academic genres as the analytic essay.

Beck (2006) suggested that, though this study focused on the teaching of the literary analysis essay, the findings apply to teaching any sort of writing: because teachers' and students' expectations of good writing may not agree, teachers may not be effectively steering students toward the same goal. Finally, Beck states that a shared understanding of any literacy task can be effected by differences in values and beliefs about the purposes of academics in general. A teacher's personal preparation ought to include a critical examination of one's values and beliefs about academic literacy.

### Summary

The above research indicated that effective teachers have numerous attributes in common. Langer (2001), Ostrowski (2000), Applebee (1994), and Applebee,

Burroughs and Stevens (2000) agreed that curricular coherence is an important factor in successfully teaching literacy. Spaulding (1995) found that lower-achieving students were more engaged in their writing effectively when the teacher was present and involved, while students with a high sense of self-efficacy wrote better when the teacher was not the sole audience.

Applebee (1994) found that students' awareness of their teachers' expectations was significant in their achievement, while Beck (2006) discovered that there may be a lack of agreement between students and teachers on the criteria and goals of the learning, in part due to a teacher's lack of cultural knowledge of students unlike him.

#### Teaching in Context vs. Teaching Discretely

One of the major points of disagreement among education researchers is how much explicit teaching of grammar and skills – if any at all – should be done, and how that teaching should be incorporated into lessons. The reviews in this next section all explore this question.

Knudson (1995) did a quantitative study of explicit teaching of such elementary genres as descriptions, comparisons, hypotheses, procedural instructions, thesis-and-evidence arguments, and thesis-and-logical-consequence arguments. She asked three questions in pursuing her study: What is the effectiveness of four instructional strategies on student argumentative writing? What are the differences in student writing based on essays obtained at three different times? What qualities within the essays influence the raters' decision with holistic scoring?

Study participants were 110 students, 44 from 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and 66 from 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Forty-eight percent were boys, 52 percent were girls. They were primarily lower middle class and middle class, from an urban California high school. They were randomly assigned to four instructional groups in which they wrote essays for 14 days, 20 minutes per day. Group 1 were instructed through model pieces of writing; Group 2 guided its writing through scales, questions and criteria; Group 3 were instructed through both model writing and scales/questionnaires/criteria. Group 4, the control group, were given a picture each day to write about. Students were taught in their regular classrooms. Writing samples were taken prior to the study, at the conclusion of the study, and two weeks after the study was finished. Writing samples were scored holistically, taking into account the writing's purpose, audience and degree to which the task was addressed. It was also scored according to Toulmin's criteria. Two raters scored each essay with a six-point scoring rubric. Inter-rater reliability ranged from 84 percent on sample 1 to 72 percent on sample 3.

Knudson (1992) found that teaching methods that were effective with narrative, descriptive, and informational writing might not be useful in teaching argumentative writing. In forming arguments, Knudson concluded, it is important that teachers impart procedural knowledge, and that students have knowledge of the subject they are writing about.

The scoring of the essays by two different scorers with high inter-rater reliability contributes to the reliability of the results. The writing prompts seemed appropriate to the grade levels they were given. Knudson (1992), however, did not make specific mention of the ethnicity, ability status or background of the students

tested. It is possible that LEP students may not have fully understood. It is also possible that the teachers in the different classrooms offered differing instructions. As the instructions to the students were not specified, it is not possible to judge whether they were clear. Knudson did not specify how the classrooms or teachers were chosen.

Dixon-Krauss (2001) sought to discover which of two methods was more effective in using literature as the context for teaching new vocabulary. She found that an integrated method was more successful than discrete teaching alone.

Two ninth-grade English I classes, comprising 12 boys and 31 girls with abilities ranging from low-average to high-average achievement in language arts, were observed. Though classroom observations demonstrated students' ability in vocabulary definitions, their use of words in writing assignments reproduced statements of definitions. Words were used incorrectly or in unnatural ways, producing illogical sentences and paragraphs. (Dixon-Krauss, 2001).

Dixon-Krauss's (2001) study looked at two instructional strategies chosen by the teacher: In the first three of six sessions, direct instruction prior to reading followed by a session that included class discussion and a vocabulary test (matching and fill-in-the-blank) on 20 words; and, alternately, in the last three reading/writing/discussion sessions the teaching vocabulary words within the context of literature after reading, also followed by a class discussion and vocabulary test. In the latter sessions, the teacher also used the words in class discussion, during which she clarified meanings. Each student kept a literature journal. After each session, the

teacher recorded her observations about word usage in students' writing, discussions and students' comments, and these records were shared with the researcher.

Dixon-Krauss (2001) found that the class means increased from 73% on the first vocabulary test to 82% on the second test. As the researcher pointed out, these would have been Ds and Cs, low grades for these otherwise average and above-average students who reported that because it was a matching test, they thought they wouldn't need to study. As for the journal writing, the number of vocabulary words increased as the students got further into the novel, from 57 in journal entry number 1 to 210 in entry number 6. The percentage of words used correctly increased from 65 percent in the first entry to 93 percent in the final one. Students also reported a feeling of accomplishment in being able to use words correctly.

The conclusions drawn by Dixon-Krauss (2001) were: first, learning new vocabulary should occur after reading, not before, as the story provides a context for understanding those words; and, second, that teacher talk and open-ended questions using those words reinforced the learning of them. In their journal-writing, students showed improvement in their usage of the new words that was wasn't shown when the teacher omitted reinforcement of those words.

Johnson, Thompson, Smagorinsky and Fry (2003) did case-study research into whether the five-paragraph theme should still be taught, after having been a staple in secondary English classes. They examined an early-career teacher's decision to include the five-paragraph theme in a state-mandated writing assessment, and found that she chose to teach it over using more progressive methods due to testing pressures, among other things.

They chose middle-school teacher Leigh Thompson, whom they followed from her student teaching through her first year as an English teacher. She had chosen to teach English because she was good at it in school, and she liked her high school English teacher, who connected well with his students. Her master's program, in the view of Johnson et al. (2003), was fragmented, meaning that rather than study as a cohort, students took separate classes, and there was no sustained focus across courses that would offer a conceptually unified philosophy of teaching. None of her classes focused specifically on how to teach writing. Thus she drew on her own experiences as a high school student, and on her colleagues during both her student teaching and her first job appointment.

Johnson et al.'s (2003) methods were observation and interviews with Leigh about her decision to teach the five-paragraph theme. There were also interviews with Leigh's mentor teacher, university supervisor and middle-school entry-year committee. The researchers coded the interviews with Leigh regarding the types of assignments she gave, whether conceptual or practical in nature, the curricular strands they attended to (management, writing, reading, etc.), and any attribution by Leigh as to where she learned of the tool being used.

Results showed that though Leigh had thought, during her first year of teaching, that experience would afford her the knowledge to better prepare students for testing and therefore she would be able to offer a greater variety of assignments and teaching strategies, she was more intent than ever, during her fourth year, to reinforce the learning of the five-paragraph theme. She explained that she felt pressured by her English colleagues, who told her how important it was. Because the

school's score were published every year in the newspaper, and because the school had always done well in the writing test, she felt a great deal of stress to have her own students do well. She did not, however, feel pressured by the school's administration (Johnson et al., 2003).

Johnson et al. (2003) concluded that the eighth-grade teachers taught the five-paragraph theme to the exclusion of other writing due to the pressure from the state and community to teach to the test. They also, however, saw other reasons that Leigh and others chose to teach it: a faith in the five-paragraph theme's usefulness (as it had been useful to her); her student observations and student teaching, at which she was encouraged to use it; and the program in which she learned to be a teacher.

Johnson et al., concluded that classroom stresses caused beginning teachers revert to deeper beliefs than the education programs such as Leigh attended offered. She had no enduring conceptual framework that allowed her to teach in other ways than what she had grown up with.

The researchers appeared to have formed their conclusions, from prior research studies, before embarking on their research. This case study seemed to confirm what they already apparently knew. Two of the researchers, including the principal investigator, were faculty members of the university that Leigh attended, which gives rise to the question of motive, as the results tend to demonstrate that the master's program Leigh attended was not a good one.

## Summary

Applebee (1992) found that students in outstanding schools reported that their teachers were more concerned with creativity and quality than with punctuation and

grammar. Scherff and Piazza (2005) concluded that instruction that is not connected to reading and writing becomes simply an exercise in test preparation. They advocated a balanced approach to writing instruction.

Knudson (1992) discovered that students need additional help in learning to write argumentatively, while Dixon-Krauss (2001) concluded that incorporating vocabulary learning into lessons, after which the vocabulary was specifically taught, then reinforcing their use through journal writing and discussion, provided a context for the learning of those words and was thus more effective in teaching their meaning than was direct instruction prior to a reading. Johnson, Thompson, Smagorinsky and Fry (2003) discovered that though a new teacher agreed with more constructivist methods of teaching literacy, she nonetheless chose to assign five-paragraph themes, in part because she was familiar with them, and in part due to the lack of a conceptual framework for teaching other types of work.

#### Connecting School Literacy to Home and Community

A flourishing area of research has been on the outside-school literacy practices of adolescents, and how those can be a bridge to schoolwork. Identity formation, social networks, self-perception and the place of school in a student's life all prove to be important factors in how receptive a student is to learning. The research reviewed in the next section investigates literacy learning outside of the classroom and its implications for the effective teaching of writing.

Fairbanks and Ariail (2006) studied the role of social and cultural resources in literacy and schooling through three case studies. In essence, this was a look at adolescent female identity formation, particularly as it related to school: both how

school influenced that formation and in turn, how the girls' identity influenced how they viewed school, especially their English classes. While much of the discussion of social, symbolic, and cultural capital does not apply to this paper, the results of how the girls viewed their English assignments goes directly to the need for prior knowledge and the necessity of making work relevant. The researchers found that the girls' personal writing rarely intersected with in-class literacy learning, and that they became, for the most part, increasingly bored with traditional teaching practices.

Multiple interpretive analyses were made of Isabel, Melanie, and Jessica in order to discover how their personal identities intersected with literacy and schooling (Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006). They were followed through grades six to eight at their diverse, 40-percent-lower-income school in a Texas metropolitan area. The researchers used comparison and grounded theory, plus a framework adapted from Driessen (2001) organizing and categorizing cultural resources that affect student performance. The girls were asked to talk about how they saw literacy and schooling so that the researchers might examine the attitudes the girls had in this regard, how they worked toward and adopted school identities, and how those identities influenced their school participation.

The girls were selected as representing a range of personalities, abilities and attitudes (Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006). Jessica and Isabel were Latina, while Melanie was African-American. The researchers were white women who consulted Latina and African American colleagues in order to deepen their understanding of cultural influences on the girls' identities. In the sixth grade, there were 22 classroom observations, plus videotaping and seven individual interviews per girl. In seventh

and eighth grades, the girls were interviewed seven times each, but were not observed in classes. Their perceptions of their lives both in and out of school were studied.

The researchers (Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006) found that, for the most part, the girls' English classes comprised traditional teaching of discrete skills, and direct instruction with rare occasions for student choice of reading materials or writing. There was little critical analysis of literature. Though the girls considered their school a good one, they were bored with their classroom work, the exception assignments that were directly relevant to their lives or that involved creative activities.

Melanie disliked reading and school writing. On her own, however, Melanie wrote in a diary. She told the researchers, at the end of the eighth grade, that she liked her eighth-grade language arts teacher's assignments that allowed personal exploration (Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006). Otherwise, the work she did was purely to get a grade in order to achieve her goal of becoming a professional basketball player. The researchers attributed her attitude to being worn down by a skill- and test-driven curriculum. Because little of the work connected with her own life experiences, she had a difficult time maintaining engagement in English class activities. The literacy schooling she got highlighted her deficits, as she was assigned to a class in which reading assignments focused on skill and drill. Further, Melanie found little meaning or value in literacy itself.

Jessica got better grades than Melanie, but she similarly became disinterested when the work did not related to her life and seemed to be without meaning (Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006). Activities such as making a booklet or poster, however,

were more engaging. She, too, maintained a personal diary, but like Melanie, saw little use for English outside of school.

Isabel, quiet and compliant, was considered a good student because she worked hard. Not until eighth grade did she express any doubts about her literacy learning, in particular the grammar lessons, finding little use for them in her life.

Fairbanks and Ariail's (2006) case studies give a valuable look into the meaning of literacy learning in adolescent girls' lives, and into their attitudes toward English classes: The girls ultimately saw school as entirely separate from the rest of their lives. Though limited in scope – few interviews and no classroom observations in seventh and eighth grades – this look is nonetheless illuminating.

A similar case study by Schultz (2002) examined three high school students' in- and out-of-school writing practices with the hope of showing that a broader view of students' interests and learnings should be taken by teachers; that personal and school worlds can be bridged by writing. She argued that writing is a social activity, dependent on the values and accepted behavior of each social group. Thus, to understand a student's literary habits out of school is to open possibilities for connecting that student to school itself. In order to do that, Schultz sought to discover the personal forms of outside-school writing that students engaged in, and their meaning in the students' lives. As with the study above, she found that in- and out-of-school writing were rarely connected.

Schultz (2002) chose an urban school whose population was equally divided among African American, of Mexican descent, and Asian American. Seventy-nine percent of their families received Aid to Families with Dependent Children. She

observed the students at school, at home, and in their neighborhoods. The researcher was white and middle class.

Schultz (2002) spent three to five days a week at the school during the study's first year. She observed two senior government classes, an advisory period and an English class with the same students. She also ate lunch with them and met them in their homes and at community centers. She held both formal and informal chats with the students as well as took notes. She collected field notes, transcribed interviews, and miscellaneous artifacts such as the student yearbook and student newspaper. At the end of the year she administered an open-ended questionnaire regarding their literacy practices, plans and goals.

During the second year, after graduation, Schultz (2002) visited the students at their homes and jobs, at community colleges and in job-training programs. During that year, Schultz interviewed them every two months, and in the following two years she met quarterly with five of them. There were formal and informal interviews with most of the girls in the two classes, and regular interviews with 12 students. Of these 12, 10 were female and two male; six were African American, three were Latino and three were Asian American, all from low-income families.

In analyzing data, field notes and interview transcripts were looked at for patterns and recurring themes (Schultz, 2002), focusing on the relationships between personal and classroom writing. Three themes became prominent: first, that personal writing was a private endeavor kept separately from schoolwork; second, that writing was used to take a critical stance, and, third, that writing was a bridge between home and school.

Schultz's (2002) first case study was Ellen. As with a third of the participating students, she kept a diary; in fact she kept two, one entirely personal, the other more a record of daily events, dreams and plans, which she showed to family and friends. As with the other students, she seemed embarrassed about her diary-writing, which Schultz attributes to Ellen's possible feeling that writing was acting white, or that to be seen as a writer was wrong, or that she was shameful about its content. Because Ellen wrote about school events, Schultz posits that one use of Ellen's diary was to connect both her home and school worlds. Ellen did not do well in school and once she graduated she lost both of her diaries.

Luis, born into a Mexican gang, wrote poetry about and critical of the difficult circumstances in which he lived (Schultz, 2002). His teachers, however, never saw this poetry that described his personal and school experiences, which he saw as boring and disliked due to feeling disrespected by the teachers. Like the others, he didn't connect his personal writing to his schooling. After graduating, Luis wrote only rarely.

The case study of Denise (Schultz, 2002) demonstrated how teachers used writing to link home and school. Outside of school, Denise, an African American athlete, wrote poems and plays about meaningful events in her life such as the shooting death of a cousin. Her teachers allowed her to use her writing to graduate from high school. However, after graduation, like the others, she rarely wrote, and no longer thought of herself as a writer.

Schultz's (2002) research indicates that teachers might aim to build on students' out-of-school writing, to learn about their writing practices and to

incorporate that work into classroom assignments as a way to bridge school and a student's personal life.

Schultz (2002) concluded that out-of-school writing is mostly unconnected to in-school writing. It is of a personal, private nature and not generally seen in the classroom. Effective teaching strategies might incorporate or draw on that private writing, such as Denise's teachers did.

Despite the limited and specific nature of this case study, findings are easily generalizable. That Schultz (2002) followed these students post-high school adds an interesting layer to the research. Schultz seemed to gain enough trust from these students to access their personal writing lives; inherent in that close relationship, however, is the danger that the researcher might lose objectivity.

Guzzetti and Gamboa (2005) looked at online journaling as just such a bridge. They wanted to know for what purpose and by what means adolescents choose to write and read online journals in the hope of broadening the classroom definition of writing. Associated goals of the study were to become familiar with teens' interests, and to learn how to build on literacy abilities that fall outside the bounds of academia, in turn learning how to make schooling more relevant and meaningful. They found that online journaling might be incorporated into classroom activities as a bridge to the private world and unique culture of youth.

Guzzetti and Gamboa (2005) did a case study of two teen girls, Janice and Corgan, described by their teacher as prolific writers who used technology to write outside of school. Janice was sophisticated in computer use, with abilities to post and link to her journal, build her own web site, navigate chat rooms and download music.

Corgan also knew how to build a web page, was adept at web searches and had published a zine. She was into punk rock and saw herself as a nerd. Both girls were white and upper middle class, and attended AP English classes at the same affluent school. Each found wider social connections through the internet than in school.

Guzzetti and Gamboa's (2005) data consisted of formal interviews that were audio taped and transcribed. The girls were also observed, focusing on the process and content of the girls' journaling. There were also informal email interviews, an open-ended questionnaire, and miscellaneous notes.

Guzzetti and Gamboa (2005) found that Janice used her online journal extensively both to write in and as a forum for her friend's responses. She used graphics, ideograms, pictures and links to her web site to express herself. She used her journal (which was open for viewing by her friends) to vent her moods, frustrations and anger. Identity – both hers and her friends' – was an important feature of her own writing and in critically thinking about others': whether they were honest, what they were really like, etc.

Janice also participated in FanFiction.net, a site where users collaborated in writing or rewriting episodes of TV shows. She received feedback on her writing from other users. In addition to receiving critical advice, she took the role of editor and the one giving feedback. Thus, she learned to improve her own work, as well as to critique others'. Janice turned in some of these stories for extra credit in her English class (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005).

Corgan, on the other hand, posted in her online journal far less than Janice, her postings were about ideas rather than feelings, and they were open only to select

friends to read. Joining interest-group forums and writing about feminism and her own political beliefs were an important part of Corgan forging her own identity (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005).

Neither girl thought that, due to its personal nature, online journaling belonged in school, though they thought that teachers should be aware of online journals as resources for their students (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005). The researchers concluded that unique features of online journaling enhanced their literacy development and practice and were inherently appealing to these girls who, like many adolescents, were searching for where they belonged in society.

Conclusions by Guzzetti and Gamboa (2005) included the idea that online journaling might be incorporated into classroom practice in order to tap into students' interests and to span the divide between the personal and the academic, home and school. The girls pursued online journaling as a social habit, as an emotional vent, and as a form of personal expression, little of which is attended to in traditional classroom practice.

Guzzetti and Gamboa (2005) suggested, from their findings, that teachers allow for less traditional modes of written expression in the classroom. Students should be given more choice in writing topics, which in turn will give teachers a chance to better get to know them and teenage culture itself. The authors also saw a value in allowing students to select their own audiences, and to decide what kind of feedback they wanted as well as who should give it. In addition, allowing students to write about personal experiences might encourage them to view literacy as a useful tool in their lives beyond the classroom.

Guzzetti and Gamboa (2005) believed that teachers should value nontraditional literacy practices such as multitasking and web creation as skills needed in a global society. Thus, teachers must change their views on the schooling process, allowing themselves to become learners, adjusting their stance as the center of classroom and sole provider of knowledge and authority.

The research offers a picture of how two individuals interact socially and create their own identities online. That one of the girls was simultaneously participating in another research study by the authors, and had also participated in one previously might skew her responses and attitudes. It also makes me think that the authors didn't look very hard for subjects. In addition, these are affluent girls with time to spend journaling and access to home computers. While there are certainly millions of teens just like them, I wonder why they didn't choose a boy, a nonwhite child or a child from a lower-income family. In addition, the suggestions for teachers seem to ignore the realities that many teachers face, of little time, inadequate resources and bulging classrooms.

Kelly (2001) took a broader look at students' out-of-school identity-forming literacy practices and the significance of those. She posited that literary practices learned in one context, such as church or school, influence learning in other contexts. She sought to discover how different contexts informed literacy, what kinds of literacy practices informed a positive sense of identity, and how then does that identity empower African American youth. She found that such nontraditional literary practices as those found in church and drumming classes influenced the work and attitudes of African American teens in other contexts.

Kelly (2001) had worked with African American teens in a church computer lab, and at its Saturday-school program, the main purpose of which was to offer an African American perspective on traditional subjects taught in school. Eight students were initially chosen as participants for the year-long case study. The researcher observed the church's African drumming groups and services, and attended public school classes and after-school activities with each child for two weeks. Each participant was interviewed formally three times, and each was given a tape recorder into which he could record his thoughts. The researcher analyzed the students' literary practices in the context of their lives, looking for examples of empowerment as an African American.

Kelly (2001) did not limit her definition of literacy to reading and writing. Rather, she argued that while traditional concepts of literacy are confined to printed words, in the community of the African American church that she was involved with, literacy could be found in such events as drumming and dance practices, and at church, though little was actually read there. Kelly suggested that what African American youth learned about their own culture and history through such activities fomented an interest in learning more through reading and writing.

In particular, Kelly (2001) focused on Anthony, a standout student in the Saturday school, where he brought skills he'd learned in public school, such as editing and letter-writing, to help him with his projects involving African American identity. In school he was considered at risk of failing because, for instance, he didn't like to do multiple drafts of papers. The church-related activities in Anthony's life influenced his school activities. For example, his interest in and study of African

American history were the background to his lobbying to start a Black Student Union at his high school, in part so that other minority students would get in touch with their roots. In pursuit of that goal, Anthony wrote persuasive and convincing letter to the principal as a school assignment. Kelly deduced that the reasons for Anthony's uncharacteristic engagement with school were, first, that it connected to his own life experiences; second, that it spanned his school and community identities, and third, that it had a real-life purpose.

Kelly (2001) concluded that the students' dancing, music, storytelling and personal history practices in the community fostered a flexibility in moving between school and the outside world. She stated that the knowledge Anthony gained through his involvement in the African American community guided his participation in classroom literacy. Looking at the broader picture brought up questions for the researcher. She wondered whether it was reasonable that all the work of boundary-crossing and making community-school connections should be done by African-American youth. Kelly argued for more culturally relevant curricula, open-ended assignments, and teachers who are knowledgeable about the communities they serve.

While it's questionable whether drumming and dancing can be considered as literacy practices, this study truly opened up a cross-section of a young man's life and convincingly demonstrated how the discrete pieces of learning from a variety of domains inform one another. That Kelly (2001) had already worked in the church computer lab puts her objectivity in question.

Connection to the community was the basis of Frkovich and Thoms' (1994) case study examining the creation of monologues as a way to engage students,

enhance English skills, and help students write about issues that are critical to them. The project was deemed successful in fostering all of those.

Two high school classes were looked at, one in lower Manhattan, one in Milwaukee. Students were shown videos of monologue performances by Anna Deveare Smith and others, after which they brainstormed ideas of global, national and community importance to decide on a topic to investigate through interviews. They transcribed those interviews, shaped them into monologues and performed them, some using their native languages and supplying English translations. At the New York school, they focused on stories of 9/11, a topic vital to their lives. In Wisconsin, the project focused on the lives of women (Frkovich & Thoms, 1994).

The researchers (Frkovich & Thoms, 1994) found that the project provided students with a useful reason to learn the standards of English usage. It also gave them experience with diversity and multiple perspectives. Organization, examination of literary terms, grammatical conventions, revision, group work, critical thinking, performing and critiquing were some of the skills the author saw as being enhanced.

Though Frkovich and Thoms (1994) acted as observers during rehearsals of their projects, each had instituted the project in her own class and thus was deeply invested in the outcome. Specific data is lacking on the ethnicities and abilities of their students, and on the achievement levels of their classrooms. In addition, the researchers' conclusions came solely from observation; the students were not interviewed, surveyed, or tested to examine their perceptions and learning. However, that they included children of diverse backgrounds and cultures, and that the project is

adaptable to local issues indicates that this project could be useful in a variety of classrooms.

### Summary

Most of the researchers found that outside-school and in-class literary practices do not closely connect (Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005; Schultz, 2002). Kelly (2001), however, concluded that diverse church and community literacy activities in the African American community inform a student's in-school learning, and Frkovich & Thoms (1994), concluded that a classroom project involving engagement with the community seemed like to foster compassion for and understanding of others as well to motivate students in a meaningful way to employ the standards of English usage in their writing.

In all most of the studies, the students' personal writings were deeply important to the student but were disconnected from school itself. All of the researchers suggested finding ways to use personal and community literacy activities to enhance in-class student learning.

### The Importance of Relevance in Student Engagement

The question of best practice in effective writing instruction necessarily includes the question of how best to engage the student. As seen earlier in the results of the case studies of Fairbanks and Ariail (2006), students may find little interest in skills and drills and because of that may tune out and turn off their learning.

Alternatives are herein discussed, including a variety of novel ways to enhance engagement in writing practice by making it more relevant to the student.

The need for relevance and for the building on prior knowledge was the basis of Langer's (1997) study of a book-writing project. In search of methods to expeditiously develop the speaking, reading, and writing abilities of students from linguistically and culturally diverse populations, she examined whether a project that called upon the strengths of immigrant students – knowledge of their own culture – would engage them in a meaningful production that allowed them to gain higher literacy. The results were mostly positive.

The study participants were students from one of the lowest-performing middle schools in New York City; half held part-time jobs, 83 percent were low-income, all were from the Dominican Republic and had been in the U.S. from one to five years. Two teachers and their classes were examined. One was an ESL bridge class (grades 7-9), the other a ninth-grade bilingual class.

The study (Langer, 1997) lasted two years. The first year was spent studying the neighborhood and community. In the second year the students were to write a book for future LEP students. The stories would come from the students' own lives – collected, tape-recorded and eventually written. Students were taught to work in collaborative peer feedback groups, with guidance from the teachers on how to help. Students were reminded to do all they could on their own and to seek help when they thought it would be useful. They were welcome to write their stories in Spanish and then translate them. Teachers taught guidelines for revision and editing others' work. The teachers modeled their own folk tales and stories. Writing activity was interspersed with readings, books and stories which the students discussed and critiqued. As the stories neared completion, other students and teachers assisted in

the editing, and ultimately a book was made of all the stories. Finally, the entire school became involved in having a cultural evening during which they shared stories, dances and other cultural artifacts.

According to Langer's (1997) observations and analysis, engagement grew during the project. (Langer did not specify how observations and analysis were carried out, and how data was collected.) Students' Spanish and English literacy grew. They learned to listen as well as communicate and defend their own interpretations. Students sought help from others and formed a collaborative community. They learned to critique and revise. They began to make distinctions among family talk, classroom talk, and published book language. They began to talk about stories in a more academic way.

Langer (1997) found that students were improving in both Spanish and English literacy; that they were gaining metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness; that they were learning to communicate and reflect. They became aware of language choices and their effects on the story. Students sometimes helped each other more than their teachers did, and they gained an ear for language. Their stories gained sequences as the students elaborated more, from which the researcher concluded that the students' reading and writing was improved.

Langer (1997) seemed to be testing theories that she had written about in a book. Thus, she would be looking for it to succeed. The later involvement of the entire school indicates that enthusiasm for this project spread over its two-year duration. Due to the lack of data, it is difficult to assess the findings specifically, but they appear to confirm that authentic and meaningful work more effectively engages

students than fill-in-the-blank type exercises and discrete learning. Since these were LEP students, it further cements the idea that this kind of work is useful for all students.

Butler and Mansfield (1995) sought to discover whether an eight-week lifewriting unit would assist eighth-grade English students in overcoming writing apprehension as well as develop their sense of identity in their new classroom. They also looked at whether the collaborative aspect would improve the social cohesion of the classroom. The results were mixed.

The researchers looked at eighth-grade students from different schools, approximately half of whom were ESL students. Six lessons were given on a weekly basis, each one embodying a different heuristic. Oral writing, writing partners, peer editing, and written peer response were incorporated in order to promote collaboration. Data were collected through a combination of observational notes. At the beginning and end of the project Likert-scale questionnaires on writing apprehension and social cohesion were filled in by the students. The researchers' main goal was to assess how both students and teachers felt about the project (Butler & Mansfield, 1995). Halfway through, a research assistant conducted a personal interview with each student that asked whether lifewriting had made any difference to the student's writing or learning.

According to the survey (Butler & Mansfield, 1995), there was a general lowering of writing apprehension. Girls made greater gains in lowering their writing apprehension. The results showed a high initial level of social cohesion and generally

small gains made in the posttest. Some but not all of the students became less resistant and less apprehensive.

Data specifying the number of students, teachers, researchers and findings was missing from this study (Butler & Mansfield, 1995); thus, it is difficult to assess whether the conclusions of the researchers match their data. The students may have responded positively in their surveys because they had guessed that the researchers were looking for improvement, especially the ESL students, who may have had the idea that they needed to be polite and say nice things to those in charge.

The overall positive nature of the feedback Butler and Mansfield (1995) received from students indicates the value of this tool to get youth writing, to engage them so that they stay on task, to have them collaborate in a meaningful way, and to present writing as a useful tool for them in their everyday lives.

A study conducted by Frey and Fisher (2004) examined the use of graphic novels, anime and the internet in enhancing literacy acquisition for adolescents from diverse backgrounds by making the work more relevant to their interests. The study participants were 32 ninth-graders enrolled in a 90-minute class for struggling readers and writers. Seventy-two percent were ELL, 24 were Latino, four were Asian American, three were black, and one was white.

The researchers/teachers (Frey & Fisher, 2004) (they came to the school from a local university) first used a wordless story, then had students write the story taking various perspectives. Teachers then, employing other graphic novels, shared reading, used a think-aloud strategy, discussed word choice and vocabulary, mood and tone, and taught techniques on how to achieve similar effects with words, revision,

sentence combining, etc. Finally, students wrote and illustrated their own stories, sometimes with found pictures from the internet or magazines. Students received lots of teacher help, and also peer-edited. Teachers modeled constructing an illustrated story.

Students' writing ability was tested through five-minute timed writing samples over four weeks. The researchers found that complex sentences and multiple ideas increased. Mean sentence length increased from 11.2 to 12.89 words, prompting Frey and Fisher (2004) to conclude that the students became better writers and also more knowledgeable about the information they read.

There is a lack of data and description of methods in the research. The increase in words per sentence was from only 11.2 to 12.89. The researchers did not define what they meant by better writers nor did they indicate that they had collected any data other than test scores. Since there was no control group, it can be conjectured that the students' writing might have improved just as much with traditional methods.

Student engagement was the thrust of O'Brien, Springs and Stith's (2001) four-year case study of at-risk high school students. The students, among the lowest achievers, were traditionally classified as remedial readers. They attended The Literacy Lab at a high school in Indiana. The Literacy Lab was a regular English class for 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>-graders who performed in the lowest 8% of reading achievement per standardized testing, and consistently failed in literacy. They included students with social and emotional problems. Four percent of the students were African-American and Latino, and 29 percent from lower-income families.

There were typically 15 students per class period, a teacher-student ratio of about 1 to 8. The researchers noted that from their initiation into schooling, these students were destined to fail as they didn't fit well into the system. In searching for means to increase engagement and hence, achievement, the researchers attempted to create a curriculum that was motivating and intellectually challenging in a social process that involved students' interests in and knowledge of popular media.

O'Brien, Springs and Stith (2001) sought to discover what the meaning of literacy engagement was in which social and culture practices with electronic media and youth culture would play a large part; and how such a program might mitigate against the traditional standards of school failure. They saw at-risk programs as disenfranchising, marginalizing and punishing rather than providing for the needs of the students. In contrast, their study showed that the use of media and popular culture can be effective ways to motivate and engage students who are in danger of failing.

The thrust of O'Brien, Springs and Stith's (2001) study was to examine the ways in which teens produced and critiqued texts within popular culture. The researchers acted as participant observers, teaching the students as well as video- and audio-taping classroom literacy activities. They analyzed the data by viewing students' activities in the program as social and cultural practices.

Students chose from a list of topics to complete multimedia projects that combined written text with other media, such as computers and video. They chose topics that interested them, such as vampires, music groups, or television violence. While the students became engaged in making challenging projects about subjects

that were relevant to them, the researchers reflected on the fact that, regardless of the appeal of utilizing media and youth culture as tools, students would still need to learn basic literacy (O'Brien, Springs & Stith, 2001).

The findings of O'Brien, Springs and Stith's (2001) study were that the use of technology helped motivate reluctant learners to read and write; and that these students may become more engaged through culturally shared media than with traditional texts. The search for personal identity plays a large part in engagement, as adolescents look to popular culture to see who they might want to become. The questions that O'Brien, Springs and Stith (2001) encountered in importing youth culture into the classroom include whether it promotes identities that are antithetical to school as an institution or to educational goals; and how much the substitution of popular culture for traditional texts limits students' options in the future.

A lack of specific data hampers assessment of the results. Additionally, the precise nature of the projects isn't provided, nor is information on whether the students collaborated on projects. As the researchers (O'Brien, Springs and Stith, 2001) were also the teachers, and therefore hoped to see positive results from their research, objectivity is questionable.

### Summary

The need for relevance in student engagement does not appear to be in question. Researchers are now looking for the best approaches to winning that engagement and in so doing are trying a variety of approaches. Langer (1997), and Butler and Mansfield (1995) tied learning to projects that drew from students' own lives and communities, with mostly positive results. Frey and Fisher (2004) and

O'Brien, Springs and Stith (2001) successfully connected writing to popular media and youth culture, finding that motivation increased. Further research will surely yield new approaches to teaching writing that build on a student's existing knowledge and interests.

#### Process vs. Product

The most effective process for writing is also in question. Various approaches produce a variety of results worth looking at.

A case study by Emig (1971) looked at how students write, as opposed to investigating their finished compositions. She sought to understand the process students went through, and ultimately found that, unlike what had been presumed – that completed works flowed from beginning to end onto the paper – writing is a recursive process marked by pauses for consideration.

Emig (1971) chose eight twelfth-grade students at different high schools, ranging from a primarily African American school to a private, university-affiliated school. Over four sessions, the students wrote autobiographies of their writing experiences and composed three themes orally. Five of the subjects were girls, three were boys; there were six white, one Chinese-American and one black student. Six were of above-average intelligence and two were average.

Emig (1971) studied both reflexive and extensive writing. She defined reflexive as being primarily about the writer's thoughts and emotions, the main audience being the writer himself, and in a style that is tentative and one of personal exploration. Emig defined extensive writing as work of a communicative nature, and in a style that is confident and impersonal.

Emig (1971) noted that composition handbooks offered rules without reason as to how to write. She found little connection between such common assignments as the five-paragraph theme and real-life writing, and faulted teachers for not writing themselves; in effect asking students to do what they had little experience of themselves and could only make assumptions about.

Emig (1971) found a variety of approaches and contradictory information about how students write and concluded from her research that despite what the textbooks said, writers only sometimes preplanned and rewrote. And unlike the writing process as described in textbooks, composition was a recursive practice that included pauses, anticipation and hesitation. This finding alone significantly influenced both research and teaching methods that followed. Educators re-examined their instruction. Researchers began to study teaching strategies.

Emig (1971) found that the students' previous literacy instruction had, without exception, been focused on grammar, spelling and syntax, with little or no concern with content. Most school assignments concerned abstract topics rather than personal ones, while students' personal writing was more often about themselves or their relationships. The students chose to do little preplanning, such as an outline, for school writing of 500 words or fewer. Emig described school writing assignments as limiting. The sole audience was the teacher, who was mainly interested in a product to be critical of. The teachers were not interested in an imaginative process that could be supported empathetically.

Emig (1971) suggested that teachers offer a wider variety of writing assignments and, significantly, asked: "One wonders at times if the shying away

from reflexive writing is not an unconscious effort to keep the ‘average’ and ‘less able’ student from the kind of writing he can do best and, often, far better than the ‘able,’ since there is so marvelous a democracy in the distribution of feeling and of imagination” (p. 100). Finally, Emig offered the idea that peers play a larger part in the writing process, and that teacher-centered instruction is an anachronism. Clearly, this study started a revolution in English-class teaching methods – a revolution that harked back at least 70 years to Dewey, perhaps; at the least, it marked a sea change in attitudes.

Emig (1971) noted that the study brought up many questions and unlimited areas for further study. She also noted the numerous limitations of the study, including its small size, and problems inherent in composing aloud.

Though Emig’s (1971) case study was limited to eight students, her focus on diversity lends the research weight. As the students had nothing invested in the answers they gave, and that the answers were surprising to Emig, challenging what many textbooks had written as truth, her conclusions are plausible. The implications of her findings still resound with teachers today; understanding the nature of writing can only help to shape more effective strategies for teaching it.

Snyder (1993) sought to discover, through both quantitative and qualitative methods, whether using classroom word processors produced more effective writing than paper and pen alone. In addition, collaboration and classroom demeanor were examined. The results did not point to better writing, only quicker production of words.

The participants of her study (Snyder, 1993) were 51 eighth-grade students at a Melbourne, Australia, metropolitan private school. Seventy-five percent owned computers, and all had used word processors in primary school.

A writing program was designed collaboratively between the teacher and researcher. The aims of it were to allow students to discover that they could take an active role in shaping their writing, and that revision should be seen as a critical part of the process. Student collaboration was hoped for, with teacher and researcher modeling a collaborative partnership in their one-on-one work with students (Snyder, 1993).

Students completed writing tasks once every two weeks in three genres: narrative, argument and report. There were three pretest and three posttest writing tasks in each genre. Half the group hand-wrote their assignments while half did theirs on individual computers. Each group had the same teacher and were given the same instruction.

Three hundred six writing samples were typed by assistants in the same font; teacher-markers didn't know if a piece was written on computer or by hand; or whether it was pre- or posttest. The number of words, syntactic complexity, analysis of errors, and global quality assessment were evaluated in a pooled global score. Students were also given questionnaires.

Snyder (1993) found that computer use fostered collaboration. The computer class was less teacher-dominated. Also, though students talked more, the talk was more task-oriented. The researcher did not note whether the teacher behaved differently in each classroom. The only difference across the genres was that those

using word processors to write arguments and reports identified and corrected errors better: Argument:  $p < .01$ , Report:  $p = .03$ . Narrative:  $p = .07$ . There was no statistically significant interaction between writing tool and genre:  $p = .10$

Snyder's (1993) statements, such as, "The computer setting seemed to invite writing. The computers were there, waiting to be used. It was as if the machines beckoned the students to use them" (p. 13) raise questions of objectivity. Because the study was limited to privileged white girls in a private school, it is not generalizable to all settings. Also, the researcher seemed to be involved as more than a researcher. As she collaborated with the teacher and worked personally with the students, she may have unwittingly encouraged the computer students more or guided them in a different way.

Snyder (1993) pointed out the many ways in which the study was flawed, such as that because the computer room was a novelty, students might have behaved differently than if it were something they always used. In addition, word production and error rates do not address the soundness of an argument or the quality of the writing.

Albertson and Billingsley (2001) sought to assess whether using strategy instruction and self-regulation would improve gifted students' creative writing. They focused on planning, text production, rates of writing, revision, and writing quality. The results were inconclusive.

The participants in this case study (Albertson & Billingsley, 2001) were two 13-year-old students labeled as gifted by their school district, and enrolled in honors programs in the seventh grade. They had participated in a previous study with these

researchers. Each student received a C-SPACE planning handout and a reviewing checklist that included instructions to think about the C-SPACE mnemonic, use it to help plan writing a story, and fill it in during planning. The handout listed the elements of the mnemonic. A reviewing prompt instructed the students to reread their story, edit and make deeper revisions. They were also given a goal and performance sheet where the students recorded their goals for planning time, number of words they'd write per minute and number of story elements included in each story.

Text production was measured by 1) amount of time spent writing; 2) number of words written per story; and 3) rate of writing, calculated as the number of words written per story divided by the number of minutes spent story writing and reviewing. Writing quality was judged subjectively by three raters: a volunteer writing tutor, a sixth-grade teacher, and a graduate student researcher. The students wrote one story in the maintenance session, and more in the instructional intervention sessions. One of the students had to be retrained to understand the instructions. They were tested separately (Albertson & Billingsley, 2001).

After each had finished her story, she met with the investigator, who made positive and encouraging comments. The findings showed that both students wrote more per minute and scored higher on story elements during the first intervention. During intervention No. 2, neither student wrote faster (Albertson & Billingsley, 2001).

As Albertson and Billingsley (2001) didn't include the C-SPACE Handout itself, its value can't be judged; because this was their own creation, it may have been that they were hoping this would be effective so that they could then promote their

writing system. Because they only worked with two students, with whom they'd worked before, it would be difficult to replicate this as usual procedure in the classroom. Further, the behaviorist responses by the investigator were unique to that investigator, and the students also knew they were performing for a test and trying to meet specific goals.

Words-per-minute output doesn't necessarily indicate the writing was good or that it improved in quality, though the elements of what they'd written were also scored. However, they were scored by one of the researchers' assistants in addition to two others. Though the stories the students wrote were not marked as to when they were written, it still seems quite possible that the assistant could tell by word count the ones written after the intervention, and thus might score them higher on elements. Writing quality was not judged (Albertson & Billingsley, 2001).

Another aspect of process vs. product is the effect on critical thinking that different modes of writing produce. To uncover the best strategies for teaching writing necessitates a look at which kinds of writing to teach in an English class in order to both give students the skills to succeed in other classes, and to make their reading of literature more meaningful.

In a quantitative study by Newell (1984), he asked, first, What are the effects of note-taking, answering comprehension questions and writing an analytical essay on learning information from prose passages as measured by passage recall, gain in knowledge of specific concepts, and application of concepts to new situations?; and, second, What are the effects of the three writing tasks on the composing and learning operations in which students engage? He defined learning in this context as it

referred to writing, including concepts, relationships between the concepts, and relating those concepts to students' prior knowledge.

Eight 11<sup>th</sup>-grade public-high school students in the San Francisco Bay Area, four boys and four girls, were chosen on the basis of high reading achievement and writing ability. Each student was randomly assigned either science or social science as the area of study for the three writing tasks: short-answer exercises (six study questions), note-taking, and an analytic essay. Comprehension was measured after the reading and writing, and scored for the presence or absence of the content units and relationship units of the content structure. Two raters agreed 97 percent of the time. Passage-specific knowledge was also scored, reflecting the strength and organization of the students' existing knowledge as it related to key concepts and vocabulary contained in the passages (Newell, 1984).

After completing each of the writing tasks, students wrote short answers to three application questions that required them to apply the three concepts to new situations or problems. They were then scored on a scale from one to six, based on 1) students' ability to correctly apply the concepts and 2) students' ability to elaborate on the application (Newell, 1984).

Data were collected over a six-month period. For the first stage, students were interviewed regarding their writing experiences. The second stage tested them for prior knowledge, and during the third, each of the students composed aloud while performing each of the six writing tasks. The tasks simulated the classroom environment as much as possible. Learning was assessed through the recall task,

improvement in knowledge about key concepts in the text passages, and by the students' ability to apply those concepts to different situations (Newell, 1984).

Results showed that writing essays was more effective in producing abstract associations for key concepts than was note-taking or answering study questions (Newell, 1984). One conclusion that Newell came to regarding this result was that students, when writing for communicate purposes, may more deeply think about the topic. Writers may consider more fully when expression of ideas is necessary, as opposed to answering pre-set questions.

Further, Newell (1984) explained that students needing to integrate new information into a coherent text must plan at a global rather than local level. Alternately, since essay writing requires students to look closely at evidence and ideas, they must necessarily absorb elements of text into their knowledge of the topic; thus, discrete bits of information become part of the whole.

Newell (1984) stated that the variation on time limitations per task was a limitation deserving of further study, and that future research should include delayed recall of the prose passages as well as immediate recall.

Because the note-taking task instructed students to take notes in the way they normally did, a wide range of skills might be unaccounted for. In addition, the composing aloud during writing may have been influenced by the presence of the tester, and/or it may have skewed the writing itself. Otherwise, the detailed manner in which test results and writing was analyzed, including consideration of the student's prior knowledge, offer confidence in the results.

Advancing Newell's (1984) research, Marshall (1987) asked similar questions in a case study and experimental study regarding how various writing tasks effect student writing and learning. He also looked at modes of discussion to discover which approaches to literature were typically used in the case study English classes, and at how these approaches helped shape students' discourse. In addition, he looked at how restricted, personal analytic, and formal analytic writing affected the nature of students' written products and writing processes; and at how the different writing tasks affected the quality of students' later responses to literature. In short, he concluded that formal, traditional essay writing stymied independent analysis of the text while freeform analytical writing allowed for more abstract thought.

The research (Marshall, 1987) subjects were from a middle-class suburban high school in the San Francisco Bay Area. Six students out of 80 were selected for study, two from each class, balancing gender and ability differences across classes.

This was a two-part study (Marshall, 1987); the first stage was the case study; the second, an experimental study. Stage one included 18 visits by the researcher over three-and-a-half months; field notes, two interviews per student regarding his reaction to and routines for the writing assignments that were typically given, and his manner of handling reading assignments. Samples of student writing were taken during the observational stage.

In stage two, four J.D. Salinger stories were chosen that relied on suggestion to make their points (Marshall, 1987). Four types of writing assignments were possible for each story: no writing, restricted writing (eight short-answer questions for each story: three at the descriptive level [recall literal features of the text], three at the

interpretive level [make inferences about literal features], and two at the level of generalization [make judgments about the story]), personal analytic writing (explain and elaborate their responses), and formal analytic writing (interpret the story in an extended fashion, making inferences and drawing conclusions from the text alone). The first posttest included three questions for each of the four stories, designed to elicit paragraph-length answers of the descriptive, interpretive and generalized mode. The final posttest simply asked students to write an essay on each of the stories.

Measures included 1) analyses of the written products from the experimental study; 2) analyses of the composing-aloud protocols of the case study students; 3) analyses of the quality of the posttest responses. Two raters coded six randomly chosen papers from each of the three writing tasks. Exact agreement between raters was 84 percent (Marshall, 1987).

The mean percentages for the literary response categories shows that there was significant effect for task ( $p < .001$ ). The students more often made descriptive statements in their formal analytic than in their personal analytic essays ( $p < .001$ ) and more often made interpretive statements in their restricted than in their extended writing ( $p < .001$ ). Each of the three assignments shaped the pattern of the students' response in predictable ways. Results suggest that the writing assignments encouraged students to approach and think about the stories in different ways. In their formal analytic writing, students used more-or-less objective evidence to support their arguments. In personal analytic writing, students drew on their own histories and reactions. In this mode, students also took a different approach – they reflected on their own reactions to the story and seemed less concerned with formal

correctness. Formal analytic writing, however, found them employing a limited range of options, rarely breaking away from the traditional organization and approach in which they had been schooled (Marshall, 1987).

In the oral writing portion of the study, there was also a significant effect for task ( $p < .001$ ), with the students making fewer than 3 percent of their remarks before writing in the restricted condition, while making 20 percent before their personal analytic writing and more than 30 percent in their formal analytic writing.

At all three levels, when the students wrote extensively, they scored better on posttests than when they wrote in a restricted fashion. In fact, when the students did no writing at all, they scored just as well as when they completed short answer questions.

In the final posttest the findings also reflect a significant effect for task ( $p < .001$ ) with average higher scores for the extended writing.

Marshall (1987) concluded that the kind of essays generally taught in a traditional literature class, requiring logic, evidence and proof, may keep students from delving into the text itself. Independent analysis was stymied by the rigors of formal conventions, which Marshall saw as an exercise to fulfill the expectations of their teacher rather than an opportunity to deeply consider the literature they had read. Marshall concluded that when students frame an argument, locate the evidence that supports it, and do the writing, that intellectual representation of the story may stay with them over time.

While Marshall (1987) suggested more than once that traditional English-class discourse (such as answering quick questions from the teacher for whom the answers

are known and expected) isn't conducive to analysis or critical thinking, he did not elaborate on what he saw as the alternative. The composing-aloud component of the research may have been subject to tester effect. The high percentages of inter-rater reliability on various testing components, and the use of both case study and experimental methods of data collection and analysis lend credence to Marshall's results.

The two studies above give weight to the argument that writing which demands thinking on the part of the student, writing that is more involving than short-answer or note-taking, is more effective in engaging the student and constructing meaning.

Scherff and Piazza (2005) sought to assess the state of English teaching in Florida through a survey and qualitative study. They surveyed students at four high schools, two deemed excellent and two average by the Florida Department of Education. The students were in grades 9 through 12 and enrolled in seven academic tracks, from IB and AP classes to special education. The survey explored students' perception of their writing and writing instruction. The researchers examined the kinds of writing students believed they were assigned in English classrooms, and how much writing students believed they did, according to their answers on the survey. A Likert scale allowed students to estimate how often they had done certain writing tasks per week, month and year. Validity and reliability of the survey were established, then pre-packaged instructions and surveys were sent to school principals. Out of 3,763 surveys sent, 1,801 were returned, totaling a 47% response.

Qualitative analysis procedures were used to assess answers in the comments section (n=504).

The most frequent writing activity reported by the students was responses to literature: 61% reported doing such assignments at least once or twice a month. While the types of literature responses were not noted, student comments indicated that answering questions in the book after reading a story was common (Scherff & Piazza, 2005).

Expository and persuasive essays were written once or twice a month, according to 30% of the students (n=580), and 28% (n=498) reported writing them once or twice a quarter. As the study (Scherff & Piazza, 2005) noted, student comments indicated that much of the writing was assigned solely to practice for the standardized test. Forty-seven percent (n=842) wrote summaries at least once or twice a quarter, with 27% writing them once or twice a month.

Scherff and Piazza (2005) reported that, despite its importance, only 25% of the students reported writing narratives once or twice a month, and only 29% (n=526) said they wrote compare-and-contrast pieces once or twice a month. Twenty-six percent of writing-related comments complained of the lack of creative writing assignments. Personal writing decreased in the higher tracks.

Further data showed that research papers, deemed crucial by Scherff and Piazza (2005) were written only once or twice a year by 35% (n=634) of students. Approximately half the students reported rarely writing responses to art and/or music, writing business letters, drama or poetry. One student reported that IB had destroyed the creativity he once possessed, as creative work was never assigned. Thirty-four

percent surveyed said that teachers taught writing using professional or student samples, but only 10% believed that their teachers were competent in providing writing instruction and/or modeling.

Process-writing activities such as peer revision and editing were reported as occurring only once or twice a year – or never – by almost 50% of students, and the percentages were even higher in the higher school tracks. Twenty-eight percent of students reported never doing more than one draft of a piece of writing (Scherff & Piazza, 2005).

Scherff and Piazza (2005) concluded from that data that, regardless of research showing more effective teaching strategies, traditional models still prevailed in many high schools. The focus on teaching to state and national standards seemed to have caused the pendulum to swing back toward older models of teaching. Given the lack of creative writing, and practice in work-world writing, and the emphasis on summaries, the researchers pointed to opportunities lost for improving students' writing abilities.

The researchers (Scherff & Piazza, 2005) did not blame teachers, pointing to time constraints, external demands, and the pressures of state and federal standardized testing

Scherff and Piazza (2005) pointed out some of the limitations of their study, such as influences on student reporting, the vagaries of answering survey questions, and student interpretations of what may constitute particular writing activities. While I agree that due to the nebulous shades of reporting – for instance, summarizing could mean any number of approaches – the specifics of the survey are of limited value; as

a general look at in-class practices, however, the researchers offer a commendable look at how teachers seem to be responding to the demands of testing, and at what students are actually doing in high school English classes.

Anagnostopoulos (2003), in looking specifically at the Chicago Academic Standards Exam (CASE), instituted in 1997-98, thought it important to examine the relationship between standardized tests and in-class literature instruction. She sought to discover how the CASE influenced the reading of a novel, and how teachers and students responded to that influence. She concluded that focusing narrowly on a novel, with the test in mind, restricted opportunities to engage fully with the literature. As the reading of literature goes hand-in-glove with writing, these questions apply directly to the larger question of this paper.

How the district tests shaped the discussion of race and racism in *To Kill a Mockingbird* was the particular focus of Anagnostopoulos's (2003) study. The book was a required text in all 10<sup>th</sup>-grade English classes. The case study took place in a 2,000-student Chicago high school with a diverse population that was 30% limited English proficient. Eighty percent of the students were low income. Sixteen out of the school's 19 English teachers were white, one was Asian American and two were black. In 1998-99, the year of the study, the school faced a third year of probation by the district for having less than 15% of its students scoring at national norms of standardized reading tests.

Anagnostopoulos (2003) chose two classrooms to focus on, Ms. Chey's and Mr. Jones's due to the contrasting views each had on district testing policy, which was influenced by their experience and status in the department. Mr. Jones supported

the testing policies, and decided to devote 12 weeks to preparing students for the Test of Academic Proficiency. Students worked in pairs or groups on sample tests and worksheets. Ms. Chey was a first-year teacher who, with little experience in testing, felt torn between preparing students for the TAP or the CASE. All of Ms. Chey's students had been demoted due to low test scores or insufficient credits.

Anagnostopoulos (2003) interviewed each teacher three times during the year to learn about how they planned instruction, the affect of the CASE on their decisions, and how they assessed student learning. As part of a previous study, the researcher had visited the school weekly for three years, done extensive interviewing and observed 10<sup>th</sup>- and 11<sup>th</sup>-grade English classes. In addition to drawing on that data, the researcher observed both teachers, took field notes, and audio taped whole-group discussions. She read classroom transcripts to pinpoint explicit references teachers and students made to the CASE, and to deduce how such references showed what and who counted as good readings and good readers, as well as who and what did not. Specifically, Anagnostopoulos noted teacher and student references to the text regarding how important or unimportant it was to the test. Finally, the researcher kept track of teachers' motivational statements regarding the CASE.

Anagnostopoulos (2003) concluded that, though testing can highlight the needs and strengths of students, testing alone is not enough. More support for underachieving and disadvantaged students is called for. The tests delineated good readers as those who were minimally skilled; effective reading was seen as being able to recall facts. Students were labeled as good or failing, which the researcher saw as being of questionable value. Anagnostopoulos suggested that the narrow focus of the

tests may be restricting students' opportunities to engage critically with literature and social issues.

That Anagnostopoulos (2003) investigated two teachers and visited them only three times during the year for two years initially raised questions of validity; however, as she focused narrowly on approaches to structuring curriculum for one particular book, and as she drew on extensive previous research done in the same classrooms, her study has merit. That the CASE is limited to one geographical area does not dilute the more general question of effective teaching strategies in the face of state and national standardized testing.

#### Summary

In assessing a variety of teaching strategies, the teacher must weigh the importance of both the process and the product. While each is equally important, constructivist methods tend to emphasize such processes as prewriting and editing, while traditional methods are concerned with having students memorize facts and find the right answers in the text.

Emig (1971) found that most texts assumed that students wrote in a neat, linear fashion, while her research showed that not to be the case. She concluded that writing is a messier process of consideration, rewriting, rethinking and editing. Her findings inspired more research into process and caused educators to reconsider the traditional approaches to teaching writing.

Snyder's (1993) research looked at the use of word processors to see whether they fostered better classroom writing, while Albertson and Billingsley (2001) tested

a writing mnemonic in search of faster word output. Neither proved to be wholly successful.

Both Newell (1984) and Marshall (1987) examined various writing tasks as they related to student learning, and found that longer writing assignments were the most effective in producing abstract thought. While Newell found that essay writing was more beneficial to learning than short-answer or note-taking, Marshall suggested that analytic writing – either formal or personal – superseded essays.

Scherff and Piazza (2005), found in surveying students, that despite research showing the effectiveness of process-type writing activities (among other writing assignments) teachers, for the most part, continued to use traditional teaching strategies focusing on the product of good scores, in part due to the pressures to have students succeed on state testing. Anagnostopoulos (2003) also looked at the effects of testing pressure on classroom practice and found that the exigencies of the test may be limiting students' opportunities to learn.

### Discussion

Sperling and Woodlief (1997) did a case study of two classrooms to investigate how teachers and students built writing communities in these different classes; and, second, how discussions worked to shape the two communities. One larger goal of the study was to discover ways to connect schooling to a student's out-of-school life, and to value the experiences of inner-city adolescents.

Sperling and Woodlief (1997) chose an inner-city San Francisco school whose population was mostly African American, Latino, Asian and European immigrant, and a suburban school of mostly white, middle-class students. The researchers

observed, audio taped, and took notes every day for six weeks in Ms. Jencks's class, and for seven weeks in Ms. Smith's. They had formal and informal interviews with the teachers, and interviewed a subset of students from each class comprising both girls and boys.

In Ms. Jencks's inner-city classroom, Sperling and Woodlief (1997) found that the lines between students and teacher were blurred during discussion, with the teacher often looking to the students for information. She noted that minimizing role differences, for instance, valuing a student as an authority, helped to build community. As students read their work, other students often took the view of the person the students were writing about, allowing them to build empathy and giving them a chance to stand in one another's shoes.

Ms. Jencks encouraged the students to value their own experiences, which students perceived as unusual and valuable. Discussion was not of the IRE model, but rather an open expression of opinions, and sharing of stories.

Sperling and Woodlief (1997) concluded that, in Ms. Jencks's class, students' personal and community experiences connected them both personally and in their autobiographical writing.

Contrastingly, Ms. Smith's suburban class was working on a research-based project, as well as the goal to create polished drafts from sloppy writing (Sperling & Woodlief, 1997). Student talk, typically orchestrated by the teacher, was about not only the information they were gathering, but about the problems found in gathering it. While the social distance between students shrank, as it did in Ms. Jencks's class, it happened in different ways and with different results. Discussions often revolved

around comparison and juxtaposition among students and other writers, and the processes of writing their papers, as directed by the teacher. During discussions, those who had written their papers or were in the process of doing so were considered members of a student collection that shared experiences, resources and techniques.

Sperling and Woodlief (1997) found that students in both classrooms were less simply students in a classroom than participant writers among other likeminded students. Vital to both classrooms was the inclusion of the students' outside lives and interests, which became central to classroom discourse.

The differences between classes were in what they talked about, and how their conversations were orchestrated. Discussion in Ms. Jencks's class was about involving oneself in literacy activities, while in Ms. Smith's class, talk was mostly about writing process, with students learning from their peers. In both classes, students were allowed to see each other, through their writing, in a new ways.

Sperling and Woodlief (1997) concluded from their study that there should be a range of classroom communities available to accommodate students from different cultural backgrounds and with differing modes of learning.

Sperling and Woodlief (1997) admit the limits of their study: that each classroom was unique and that the methods in one would not have worked in the other; further, that because the teachers' own interests and particular methods informed and shaped the discussions, it is not a generalizable look at a wider swath.

Sperling and Woodlief's (1997) research may have been more valuable had it considered the question of why the discussions in the two classrooms were different, what the value of those differences was to the students, and what the implications for

the teaching of writing are. The students' perceptions of each classroom, presumably gained during interviews, was not noted, nor was any data taken on actual learning.

Caughlan and Kelly (2004) investigated the effects of tracking on teachers' methods in dialogic classrooms. They defined dialogic classrooms as those in which teachers asked authentic questions, encouraging critical analysis and relating discussion to students' lives, rather than relying on the common initiation-response-evaluation method. Caughlan and Kelly (2004) asked how high-track teaching strategies differed from those in low tracks. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, Caughlan and Kelly then investigated the different effects of dialogic practices in different tracks. Caughlan and Kelly (2004) followed one teacher, Mrs. Vernon, who taught both a high-track and a low-track class. The study took place at a large suburban high school in Texas, comprising about half white students, 38% black, 9% Latino, and 5% Asian American. Mrs. Vernon was white and middle class. Only 8% of the students qualified for reduced-price lunch. In her high-track English class, 19 students were white, six were black and one was Latino. In the low-track class, five were white, six were black and three were Latino. Student writing samples were taken in the spring and fall to assess achievement, as scored by two raters. Classroom interaction was recorded by observers four times in each of the 64 classes over the year in order to assess discussions. The teacher was interviewed twice regarding her characterizations of students and her goals for each class. Classroom observations were also audio taped, and two complete class sessions were transcribed and analyzed line by line (Caughlan & Kelly, 2004).

Unlike many teachers of low-track classes, according to Caughlan and Kelly (2004), Mrs. Vernon's main goal was to get her students to think by reading the American literature canon rather than young-adult books. She mixed open-ended questions along with factual recall and prompts as ways to identify literary technique. She accounted for students' placement in the class to their preferences and dispositions rather than to cognitive deficits. She saw the upper-tracked students as headed toward college, and gauged her teaching to reflect that, for instance, teaching vocabulary geared toward passing the SAT, which she taught discretely.

Caughlan and Kelly (2004) found other differences between the classes: first, the low track spent large amounts of time on single tasks while the high-track curriculum strands were more coherently interwoven. Second, the high-track class seemed happier, and there was less time spent on classroom management. In the low-track class, directions were often repeated, and Mrs. Vernon asked a lot of non-content related authentic questions in an attempt to maintain a positive relationship with the students.

Caughlan and Kelly (2004) demonstrated that tracking's institutional effects include how the teacher perceives her students, which leads to differences in the form and content of curricula, and in how discussions are led and shaped. Ultimately, the researchers found that the differences in curricular coherence could be attributed to the teacher's perception of her students' abilities. Discourse analysis showed that, though Mrs. Vernon offered more demanding instruction than many low-track classes do, there was much more literature discussion in her high-track class. The bridge between life and literature was deeper than in the low track. Both the teacher and

students offered personal anecdotes and connections between their lives and the text or characters. The researchers saw this as helping to explain why the high-track class achieved more and the low track less than would be expected. Further, the differences in how Mrs. Vernon taught were due to the different cultural models that she had for the two classes, and her different expectations for the two groups. Because she understood the higher-track students better, she was better able to meet their needs.

Due the particular nature of Mrs. Vernon's perceptions and personality, this research is generalizable only as common sense: that a teacher's perceptions of her students' abilities would frame what and how she teaches. Further research might uncover whether teaching against those perceptions might be beneficial. The researchers (Caughlan and Kelly, 2004) did not assess actual learning in the class.

#### Summary

Sperling and Woodlief (1997) looked at the function and flow of discussion in both an inner-city and suburban classroom, concluding that both classrooms became writing communities when discussion included their outside-school lives as well as the process of writing. Caughlan and Kelly (2004) also focused on discussion, examining the differences between high-track and low-track classes. They found that the teacher's perceptions of her students' achievement goals and abilities influenced the subjects and manner of discussion.

## CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS

Having in the previous chapter reviewed the literature, I will summarize the conclusions, discuss the implications of the research findings for teaching writing, and suggest some areas for further research.

Perl and Wilson (1986) concluded that, just as there are any number of ways in which to write, there are any number of ways in which to teach writing. The strategies and curriculum a teacher chooses are dependent on who he is, what's important to him, the background he brings into the classroom, and the students he finds there. In addition, how he teaches will be affected by community and administrative conditions and pressures, and cultural considerations.

One of the major considerations in teaching today is whether and how much consideration should be given to direct teaching of discrete skills – as opposed to teaching in an integrated, more constructivist manner – in order to prepare students for standardized tests. As was seen in chapter 2, this controversy goes back in history to Dewey's constructivist teaching philosophy versus those who believed in traditional methods. As every teacher must decide what the best teaching strategies are for his class, this question affects every teacher and every student in every class.

Scherff and Piazza (2005) found that, due to the pressures of state and federal standards testing, the teaching of writing has reverted to outdated modes of instruction that include discrete teaching-to-the-test and such traditional assignments as the five-paragraph theme that may not have meaning to the student. They stated that, as with discrete instruction in grammar, lacking connection to authentic reading and writing, writing instruction itself may have become simply test preparation,

offering students little understand of how that writing is relevant to their lives. They noted that in the present political climate, in which No Child Left Behind demands results in student testing, teaching that results in product often eclipses process approaches and writing.

Beck (2006), too, found standardized testing to be skewing the better intentions of writing teachers. The researcher stated that the pressure to have his students meet the goals of standardized tests shaped instructional strategies in a much narrower way than the teacher intended.

Hillocks (1987), as cited by Knudson (1992), concluded that the quality of student writing does not improve through the traditional study of grammar, as it does not consider a writer's audience, purpose, content or style; Dixon-Krauss found that vocabulary teaching was more effective in an integrated manner; and Applebee (1992) concluded that outstanding schools are marked by teachers concerned with creativity and quality over the details of grammar.

If we consider the above to be evidence that constructivist teaching strategies are more preferable to teaching discretely – often to the test – we then must investigate what particular methods of constructivist teaching are best and what considerations should be made when choosing them.

### Effective Writing Strategies

Scherff and Piazza saw balanced instruction as the best and obvious strategy. They defined balanced instruction as including in the writing process lessons on prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing in addition to strategies that

address the writer's craft, such as genre, dialogue and plot. Lessons in craft are integrated into the revision process as part of a work's development.

Ostrowski (2000) found that Atwell's (1998) reading/writing workshop is an effective method of engaging students in classroom writing and reading. Atwell's workshop is a good example of constructivist teaching methods, in which process is emphasized, the work is collaborative and social, and a student's present life is valued.

### Considerations in Choosing Writing Strategies

As the research in chapter 3 showed, connecting writing to a student's life outside of school is important in making work more relevant and meaningful to the student and thereby achieving a higher level of engagement, and, resultantly, more learning (Fairbanks & Ariail, 2006; Schultz, 2002; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005; Frey & Fisher, 2004; O'Brien, Springs & Stith, 2001; Mayher, Lester and Pradl, 1983). Langer (1997) considered it to be critical.

The researchers used a variety of materials and approaches – such as emails, acting, comic books and hands-on projects – to link into non-academic areas of a student's life in order to spark his interest and to bridge community and school life. They focused on topics from the student's circle of personal knowledge, culture, and society, such as family stories family, pop culture characters, blogging, church, and diaries. It's logical to conclude that further such inventive strategies would also be effective in engaging students, accessing their prior knowledge, and making learning meaningful. The use of traditional texts, too, might be reconsidered in lieu of

contemporary works more relevant to a diverse population, according to Applebee (1994).

Another area to consider when assessing teaching strategies is the social milieu of the student. Snyder (1993) stated that all learning is socially based. Sperling and Woodlief (1997) concluded that writing is not only a social activity but is a socially purposeful activity. Atwell's (1988) reading/writing workshop is a good example of a learning situation dependent on its social groupings. Perl and Wilson found that when students work collaboratively, in groups, pairs or trios, they discover themselves in new roles, such as listeners, co-inquirers, helpers, and authors whose work impacts others.

Discussion is one effective social strategy in teaching writing. Langer (2001) saw student involvement in discussion as an element in successful English classrooms. Sperling and Woodlief (1997) found that when students' extra-school lives are included in classroom discussions, those classrooms become communities of writers.

Caughlan and Kelly (2004) stated that true classroom discussion occurs when the learning environment is student-centered, the teacher builds on student comments, and the talk becomes free-flowing. Questions posed by the students themselves to teachers and peers may direct the conversation. The teachers, however, as suggested by Perl and Wilson (1986), do not cede authority. In a creative manner, they enable students to empower themselves. This applies to writing itself, as well. As Perl and Wilson (1986) found, some students discovered a new sense of freedom and expression when no longer instructed to write purely for their teachers.

## Conclusion

Constructivist methods in which process activities are employed in a social setting, with work and assignments that connect with the student's personal life seem to be the ideal for teaching writing.

### Implications for Further Research

As was shown by Fairbanks and Ariail (2006) and Schultz (2002), a student's personal, private writings might be realized as a bridge to in-school learning. More research might show methods in which this could be achieved. Another area for further research is the use of the internet as a tool with which to engage students in writing, either to another party, through blogging or journaling, or in responding to others' writing.

As connection to community has been highly espoused, research might be done into effective ways in which to include cultural, family, church, sports – any outside area of interests to the student – in writing practice and teaching.

Finally, with the pressure of No Child Left Behind continuing to push standardized testing, research into teaching methods that are constructivist in nature, yet account for the need for positive test results, might be done.

## REFERENCES

- Anagnostopoulos, D. (2003). Testing and student engagement with literature in urban classrooms: A multilayered perspective. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 38 (2), p. 177
- Albertson, L., & Billingsley, F. (2001). Using strategy instruction and self-regulation to improve gifted students' creative writing. *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education*, 12(2) 90-101
- Applebee, Arthur N. (1992) *NAEP 1992 writing report card*. National Center for Education Statistics, available from U.S. Government Printing Office
- Applebee, Arthur N. (1994). *Shaping conversations: A study of continuity and coherence on high school literature curricula*. National Research Center on Literature Teaching and Learning. Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Washington, D.C.
- Applebee, Arthur N., Burroughs, R. & Stevens, A. (2000) Creating continuity and coherence in high school literature curricula. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 34 (3)
- Atwell, N. (1998) *In the Middle*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann
- Beck, S. (2006) Subjectivity and intersubjectivity in the teaching and learning of writing. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 40 (4) 413
- Bernstein, S. (2004) Teaching and learning in Texas : Accountability testing, language, race, and place. *Journal of Basic Writing*, 32(1)
- Butler, S. & Mansfield, E. (1995) Lifewriting in a secondary school. *English Quarterly*,

28(1)

- Caughlan, S. & Kelly, S. (2004) Bridging methodological gaps: Instructional and institutional effects of tracking in two English classes. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 39(1), 20
- Dixon-Krauss, L. (2002) Using literature as a context for teaching vocabulary. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*. 45(4) 1-9
- Emig, J. (1971). *The composing processes of twelfth graders*. National Council of Teachers of English, Research Report No. 13, Urbana, IL.
- Fairbanks , C. & Ariail, M. (2006). The role of social and cultural resources in literacy and schooling: Three contrasting cases. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 40(3)
- Fischer, S. (2003). *A History of Reading* . London : Reaktion Books
- Frey, N. & Fisher, D. (2004) Using graphic novels, anime, and the internet in an urban high school. *English Journal*, 93(3), 19
- Frkovich, A. & Thoms, A. (2004) The monologue project for creating vital drama in secondary schools. *English Journal*, 94(2)
- Guzzetti, B. & Gamboa, M. (2005) Online journaling: The informal writings of two adolescent girls. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 40(2) 168
- Johnson, T., Thompson, L., Smagorinsky, P., Fry, P. (2003) Learning to teach the five- paragraph theme. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 38 (2) 136
- Kelly, M. (2001) The education of African-American youth: Literacy practices and

- identity representation in church and school. In E. B. Moje & D. G. O'Brien (Eds.), *Constructions of Literacy* (pp. 239-259). Mahwah , NJ: Erlbaum
- Kliebard, H. (1987). *The struggle for the American curriculum 1893-1958*. New York and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Knudson, Ruth E. (1992) Analysis of argumentative writing at two grade levels. *Journal of Educational Research*, 85(3), 169
- Langer, J. (1997) Literacy acquisition through literature. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 40(8)
- Langer, J. (2001). Beating the odds: Teaching middle and high school students to read and write well. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(4) 837-80
- Marshall, James D. (1987). The effects of writing on students' understanding of literary texts. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 21(1)
- Mayher, J., Lester, N. & Pradl, G. (1983). *Learning to write, writing to learn*. Portsmouth , NH: Boynton/Cook
- Newell, G. (1984). Learning from writing in two content areas: A case study/protocol analysis. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 18(3)
- O'Brien, D., Springs, R. & Stith, D. (2001). Engaging at-risk high school students: Literacy learning in a high school literacy lab. In E. B. Moje & D. G. O'Brien (Eds.), *Constructions of Literacy* (p. 105-123). Mahwah , NJ : Erlbaum
- Ostrowski, S. (2000) *How English is taught and learned in four exemplary middle*

*and high school classrooms*. National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement

Perl, S. & Wilson, N. (1986). *Through teachers' eyes: Portraits of writing teachers at work*. Portsmouth, NH : Heinemann Educational Books

Scherff, L. & Piazza, C. (2005). The more things change, the more they stay the same:

A survey of high school students' writing experiences. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 39(3)

Schultz, K. (2002). Looking across space and time: Reconceptualizing literacy in and out of school. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 36(3)

Schugurensky, D., *History of Education: Selected Moments of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*.

[Online]. Available at:

Snyder, I. (1993) The impact of computers on students' writing: A comparative study of the effects of pens and word processors on writing context, process, and product. *The Australian Journal of Education*, 37(1) 5-25

Spaulding, C. (1995) Teachers' psychological presence on students' writing task engagement. *Journal of Educational Research*, 88(4) 210

Sperling, M., Woodlief, L., (1997) Two classrooms, two writing communities: Urban and

suburban tenth-graders learning to write. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 32(2) 205

Spring, J. (2001) *The American School 1642-2004*. New York : McGraw Hill.

writing. (n.d.). The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition. Retrieved January 04, 2007, from Dictionary.com website:

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/writing>

writing. (n.d.). Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1). Retrieved January 04, 2007, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/writing>