TEACHER PERSPECTIVES TOWARDS WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................. v

DEDICATION ............................................................................................................... vi

LIST OF TABLES ......................................................................................................... vii

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 1

   Background ............................................................................................................. 1

   Statement of the Problem .................................................................................... 2

   Research Questions ............................................................................................. 4

   Definition of Terms ............................................................................................. 4

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW .............................................................................. 6

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY ................................................................................... 14

   Design Approach .................................................................................................. 14

   Description of Setting and Subjects .................................................................... 14

   Data Collection .................................................................................................... 15

   Ethical Considerations ......................................................................................... 16

   Data Analysis ....................................................................................................... 17

CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS .............................................................................................. 19

   Discussion ............................................................................................................. 34

CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ........................................ 38

   Implications .......................................................................................................... 38

   Recommendations .............................................................................................. 39

   Limitations .......................................................................................................... 40
Suggestions for Future Research ................................................................. 40
Summary ........................................................................................................ 41
REFERENCES ............................................................................................. 42
APPENDIX .................................................................................................... 44
ABSTRACT

This research study sought to understand teachers’ perspectives on the North Carolina Writing Across the Curriculum as provided for in the states’ Writing Assessment System. In particular the study used five teacher respondents to examine the opportunities, support and challenges they go through in the implementation of Writing Across the Curriculum in grades 4 and 7. Findings indicate that purposeful and meaningful professional development and support were lacking at this school, yet, according to the teacher respondents, Writing Across the Curriculum benefits students. Teachers in all content areas lacked the implementation strategies necessary to employ Writing Across the Curriculum in their classrooms, which lead to overwhelming pressures placed upon 4th and 7th grade language arts teachers. This study is important because it clearly identifies gaps and areas for improvement in Writing Across the Curriculum as it is incorporated into the framework of the North Carolina Writing Assessment System within the school of research. Data can be used to create support for teachers to meet the goals of Writing Across the Curriculum as outline in the states’ Writing Assessment System.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks goes to, first, my thesis advisor, Dr. Kennedy Ongaga, whose enthusiasm for research inspired me to delve deep into my topic and uncover how teachers truly felt about Writing Across the Curriculum in this school of study.

I would like to thank all of the professors who have introduced me to research and curriculum/instruction and supervision. They have aided in making my research such a meaningful and personal experience.

I would like to thank the teachers in my school who have worked with me as I needed them to obtain the data and research necessary to this thesis. My partner teachers, I would also like to thank, even though they were not involved in the research. They listened to me, hours on end, talk about writing, writing, and more writing.

Special thanks go to my wonderful husband who has supported me through my entire educational experience. Without him, I wouldn’t be completing this thesis today.

My mother, father, and sister have been so very supportive, and for that I am thankful. They tolerated ill-tempered behaviors and endless chatting, but they were smiling through each and every step of this process.

Finally, I would like to thank my committee members for their guidance, support, and assistance throughout this research process.
DEDICATION

I would, first, like to dedicate this thesis to my husband and best friend, David, whose continued support and encouragement along the way have meant more to me than you will ever realize. You have set an example for me to follow, and I am grateful for all that you are to me. Without you, I would not be where I am today.

I would also like to dedicate this to my mother, father, and sister. Mama and Daddy – you taught me to set goals, work hard, and never give up. The foundation you laid for me as a child helped me to get where I am today. Morgan – thanks for always being there for me, and I truly admire the person you are. Not only are you a wonderful sister, but a best friend.

To my granddaddy, Jackie: You would be proud! I wish you were here to see me finish this. I love you and miss you dearly.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my magnificent nieces and nephew, Carrlee Jack, Lyndsey, and Lon. I love you all!
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tables</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1 - Themes Emerging From Guiding Question 1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 - Themes Emerging From Guiding Question 2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 - Themes Emerging From Guiding Question 3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 - Themes Emerging From Guiding Question 4</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1: Introduction

“Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength for our nation.” – John F. Kennedy

Background

John F. Kennedy’s quote challenges us, as educators, to ask ourselves what we can do as leaders to help each and every child develop their greatest abilities in education. As education evolves, it is imperative to look at curriculum and learning with an open mind. What once worked may need to be amended so that we are teaching children at their greatest potential.

As part of the North Carolina Assessment and Accountability in writing, teachers previously assessed students formally once per year. However, North Carolina lawmakers challenged themselves to alter this assessment design as part of a movement to incorporate writing across the curriculum, which, in turn, will allow students to become more skilled and literate in a particular content area. Fortunately, “as teachers in various disciplines have added writing to their courses, they have discovered that writing assignments bring great benefits. Not only do they enhance students' general writing ability, but they also increase both the understanding of content while learning the specific vocabulary of the disciplines” (Kelly, 2010, p. 1).

This movement in writing across the curriculum was essential in teaching writing, as well as increasing a student’s ability to write. Therefore, in June 2008, the North Carolina State Board of Education adopted a new framework that elevated the importance of writing across content areas, providing more authentic and on-demand writing assignments. The new framework for assessment will encourage students to engage in writing throughout the year, and
writing will be taught and assessed in all content areas. This new vision will help students
develop their own writing to their greatest potential, allowing them to communicate more
effectively.

**Statement of the Problem**

Throughout the decades, writing has been recognized as a process that helps learners to
think more deeply about ideas and information they encounter (Peterson, 2007). In response to
the need of students to learn content using a variety of strategies and practice writing in a variety
of contents, teachers across different content areas in North Carolina are adopting different
strategies associated with Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC). The basic assumption of WAC
is that “writing and thinking are closely allied, that learning to write well involves learning
particular discourse conventions, and that, therefore, writing belongs in the entire curriculum, not
just in a course offered by the English department” (McLeod & Soven, 1992, p.4). This strategy
is meant to improve student writing and prepare them for real-life situations. To achieve this
goal, it is imperative to influence the entire academic community in which writing takes place, to
make all teachers sensitive to the role of writing in learning as well as to the relationship of
writing to other communication skills – reading, speaking, and listening. However, as teachers
incorporate such processes some may find the task to be daunting and challenging, prompting
them to be indecisive when it comes to integrating writing in their subject areas.

To encourage students to write more authentic, complex assignments throughout the
entire school year, North Carolina state lawmakers recommended revision of the 2001 writing
assessment program. In June 2008, NC State Board of Education adopted a new framework to
assess writing more comprehensively throughout the K-12 curriculum (Public Schools of NC,
2008). The board argues that this new writing assessment system would, “replace the annual on-
demand writing assessments at grades 4, 7, and 10 [taken in March] and elevate the importance of writing” across each grade level (p. 3). No revisions are in place for grade 10 writing assessment. Conversely, the newly-revised writing assessment system involves two on-demand writing tasks and two content-based writing tasks at grades 4 and 7.

The new assessment was piloted in the 2008-2009 school year. During this time, teachers in each grade level were required to complete professional development courses that were designed to offer them support on how to incorporate all content areas and the process used to score student responses. Since it was piloted, no studies have been done to assess teachers’ perspectives, opportunities and challenges they experience in implementing Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC).

**Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to understand teacher perceptions regarding WAC as provided for the new North Carolina Writing Assessment System. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What assumptions do the teachers have about Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)?
2. How does the new program benefit students?
3. How are the teachers supported to implement WAC?
4. What challenges do teachers experience in the implementing WAC and how do they overcome them?

The resulting data can prove valuable to principals, curriculum directors, and superintendents in increasing accountability standards for teachers, while also providing them with relevant tools to support the implementation process. Lawmakers can also use the findings
to determine the strengths of the new assessment, while at the same time determining what adjustments need to be made to the assessment to address areas of concern.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study, the researcher applied the following terms and definitions:

**Content-Based Writing Assessment** – A writing assignment given to students two times per academic year and is based on a content area prompt. These assessments require students to research a topic before writing a response; therefore, this is an assessment that students complete over an extended period of time (Public Schools of NC, 2009).

**On-Demand Writing Assessment** – A writing assignment given to students two time per academic and is based on a prompt given to students. This assessment is administered in a computer lab setting, and students have to complete their response during the administration. This is not a work-in-progress (Public Schools of NC, 2009).

**Writing Across the Curriculum** – A comprehensive program that transforms the curriculum, encouraging writing to learn and learning to write in all disciplines (McLeod & Soven, 1992).

**Student Responses** – Written or typed responses produced by the students for the North Carolina writing assessment.

**K-8 School** – A school containing grades kindergarten, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, and eight which promotes a gradual transition between elementary and middle school.

This chapter lays the ground work for this study. In the following chapter, two bodies of research relevant to this study are presented.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In order to effectively understand the research that lends itself to this study, the researcher looks closely at research for both the North Carolina Writing System and WAC.

Writing Across the Curriculum

During the 1960’s, Americans witnessed a renewed interest in communication and writing (Bazerman, Bethel, Chavkin, Fouquette, Garufis, & Little, 2005). As this began to manifest, writing became more widely used and offered in higher level educational institutions. As indicated by Bazerman et al., students began to experiment with writing, opening “the door to writing across the curriculum” (p. 20). In the 1970’s, a movement for integrating writing in content areas was sparked when a university program moved writing outside of the English department (Bazerman, et al., 2005). Prior to this change, writing was rarely taught for the love of the craft (NC DPI, 2009).

The past 30 years, however, have proved to show dramatic changes in WAC. During this shift in ideology and implementation, writing began to be included in instruction of various content areas “because it provided a sound vehicle for testing” (NC DPI, 2009, p. 9). This paradigm shift in the way writing is taught and incorporated into various content areas has been instrumental in shaping the North Carolina’s writing curriculum and assessment program.

According to the Michigan Department of Education (2008), WAC movement incited a response to aid in the “need of students to learn content using a variety of strategies and their need to practice writing in a variety of contexts” (p. 2). Students involved in WAC engage in inquiry-based writing activities which help them to show mastery or provide a learning opportunity.
Inquiry-based writing activities involve a process students use throughout the lesson to develop their ideas. Such writing fosters critical thinking and tends to focus more on ideas rather than correct grammar, spelling, and style (Michigan Department of Education, 2008, p. 6).

Writing that is used to demonstrate mastery involves students completing assignments such as reports, essays, PowerPoint presentations, or research papers to exemplify the understanding they have gained in the content area. Students “show what they have learned by synthesizing information and explaining their concepts and ideas” (Michigan Department of Education, 2008, p. 5).

According to Peterson (2007), content area classrooms are the ideal places for helping students to develop as writers, as well as content learners. While teachers employ activities that involve skills required for learning-based writing and writing that demonstrates mastery, they reinforce the content taught in their classrooms. Using this process, students learn valuable writing skills across the curriculum.

Although the rewards of WAC are promising, teachers are reticent to the idea of incorporating writing into their instruction. Simply put, teachers find it difficult to utilize time in their classroom for writing when the demands for covering the book or meeting curriculum requirements are so elevated (Sorenson, 1991). It has been noted that another reason for the hesitation is the lack of confidence on behalf of the teacher (Goals of the NC Writing Instruction System, n.d.). Some teachers simply do not feel capable of using WAC strategies in their content area.

To bridge this gap, local and state departments must provide on-going staff development to encourage teachers to write in their content areas, as well as provide strategies that they can
employ in their classrooms (Bailey, Budden, & Hansen, 2008). When staff members are trained on WAC, they are able to create an atmosphere conducive to learning.

In hopes to provide meaningful professional development, NC state lawmakers, along with the NC Department of Instruction, created an online Writing Professional Development Course. According to NC Public Schools (2009), the professional development offered to teachers provides three courses that are offered on-line. The first course, Instructional Writing Across the Curriculum, “is specifically designed around the instruction of writing and the involvement of content teachers in the writing process” (North Carolina Public Schools, 2009). Following this course, teachers are expected to engage in the second course, which involves assessing writing skills in the 21st Century. As directed by the NC Public Schools (2009), this course is specifically designed around the scoring rubrics and scoring applications and includes English/language arts on-demand sample student responses for scoring practice. The final course in the professional development model, Assessing Content Writing in the 21st Century, is designed as a teacher resource involving the scoring rubrics and scoring applications and includes content area writing sample student responses for scoring practice (North Carolina Public Schools, 2009).

Along with professional development, it is essential both teachers and administrators fully understand the meaning of WAC because misunderstanding can lead to improper use of the writing system and its implementation (McLeod, 1987). According to McLeod (1987), one must first recognize and understand the two philosophical approaches to WAC: cognitive and rhetorical writing.

The first philosophy, cognitive writing, “assumes that writing is a mode of thinking and learning” in which we build our own knowledge structures and change these structures by
explaining these things to ourselves before we explain them to others (McLeod, 1987, p. 20).

Such tools for this philosophy that students can use are journals and other ungraded assignments that use writing as a means of learning, not assessment.

The second philosophy, rhetorical writing, “acknowledges the importance of writing as a mode of learning, but emphasizes the contextual and social constraints of writing” (McLeod, 1987, p.20). This philosophy views writing in a certain discipline as a form of social behavior in the discipline, and sees academic writing as a discourse community into which teachers must introduce our students. Classes that emphasize this approach make extensive use of collaborative learning and peer revision. As state by McLeod (1987), the goal of this philosophy is create a community of writers in the classroom.

**North Carolina Writing Assessment System**

According to the Assessment Brief of North Carolina Writing Assessments in Grades 4 and 7 (1999), in 1977, the North Carolina General Assembly enacted legislation directing the North Carolina State Board of Education (NCSBE) to evaluate annually the educational progress of North Carolina students in the first, second, third, sixth, and ninth grades. A Plan for the measurement of writing in North Carolina was presented to and approved by the NCSBE in November, 1982. As described in that plan, a field test of sixth and ninth graders was conducted in the spring of 1983, and formal administrations in both grades occurred in January, 1984. In 1985-86, the writing assessment at grade 9 was reassigned to grade 8. The program was expanded in 1992-93 to include writing at grade 4. Due to budget constraints, during the 1995-1996 school year, the assessment was reduced to include only grades 4 and 7(Public Schools of NC, 2009).
According to the Assessment Brief of North Carolina Writing Assessment at Grade 10 (1999), the North Carolina General Assembly directed the State Board of Education to define and estimate the cost of basic education for all students. The resulting Basic Education Program included, as one of its many components, the North Carolina Standard Course of Study, which is a curriculum description of what each child in North Carolina public schools is guaranteed (Public Schools of North Carolina, 1999). In order to assess the implementation of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study, the Basic Education Program included end-of-course testing in high school. As stated in the Assessment Brief of North Carolina Writing at Grade 10 (1999), the North Carolina Test of English II, an end-of-course test, assessed: “mastery of the writing curriculum, application of the conventions of Standard American English, and student performance in literary analysis” (p. 2). It was administered for the first time in 1999.

The revision of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (SCS) emphasized writing as a basic skill that can be improved with appropriate instruction. The measurement of writing ensured that ample time and resources were allotted for its development in the classroom.

The previous North Carolina Writing Assessment is composed of two parts: the Writing Assessment at Grades 4 and 7 and the English II Essay End-of-Course Test in Grade 10. These test were designed to place a greater emphasizes on writing. This testing program aligned with the Standard Course of Study and emphasized writing as a basic skill that can be improved with appropriate instruction and emphasis (Public Schools of North Carolina, 1999).

According to the Public Schools of North Carolina (1999), the writing assessment at grades 4 and 7 measures students’ skills in three of the four different modes of writing: narrative, expository, and descriptive. Students in grade 4 are asked to write a narrative composition,
personal or imaginative, and students in grade 7 are asked to write either an expository, clarification or point-of-view, or descriptive composition. For their writing task, grade 10 students are required to respond to an expository, literature-based prompt that requires analysis. This assessment involves a single, on-demand writing task administered in the spring of each year.

Over the last twenty-five years, as curriculum changed and mandates on school administrators and lawmakers have been forced to improve communication skills through writing, amendments to the North Carolina Writing Assessment System at Grades 4, 7, and 10 were necessary. Prior to 2008, the assessment continued to involve a single on-demand writing task administered each year and involved only the English Language Arts curriculum and teacher. However, in June 2008, North Carolina adopted a new framework for assessing students at grades 4, 7, and 10 in writing. This new assessment “includes authentic and on-demand writing assignments that mirror 21st century skills” (Public Schools of NC, 2008, p. 3). State lawmakers created such an assessment because they felt that “to be competitive in 21st century academic and/or occupational environments, a student must be able to communicate effectively through writing” (North Carolina Public Schools, n.d.). Further, lawmakers also increased the accountability of all educators by requiring them to implement writing activities in their specialized content area which adheres to the “building’s plan for a coherent, integrated approach to writing instruction” (North Carolina Public Schools, n.d.).

Unlike the test prior to 2008 that encompassed one on-demand writing assessment during the latter part of the year, the new model embodies a completely different philosophy. The current writing assessment strives to encourage students to write continuously throughout the year in all content areas, with a focus on complex, authentic writing tasks. In order to meet these
goals, lawmakers created an assessment that includes four writing assignments within an academic school year. Two of the assignments are on-demand assignments, while two are content-specific tasks. This new assessment is portfolio-based. Whereas the previously mandated writing assessment required students to complete a formal on-demand prompt that was scored by trained professionals, the new format allows for more flexibility and authenticity. Simultaneously, educators are able to assess a student’s improvement in writing over the course of the year and from one grade to the next (Public Schools of NC, 2008).

In the document, *Comprehensive Guide 2009-2010: North Carolina Writing Instruction System*, DPI (2009) explicitly distinguishes the difference between on-demand and content-specific writing assessments. According to this guide, on-demand writing require students to respond to two prompts provided by North Carolina Department of Instruction in the course of a given year. Students must complete these assignments within a given amount of time during one session. While grade 4 students can use paper and pencil to create their response, grade 7 students are required to complete their responses using a word processing tool. All responses are scored locally at the school or county level.

On the other hand, content-specific writing requires students to respond to a prompt created by classroom teachers twice per academic year. Students use various technology devices to create a response that is scored by the teacher or at the local level (Public Schools of NC, 2009). Such responses are completed over a period of time and are very similar to a research paper.

Currently, students in grade 10 participate in the traditional 10th Grade Writing Test. Although no changes have been made to the requirements in regard to the writing assessment,
lawmakers are hoping to include the English test at Grade 10 and the High School Graduation Project as part of the assessment in the future (Public Schools of NC, 2008).

To meet the goals set forth in the current North Carolina Writing Assessment System, it is important for lawmakers to include a WAC approach. This chapter reviewed the history of WAC and its purpose, creating a link between this approach and the importance of its integration in the North Carolina Writing System.

The next chapter discusses the design approach, setting, subjects, data collection instruments, and procedures for collecting and analyzing data for this research study.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This research study sought to understand teachers’ perspectives on the North Carolina Writing Across the Curriculum as provided for in the states’ Writing Assessment System.

Design Approach

This study used a qualitative design with a case study approach. Qualitative approach allows a researcher to seek answers regarding the “how” and “what” of a topic, and provides a mechanism for exploration into an uncharted question on a detailed level (Creswell, 1998; Yin, 2003; Patton, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This approach allows one to “inquire about specific social processes or particular persons’ perspectives through direct contact with those involved – observing, interacting, and asking questions – in natural contexts where people function” (Locke, et al., 2000, p. 97). The defining characteristics of a case study are the boundaries that establish the parameters of the unit of study. Merriam (1998) contends, “By concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (the case), the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon” (p. 29).

Description of Setting and Subjects

Participants in this study included teachers at River Elementary, which is a rural school located in Southeastern North Carolina. As part of the Duplin County School System, River Elementary School serves approximately 700 students and embodies grades kindergarten through eighth. This school is neither a true elementary nor middle school because it houses grades kindergarten through eighth in one building. This school was selected because it is currently using WAC.

Sampling
Purposeful sampling was used in selecting participants who teach 4th or 7th grade. The sample included two fourth grade teachers who taught all subject areas – science, social studies, reading, writing, health, and math. Three middle school teachers were also selected, each teaching a different subject – language arts, math, or science. The respondents teaching experiences range from seven years to eighteen years, and only one teacher is certified by the National Board. All respondents are Caucasian, three females and two males.

**Research Questions**

The following questions were used to guide the study:

1. What assumptions do the teachers have about Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)?
2. How does the new program benefit students?
3. How are the teachers supported to implement WAC?
4. What challenges do teachers experience in the implementing WAC and how do they overcome them?

**Data Collection Instruments and Procedures**

In order to answer the central question of this study, the researcher used one-on-one teacher interviews. Interview strategy was selected as a means of data collection because it helped the researcher to “obtain a rich, in-depth experiential account” of writing in the teacher’s classroom (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 646). The interviews were conducted between December 2009 and January 2010 by the researcher to capture the teachers’ perspectives and classroom practices regarding WAC. Each interview session lasted for approximately 25-30 minutes.

**Ethical Considerations**

To ensure confidentiality and security, the researcher sought consent from each participant to voluntarily participate in the study and consent to be audio-taped. The researcher
clarified the purpose of the study by making the research objectives clear and understandable to the participants. Participants’ names and other potentially revealing information that might compromise their confidentiality and identity were not shared in the research. Data was stored in a locked file cabinet and in a password protected computer. In order to maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms are used to report the findings. The researcher notified the participants of the study’s approval by the University of North Carolina at Wilmington Internal Review Board.

The researcher also received written consent from the principal at this site to conduct the study.

**Data Analysis**

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), the steps for analyzing the qualitative data consist of: (a) organizing the data; (b) developing categories, themes, and patterns in the data; (c) and analyzing the data along the research questions posed in the study. For organizational purposes, interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed along the guiding questions. This aided in finding common themes that resonated from the data.

Findings from this study are presented in chapter four.
Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter will present the findings related to the four research questions investigated in this study. The researcher will analyze the one-on-one teacher interviews conducted with five teachers. This data explains the assumptions of writing across the curriculum, student benefits of the new writing program, perceptions of writing in their specific content area, support or lack thereof to promote writing across the curriculum to improve writing scores on the North Carolina Writing Assessment, and specific challenges that teachers face in implementation of the new writing assessment.

Teachers’ Assumptions about WAC

In answering the first guiding question regarding teacher assumptions about WAC, two themes emerged from the one-on-one interviews. The themes are each presented below with supporting quotes.

Table 4.1 – Themes Emerging From Guiding Question 1

<table>
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<th>Theme</th>
<th>Supporting Quotes</th>
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| Writing Across the Curriculum prepares students for authentic writing, including a real audience and purpose | I think if the plan has a good basis then it will be a strong structure because students learn to write, or practice their writing skills, in math and social studies and science and so forth. They’ll know that there is one formula, which is what I really struggle with. They’ll start to write and think critically about their writing and paragraphs instead of just trying to fit a mold (L. Brown, personal communication, December 4, 2009).  
I do a lot of sketches in social studies. It’s kind of helped with the ABC book. I didn’t really go in-depth with that…I see how much they’ve evolved from October to December. You can kind of see their writing has increased dramatically, they use a lot more elaboration, details (D. Smith, personal communication, January 8, 2010). |
| WAC allows teachers that have a background in more than one content area to integrate | I really think this one [the current North Carolina Writing Assessment System] allows them to explore various types of writing and work on making changes. It allows you to integrate across the curriculum, content area. That’s one of the pluses; you can incorporate the writing focus maybe in the language arts classroom. You can pull things from social |
their knowledge of that content area into their language arts classroom studies, science, or what have you (L. Brown, personal communication, December 4, 2009).

“It’s [writing assessment] mostly, I figured out, quality over quantity. For math, it is a great way to introduce word problems. This writing thing has really seemed to help them as far as how to do the questions more proficiently” (D. Smith, personal communication, January 8, 2010).

“I do some biographical sketches, especially upcoming in February, in social studies. We do a lot with Black History month. Also with our ABC book, we had to write about North Carolina, so a lot of the writing has evolved over the year” (D. Smith, personal communication, January 8, 2010).

“With them doing the content, it’s made me do more writing than I had before in the content areas. Before I was more focused on the imaginary and personal narratives” (G. Jones, personal communication, December 8, 2009).

Benefits of WAC for Students

In answering the second guiding question concerning student benefits of WAC, two themes emerged from the one-on-one interviews. The themes are each presented below with supporting quotes.

Table 4.2 – Themes Emerging From Guiding Question 2

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<th>Themes</th>
<th>Supporting Quotes</th>
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| WAC is beneficial to students and shows their growth as writers. | “If the plan has good basis then it will be a strong structure because students learn to write, or practicing writing skills, in math and social studies and science and so forth. They’ll know that there is no one formula. They’ll start to write and think critically about their writing and paragraphs instead of just trying to fit a mold. Some kids that have not been strong writers at all and are usually the first ones to finish, they have written some wonderful, wonderful 5-6 page long papers” (L. Brown, personal communication, December 4, 2009).  

“It’s getting them prepared for when they get in high school and they have to write reports. I mean, last year, actually, we did a lot of informational reports, and sometimes they were asking for them. Some people didn’t believe me, but they [the students] wanted to know [if they could do a report]” (G. Jones, personal communication, December 8, 2009). |
“It makes students more accountable. Like with me, making students aware that, ‘Okay, I come in science, and I still have to use the skills I use in English’ (S. Murray, personal communication, January 6, 2010).

WAC, as presented in the North Carolina Writing Assessment System, relieves pressures induced by the previous assessment

“When the writing assessment was the one and done deal, I put a whole lot more stress on writing than I do now because I basically based it off of a writing test. When kids came to 4th grade, it had been etched into their brains ‘you need to be ready for the writing test.’ It’s big, major. But now, you know, it seems it’s not as pressurized with the four different ones, the 2 on-demand then the 2 content (D. Hatcher, personal communication, January 8, 2010).

“I think it takes some of the pressure off of them. That might sound kind of ironic since they are doing it four times, but I think it’s more informal. By saying, ‘we’ll do one now, we’ll do one later,’ it don’t make it sound like such a big deal” (G. Jones, personal communication, December 8, 2009).

“The new assessment shows them that there are different methods of writing, and it shows them the process, which is what writing is all about – writing and revision. The state test had you sit down and write something and you never even went back to check for mistakes because of time. So, I really think this one allows them to explore various types of writing and work on making changes (L. Brown, personal communication, December 4, 2009).

Support for Teachers to Implement WAC

In answering the third guiding question considering teacher support for implementation of WAC, one theme emerged from the one-on-one interviews. The theme is presented below with supporting quotes.

Table 4.3 – Themes Emerging From Guiding Question 3

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<th>Themes</th>
<th>Supporting Quotes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The onetime online module provided for in professional development was not utilized to its full potential because it was too</td>
<td>“I don’t even remember it” (S. Murray, personal communication, January 6, 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>“The online training from when…? I don’t [think it was beneficial]. Why would a math teacher have to do it? They don’t understand. It was little bit too detailed to me. There was a lot of overkill on it” (D. Hatcher, personal communication, January 8, 2010).</td>
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broad or it was not
taken seriously by all teachers and/or administrators.

“I think, maybe, it just needs some more emphasis put on it as far as other content area teachers’ grading. As a language arts teacher, I am very interested in it and others are not” (L. Brown, personal communication, December 4, 2009).

“I had no problem with it, other than finding time to do it. Well, I know, if I was coming in a new teacher, I would probably be freaking out. The biggest thing is the load” (G. Jones, personal communication, December 8, 2009).

“Professional development needs to be focused on more” (L. Brown, personal communication, December 4, 2009).

Teacher’s Experience Implementing WAC

In answering the fourth guiding question considering regarding teacher challenges in implementing WAC, as well as how they overcome these challenges, three challenges emerged from the one-on-one interviews. Each challenge is presented below with supporting quotes.

Table 4.4 – Themes Emerging From Guiding Question 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Supporting Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pressures to meet state mandates are increasing among 4th and 7th grade language arts teachers.</td>
<td>“In eighth grade [content areas other than language arts], honestly, I really don’t think they are writing” (L. Brown, personal communication, December 4, 2009).</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Some teachers are unaware of how to specifically integrate writing into their content area.</td>
<td>“Honestly, I think that you could incorporate writing in every subject area, but it’s much more difficult in math, I think. I mean, yes, I can incorporate it some” (C. Teachey, personal communication, December 8, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Focused, meaningful professional development is needed.</td>
<td>“I don’t want to step on any toes, but a lot of it depends on where it came from K-3, before they got to me” (D. Smith, personal communication, January 8, 2010).</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>“I just don’t like change” (S. Murray, personal communication, January 6, 2010).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

Data from this study provides insights to how teachers implement WAC in their content areas and concerns that need attention for this assessment to prove fruitful. The data expressed the amount of pressure that is placed on current fourth grade and seventh grade language arts teachers to meet the WAC mandates. However, data showed that content area teachers that regularly do not teach writing are unaware of WAC strategies and implementation procedures necessary to incorporate writing in their content area. This lack of knowledge in WAC and unwillingness to implement vital strategies leads to a writing system that is not fulfilling the goals and objectives set forth. Further, the research analyzed the benefits of this approach to students in regards to the North Carolina Writing System; included in the data, it is shown that teachers who teach language arts but have a background in another content area are more likely to use integration than teachers with a background in only one content area.

In chapter five, the researcher presents the implications of the findings, the study’s limitations, and the researcher’s recommendations for further researcher.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

Chapter four presented the findings from the research on writing across the curriculum, in essence of the newly mandated North Carolina Writing System. The findings presented teacher concerns, student benefits, professional development, and teacher assumptions. This chapter will discuss the study’s limitations, implications, recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

Implications of the Findings

The findings presented in Chapter 4 have meaning for the school of study in this research. The school involved needs to make changes to the implementation of the WAC approach in order for the North Carolina Writing Assessment System to prove successful. As for the school, this study denotes significant changes that need to be made to the implementation process of this assessment system, along with WAC. Teachers across all grade levels are not being held accountable for teaching writing as provided for in WAC. However, to ensure success among students and create an environment conducive to learning, this school needs to look closely at possible measures they can take to enforce a WAC approach. Whether it be grade level meetings or meaningful professional development that supplies teachers with tools to implement writing in different content areas, it is vital to this school to rethink its plan of action for meeting the requirements of the North Carolina Writing Assessment System in regards to WAC.

This data can also prove useful to North Carolina state lawmakers. The North Carolina Writing Assessment System was implemented in 2008, and, as with any new program, changes must occur during the piloting period to ensure that goals are being met and students are benefiting from the program. In this case, the teacher respondents felt that students have
benefited, but different perspectives of WAC have become apparent. It is important that lawmakers ensure that all teachers can not only define WAC, but also use different approaches in the classroom to meet the mandates laid forth in the writing assessment.

WAC promotes authentic writing tasks that students engage in to make writing real, meaningful, and purposeful (Sorenson, 1991). The implications stated in this section hold value and have an impact on all stakeholders in the North Carolina Educational System.

**Recommendations**

It is the recommendation of the researcher to make WAC a more stringent part of all content areas. A larger emphasis needs to be placed on writing in the content areas in order for the North Carolina Writing System to be successful. Professional development that identifies the meaning of writing across the curriculum, along with strategies to implement the program, is a vital part of this new writing assessment. It is important that teachers be provided with professional development opportunities to teach the basics of scoring such assessments, along with practice sessions. Perhaps it would be beneficial to receive the same training that assessors in the previous writing assessment received. Such professional development would be more thorough and articulate. To necessitate professional development, it is first imperative to provide professional development to content area teachers that offer instructional strategies for incorporating writing into their content area. Next, teachers in all content areas must be held accountable for teaching writing, just as they are held accountable for teaching their content area curriculum. Pressures from state mandated test must be lessened to make available time for teachers to use writing activities in their content areas. Until this happens, it is unlikely that WAC will thrive and address the goals set forth in its legislation.

**Limitations**
The following limitations are apparent in this study. This data was collected from only five teachers in one small school in a rural community. Because the data was collected through one-on-one interviews, this data offered a true look into the perspectives of teachers, yet the responses were dependent on the subjective perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of the participants. An additional limitation of the study was the selection of participants. Participants were selected based on accessibility of the researcher, as well as based on the locale. This school only included five teachers in 4th and 7th grade combined. Ideally, the study would have included a more diverse population of teacher respondents from different school districts in North Carolina.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study might be replicated using a larger number of participants in several schools across the state of North Carolina. It would also be beneficial for future research to include teachers from different ethnic backgrounds within schools that did not consist of a student population that was predominantly Caucasian. A more detailed study of students’ work would indicate if WAC is indeed improving their writing skills. Finally, this study may be more comprehensive if the researcher included students as study participants to validate the assumptions of the teachers.

Summary

This research study allowed the researcher to seek understanding of teachers’ perspectives towards WAC. Although WAC is valued by the participants in this study, data indicates that teachers in all content areas studied are not utilizing this approach as it was intended. In conclusion, teachers in all content areas believe that the new writing assessment
program implemented by the state of North Carolina is beneficial to students and takes a more comprehensive approach to determining effective writing skills among students.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Teacher Interview Protocol

1. How would you describe the writing skills of your students? What are you doing to help or sustain their proficiency?
2. Recently, North Carolina introduced a new approach for the writing assessment which involves writing across the curriculum. How is this new program working for you and your students? (advantages and disadvantages)
3. Describe the activities you use to incorporate writing into your content area. What activities work best for this new assessment?
4. How do you assess writing in your content area?
5. Explain how your writing instruction and student skills now compare to your writing instruction and student skills prior to this new assessment? How do they differ?
6. What resources do you need to support you in this area? (Probe: NC Writing Assessment Online Interactive Training System)
7. What do you think it will take to maintain or improve this new writing assessment program?