



CARREADER

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Julia Kara-Soteriou and Catherine Kurkjian,
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About the Publication

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***CARReader* Call for Manuscripts**

We invite all those interested in literacy research to submit articles for publication. We request scholarly articles, grounded in theory and research that are of interest to both researchers and teachers. We invite a wide range of submissions focusing on critical issues, current research and/or instructional strategies as they relate to literacy issues on the national level and the state of Connecticut.

- reviews of the literature
- graduate /field studies
- thesis statement
- action research
- position statements

The *CARReader* is a juried publication that is published once a year in the fall. Its contents do not necessarily reflect or imply advocacy or endorsement by CARR, its officers, or members. Inquiries and submissions should be directed to the *CARReader*, Lynda M. Valerie, Department of Reading and Language Arts, School of Education and Professional Studies, Central Connecticut State University, 1615 Stanley Street, New Britain, CT 06050 or sending an email to Valerie_lym@ccsu.edu

Guidelines for Publication

Publications are limited to 2800 words or fewer and must include a title, author, statement of purpose, review of the literature, methodology, summary of findings, discussion and/or recommendations, conclusions, and references. Manuscripts should be typed double-spaced with ample margins for reviewer comments. All manuscripts should be formatted using APA 5th edition. The author needs to submit both a hard copy manuscript and a diskette copy (or e-mail version) compatible with Microsoft Word 2000. To be considered for the Fall 2009 volume, the manuscript must be submitted for review before May 1, 2009.

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Editor's Note
Lynda M. Valerie

When I am at a national or regional literacy conference or meeting, I usually think that I'm lucky to work in Connecticut. Although not without areas of needed improvement, most notably the achievement gap between the two Connecticuts, focusing on literacy education continues to be a priority in our state. Many school districts now require teachers to conduct action research as part and parcel of being a reflective practitioner. When teachers conduct research, they are stepping back from the front of the classroom for a longer perspective in order to examine what effective practices with their students. Schools where teacher inquiry is encouraged and supported benefit from these reflective inquiries. Professional learning communities emerge and the possibilities and, most importantly, our students flourish.

From talking with colleagues and graduate students, I know that there are many educators like Aggie Burns and Keely Edwards who are active participants in their individual professional development. Professional development is defined as, not the in-services that we attend for obligatory CEUs but, what we each select and actively pursue to improve the quality of our teaching. I have to then wonder why the *CARReader* is not overwhelmed with submissions of teacher inquiry projects and studies from the hundreds of fine literacy educators in CT! So, spend the few hours to prepare the results of your study for submission and tell us the story of your literacy trials, tribulations and triumphs!



President's Message
Ann Marie Mulready

With this issue of the *CARReader*, our organization continues its tradition of contributing to the literacy research community in Connecticut. The support of C.A.R.R. has expanded opportunities for literacy professionals to conduct investigations in the classroom, across districts, and statewide. Every approach expands our knowledge of literacy practice and promise and ultimately informs educators from the local to the state level. Our last major investigation, summarized in this edition, "Connecticut Teachers Knowledge, Needs, and Expertise in Teaching the New Literacies of the Internet and other Technologies", has been cited by other researchers from across the country and presented at multiple state and national conferences.

It is appropriate then, that I thank our membership for its continued dedication and assure them of their impact on literacy knowledge in Connecticut. I must also thank Lynda Valerie and the Editorial Board, Julie Birch, Jill Martini, Judy Stone Moeller, and Marie Tishio for the hours dedicated to publishing this volume. Finally, without the on-going and long-term support of the CARR Board, nothing we have accomplished would be possible.



Can Topic Choice Positively Influence Motivational and Performance Levels of Fourth-Grade Boys?

Agnes M. Burns

Curriculum Specialist, Brookfield, CT.

Introduction

Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, America's public schools have been challenged to demonstrate "...the four principles of President George W. Bush's education reform plan: stronger accountability for results, expanded flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work" (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). As many classroom teachers and administrators anxiously await scores which prove that adequate yearly progress in reading, writing, and mathematics has been achieved, they are also looking ahead at what they can do to further improve scores—especially in those populations that traditionally perform below the expected levels.

Incremental gains have been established so that by the year 2014 all children will, ideally, be reading at the proficient level by the end of third grade. Despite the aggressive intentions of legislators, international, national, and state-mandated testing has consistently shown several gaps in literacy achievement. There is one subgroup that has unexpectedly emerged: boys. Classroom teachers and researchers are aggressively searching for answers on how to address the gender gap in literacy.

As Freedman pointed out "Gendered results on high-stakes testing will require a thoughtful response from school districts. Additional research is required" (Freedman, 2003, p. 11). This paper will report on how choice of reading topics impacted a small group of fourth-grade boys. The results from this small study may impact only a small community, but it is a start.

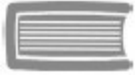
The statistics that reflect what is happening in our classrooms and our world include these from an article titled "The Trouble with Boys,"

written by Peg Tyre, in *Newsweek* magazine's January 30, 2006 issue:

- Girls ages 3 to 5 are 5% more likely than boys to be read to at home at least three times a week.
- Girls are 10% more likely than boys to recognize words by sight by the spring of first grade.
- Boys ages 5 to 12 are 60% more likely than girls to have repeated at least one grade.
- Girls' reading scores improve 6% more than boys' between kindergarten and third grade.
- First- to fifth- grade boys are more likely than girls to have disabilities such as emotional disturbances, learning problems or speech impediments.
- Fourth-grade girls score 3% higher on standardized reading tests than boys.
- Fourth-grade girls score 12% higher on writing tests than boys. (p. 47)

These statistics are from the U.S. Department of Education, Centers for Disease Control.

Later, in the same article, Margaret Spellings, U.S. Secretary of Education, states: "This widening achievement gap has profound implications for the economy, society, families and democracy" (Tyre, 2006 p.46). What has been happening in our classrooms is that as a child moves up from grade to grade, those who are struggling face increasingly more difficult curriculum. The skills needed to decode and comprehend text literally and more importantly, inferentially and critically, are dependent on so many factors including prior knowledge of phonics, vocabulary and grammar. If these skills



are not developed at an early age, frustration can set in and inevitably, self-esteem plummets.

Major Research Theories

There are two major theories that attempt to account for the literacy gap in boys. One of them is called the Social Constructivist Theory. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) advocate that social contexts influence how boys perform. They condensed the flow theory of psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and applied it to boys' literacy developing these four concepts:

- A sense of control and competence,
- A challenge that requires an appropriate level of skill,
- Clear goals and feedback, and,
- A focus on the immediate experience.

Boys want to be in charge and they want others to see them as capable. They don't want a task that is too difficult, because they will not be able to complete it and will lose their strong and capable image. They want to know how they are doing- **now**. As long as a clear description of an appropriate task is given, boys will attempt to complete it. They want the learning to relate to their lives at this time, not some far distant future. They live and learn in the here and now.

The other school of thought, Biological Determinism, is based on the work of Michael Gurian, Kelly King, and Kathy Stevens (2005, 2006). They believe that boys' brains are "hard-wired" differently than girls' brains. They illustrate this through electronic images of brains. Their observations and interviews have led them to discover more than one hundred structural differences between male and female brains. One of their important conclusions is that boys' brains have more developed spatial-mechanical functioning, while girls' brains emphasize verbal-emotive processing. Another interesting finding is that there is less cross-hemisphere communication in boys' minds and therefore, they experience difficulty in multi-tasking.

Although these two theories differ in how to explain the learning differences between the genders, they share many of the same implications for classroom teachers.

The Purpose of the Statement

This study will attempt to explore elementary-school age male participant performance in literacy when given a choice of topic, a consistently mentioned, significant factor in many studies to date.

Statement of Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: It was hypothesized that there is a correlation between choice of reading topic and the motivation and engagement of male fourth-grade students.

Corollary to this hypothesis are two subordinate hypotheses:

Subordinate Hypothesis 1: It was hypothesized that boys would favor websites and discussion during their literacy learning.

Subordinate Hypothesis 2: It was further hypothesized that due to their competitive nature, the boys will want to "move up in rank" to demonstrate the successful completion of a task.

Methodology

Participants

The participants were seven fourth-grade boys enrolled at an urban, public school in Torrington, Connecticut where I teach. They were a convenience and purposive sample. The boys ranged in age from nine years and seven months to eleven years and five months. They were available to meet at a mutually available time and all were interested in the topic of World War II. None of the boys had issues that interfered with their learning, such as special education or second language concerns; however, they were a heterogeneous group. Of the seven boys, one was

African-American, one was Hispanic, and the others were White.

Several boys had approached me about doing a group focused on World War II. They were available on Friday afternoons from 2:30 to 3:00 while other students are out for chorus. After meeting with a small group and determining their deep interest about this topic, I agreed to arrange for a special reading club called the Forbes' Flying Tigers. (Forbes is the name of our school and the Flying Tigers was a group of American mercenaries who went to Burma in order to protect the Burma Road, which allowed supplies to reach China during World War II.) Our club meetings started in mid-April and ran through the end of the school year. We actually held our meetings twice a week to accommodate the boys' desire to learn more about World War II. The second meeting time was during a lunch period. Many literacy activities were done during this period including the necessary testing, a written response assignment, website investigations, and literature circle discussions. I outlined a variety of activities to use for observation and note taking. Each boy received a folder to store materials, a camouflage pencil, and a rank sheet. We planned a culminating activity for the end of the year, which was our Pearl Harbor Wax Museum. At the end of the year, I distributed a questionnaire to the students and their parents, which provided additional feedback.

The classroom teachers indicated that this group of boys was underperforming. They did not appear to be motivated and engaged during the literacy block, especially in the area of writing.

Although I am aware of other factors that might have influenced the results in this study, I carefully considered several such as age, DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) levels, and their classroom environment and determined that they had no influence over my findings.

Instrumentation-Quantitative

Several means of collecting data were used. A Degrees of Reading Power Test (DRP) was given to assess comprehension. The Degrees of Reading Power (DRP Test) was chosen as one of

the quantitative instruments for this research study. It was chosen, in part, because of its ease of administration and familiarity to the participants. The DRP is one of the assessments used in the Connecticut Mastery Test battery. In addition, it is widely accepted as a means of assessing students' comprehension. The forms used for this study were the J-8 and J-7. Scoring was done manually by the researcher and will be reported as raw scores, DRP units, and percentile. These scores will be compared to the Connecticut Mastery DRP results from spring, 2006. In addition, as a baseline, Connecticut Mastery Scores from 2006 were used.

Results from administering the MARSII — Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory — were compared to the results from The DRP. A correlation between the results from the MARSII will be attempted to determine if there is a relationship between performances on the DRP.

Instrumentation-Qualitative

Qualitative measures include: anecdotal notes, observations, questionnaires for students and parents, and a written response piece. Conversations with classroom teachers, and a variety of assignments given during data collection also were considered.

Anecdotal notes, observations, and teacher input will be maintained to record comments for the purpose of determining levels of motivation and engagement as well as attendance and whether assignments were completed and the quality of the work.

Results

Instrumentation-Quantitative Quantitative

Six out of seven boys took a Degrees of Reading Power test, Form J-8, on April 25, 2007, which was shortly after the World War Two Club (Forbes Flying Tigers) meetings started. The seventh boy did not join the group until significantly after this test was administered.



Another DRP Test, Form J-7, was given on June 12, 2007. Both tests were administered in my office with no interruptions. Directions were given just as they are in the administration of the DRP during the Connecticut Mastery Tests

(CMT). The results from the CMT Degrees of Reading Power test for the spring of 2006, the DRP from April 2007, and the final test from June 2007 are reported in Table 1.

Name:	Spring, 2006 CMT	April, 2007 Form J-8			Change (In DRP Units)	June, 2007 Form J-7			Change
	DRP Units at .75	Raw Score Total Items= 56	DRP Units at .75	Percentile		Raw Score Total Items = 70	DRP Units at .75	Percentile	Change
1	65	52	72	94	+7	52	61	79	-11
2	53	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A*
3	56	45	59	75	+3	49	58	73	-1
4	52	41	54	63	+2	36	46	41	-8
5	65	50	67	89	+2	56	65	86	-2
6	N/A	39	52	57	+9	49	58	73	+6
7	43	39	52	57	+9	37	47	43	-5

* #2 was unable to finish the test.

These DRP results indicate that these are a heterogeneous group. Their percentile scores for the April administration range from a high of 94 to a low of 57. These boys are capable readers, but according to their cluster teachers, do not perform up to their potential. When the scores are compared to the results from the CMT last spring, in each instance the scores increased. The increase ranged from a low of 2 points to a high of 9 points. These scores indicate that although there is capability, motivation may be the reason for the lack of daily higher-level performance. The boys did not perform well in June. The percentages ranged from a low of 41 to a high of 86. There was a greater point spread in the DRP unit scores: 46 to 65. The J-7 is a more challenging test and I believe several factors might account for the lower overall scores.

On June 1st, 2007, the MARSII was given to all seven participants. This easy-to-administer survey measures how often a reader uses appropriate strategies while reading. It consists of 30 statements that are rated on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means, "I never do this." to 5 which is equivalent to "I always do this." In order to insure consistency and accuracy, I read and clarified the statements. The surveys were hand-scored. The responses are grouped into three categories: Global Reading Strategies, Problem-Solving Strategies, and Support Reading Strategies. There is also an overall score. A score of 3.5 suggests that a reader uses this type of strategy often while reading. Low usage is 2.4 and under. The middle indicates that sometimes a type of strategy is employed, but its frequency is inconsistent. The following chart, Table 2, shows the results for all participants.

Name:	Global Reading Strategies	Problem Solving Strategies	Support Reading Strategies	Overall Reading Strategies
1	3.6	4.5	3.3	3.8
2	2.2	1.6	2.1	2.0
3	3.0	3.9	3.3	3.3
4	3.5	2.9	3.7	3.4
5	1.3	1.5	1.0	1.3
6	3.7	3.3	3.7	3.6
7	2.2	2.8	3.9	2.9

In order to compare the results of the MARSİ with the Degrees of Reading Power results, I created the following informational chart (Table 3). I used the following criteria to determine if there was a correlation: a score of 3.5 or above combined with a DRP score of 85 or greater would demonstrate a relationship that shows frequent use of reading strategies would result in proficient scores on the DRP. A correlation could also exist at the other end of the spectrum. A score

of 2.4 or lower combined with a DRP score of below 50 would indicate that low use of reading strategies would lead to a deficient performance on the DRP. MARSİ averages from 2.5 to 3.4 with DRP scores falling in the range of 51 to 84 would indicate that inconsistent use of reading strategies is indicative of an average DRP score. In four out of six cases, there was a correlation. The significance of using reading strategies does pay off in terms of increasing comprehension.

Name:	DRP Score	MARSİ Average	Correlation
1	94	3.8	Yes
2	N/A	2.0	Undetermined
3	75	3.3	Yes
4	63	3.4	Yes
5	89	1.3	No
6	77	3.6	No
7	57	2.9	Yes

Qualitative

Attendance statistics illustrate an enthusiastic willingness to attend the Forbes' Flying Tigers Club meetings. From mid-April until June 6th there were seventeen meetings. **No one missed a meeting!** On one occasion, I had to change a meeting from a Wednesday to Tuesday. Everyone remembered. There was one exception: one boy

missed a meeting, due to the fact that he was on vacation the last week of May with his family in Florida.

Six out of seven of the boys returned their questionnaires. Table 4 below indicates how they responded to the question regarding what activities they would label as favorites.



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
<i>Kids Discover</i>							X	1
Journal entry with questions								0
PowerPoint timeline		X						1
Pearl Harbor websites/ writing with point of view	X	X		X				3
Reading and discussing the Flying Tigers					X			1
Life in the U.S. reading/ discussion								0
D-Day website investigation	X			X		X	X	4
<u>Baseball Saved Us</u> literature circle discussion						X		1
Other					X			1

Summary

All three hypotheses have been proven to have an impact on closing the literacy achievement gap for the boys in this study. Although this was a small sample, it represents a starting point. I believe that researchers were on target with their findings and that we need to continue to test them to verify what works and what doesn't. We need to share this information with our colleagues and encourage and support their efforts on behalf of all students, but especially the boys.

Implications for Education

As mentioned several times throughout this paper, NCLB is having an impact on every public school classroom in the United States. The stakes are high. I wonder though, if too much time is being spent preparing students for these tests rather than on high quality instruction. Are we pumping in support services to those students who are just below goal at the expense of our struggling students and gifted students? Are we sacrificing our ability to teach based on current best practices as determined by the research, to teach a rigorous academic curriculum in order to achieve adequate yearly progress? These questions don't have easy answers, but the future of our country is dependent on how we, as educators, answer them.

Implications to Teaching and Learning

After careful consideration of the research I did, I realize that although there is a very real gap in the literacy abilities of males, teachers do have some tactics that they can use.

- In trying to engage boys in reading activities, consider Csikzentmihalyi's "flow theory": provide a sense of control and competence for the boys, challenge them at a level that is appropriate, give them clear goals and feedback as soon as possible and focus on the immediate use of the information they are reading.
- Invite male role models into your classroom (especially if you are a female) to read or work with groups of students.
- "Frontload" as much as you can so that the boys will come to realize what is expected of them- no surprises.
- Minimize verbal directions because boys will drift off.
- Try to implement gender as a basis for determining reading groups occasionally.
- Tap into the media that boys are reading outside of school by bringing it into school: Internet, rap lyrics, magazines, newspapers, etc.

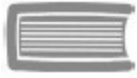
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- Start at the lowest grade levels and continue to engage boys by noting their interests and have them read materials that are engaging- try the “My Bag” activity to get to know your students, especially the boys.
 - Use technology as much as you can in your lessons.
 - Establish a “Guys Read” shelf filled with books that appeal to boys- we have bins for our favorite authors, by genre and by guided reading levels, why not create one for the boys in your class?
 - Involve parents in understanding that they have a very important role to play in their son’s education. Give them specific suggestions to do at home- i.e., sign their son’s reading log and ask questions about what he read from a sheet you have provided.
 - Bring in members of the community to encourage engagement. The NBA (National Basketball Association) has a program called “Read to Achieve” and sends out athletes and trainers to schools (http://www.nba.com/celtics/community/read_to_achieve.html).
 - Check out Jon Scieszka’s website: www.GuysRead.com for recommended books by age level and other cool things- bookmarks, posters, etc.
 - Make reading more “visible” by using the SRI’s symbolic story representations suggested by Wilhelm and Smith.
 - Bring in local male authors and illustrators to talk with all students.
 - Allow boys to draw what they are reading about and describe what’s happening in words without always having to use their

Reader’s Response Journal to write it down.

- Appeal to their multiple intelligences by giving them chances to perform or visually show what a story is about.

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An Analysis of Writing Performance in Grades 1, 3, and 5

Keely Edwards

Abstract

This study examined writing samples in grades 1, 3, and 5 for organization, imagination and content focus, word choice and sentence fluency. Participants in this study were students (n= 93) in grades 1, 3, and 5 that completed an October, January and May writing sample. The students were asked to write a narrative or expository piece according to a prompt. Results revealed significant progress was made in the student writing across the grade levels comparing grades 1, 3, and 5, however, few students scored at the exemplary stage. Slower progress was made within a grade level. The results showed the need for more explicit instruction and broadening background knowledge to develop the writer's imaginative skills.

Objectives

The objective of this research is to analyze student writing performance in grades 1, 3, and 5, noting strengths and areas for improvement. The main questions of this study, were the following:

- In narrative text, do the students use good organization for a developed story structure?
- Do the students show imaginative ideas while writing narrative text?
- In expository writing, do the students use a high quality of organization?
- Do the students show thought and creativity while presenting ideas in expository writing?

Review of Literature

Writing is a form of communication. "Literacy is a process that begins well before the elementary grades and continues into adulthood, if not throughout life" (Tompkins, 2006, p. 84). Adults use some form of writing daily. "In school, writing is one of the most necessary – and most evaluated – skills" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). The structure of writing should be taught in school. "When children first come to school, they have lots of ideas to share and stories to tell. Most young children tend to communicate these things in a stream of consciousness manner, saying whatever pops into their heads. Their writing often sounds like their speech" (Parsons, 2005, p.1). Organization is a writing trait that needs to be taught explicitly to early writers. "Because fiction stories and personal narratives are made up of moments, sequencing those moments can be a central means for organization and revision" (Lane, 1993, p. 84).

Children need to write everyday, as well as view the teacher writing. This modeling demonstrates not only good writing strategies but the value in writing. "Children need to understand that writing – like reading, tennis, and piano– can be improved by instruction, by practicing specific writing strategies, and just by writing" (Cunningham & Allington, 2003, p. 24). Teachers can also demonstrate rich language through the use of literature. "Have them read and compare the language and images used by this writer to the ones they used in their stories. After they have finished reading the story, discuss specific examples of the language used and the images created by the author" (Cunningham & Allington, 2003, p. 131).

Students should be encouraged to use their imagination. Suspense and details help to create an imaginative writing piece. "Rich detail is the end result of an inquisitive mind (Lane, 1993, p.

29). All of these pieces together complete a finished effective writing product. “The use of writing as a vehicle for expression, persuasion, and learning is essential to the acquisition of written language competence” (Lipson & Wixson, 2003, p. 578).

Methodology

Research Participants

The participants of this study were students from a Title I elementary school in a small urban district. A majority of the students received free breakfast and free or reduced lunch. These students were in grades 1, 3, and 5. The sample consists of students who completed a writing piece in October, January and May. The students completed the writing sample in their classroom within a period of 45 minutes. This assessment was given on the same day across the grade levels. No distinction was made between regular, special or ELL education students.

Texts

Students in the first and third grades received three narrative writing prompts. Fifth grade students received three prompts for expository writing.

Traits

There were four main areas that were analyzed in these writing pieces as noted in Table 1. The first trait was organization. This trait includes the introduction and conclusion, sequencing of details and transitions. The next trait explored was imagination and content focus in the narrative writing and creative ideas and content focus in the expository writing. This trait includes the focus and approach to the topic as well as the story idea. The third trait was word choice. This trait contains the use of vocabulary to enrich the writing. The final trait was sentence fluency. This trait involves the beginnings, length, structure, and overall fluency of the sentences.

Table 1: Writing Traits

Trait	Questions
Organization	Did the writer link the introduction and conclusion? Did they use transitions to tie the paper together? Was the sequencing of details logical and effective?
Imagination	Is the focus clear and definite? Is the story idea unusual and imaginative? Did the writer use creative ideas?
Word Choice	Did the writer use precise and vivid language to create a clear picture in the reader’s mind? Was the dialog natural? Was their original phrasing or reflective thoughts or ideas? Was there an effective use of figurative language? Were the words well chosen and convey the intended message?
Sentence Fluency	Did the writing have a natural flow and rhythm when read aloud? Were the sentences varied in beginnings length and structure?

Procedure

These common assessments were administered to students to develop a baseline of student achievement. The data is used to help teachers plan for further instruction. It indicates whether

students have mastered these skills or if there is a deficiency in these areas. The students completed the writing pieces over a period of one school year. A rubric was developed for each of the three genres of writing. The rubrics were adapted from 6+1 trait writing to serve the purpose of this study.



The 6+1 trait writing rubrics are very specific. The purpose of this study was to focus on the organization and imagination/creative ideas and content focus. Word choice and sentence fluency are two other important parts to a writing piece so a rubric was developed with these traits in mind. The prompts were scored by two scorers to provide for inter rater reliability. Unequal scores were then discussed between the scores to agree on a common score. The scores for each grade level were charted according to the trait and month the sample was taken. From these charts, bar graphs were developed and used to analyze the results.

Results

The first question of the study was: In narrative writing do the students use good organization for a developed story structure? To answer this question the narrative rubric for organization was used (see Table 2). Table 3 shows the actual scores for each month across the grade levels of 1, 3, and 5 for the trait organization. The primary results are summarized in the following discussion.

	Emerging Oct./Jan./May	Developing Oct./Jan./May	Accomplished Oct./Jan./May	Exemplary Oct./ Jan./May
1 st n=32	27/13/10	5/16/18	0/3/4	0/0/0
3 rd n=32	9/12/4	18/16/25	5/4/3	0/0/0
5 th n= 29	8/7/3	16/17/16	5/5/10	0/0/0

The results showed that in first grade most students were in the emerging stage, although there was an increase in January and May in the developing stage. In the third grade for organization students stayed at the developing stage, although in January there was a decrease in the developing stage and increase in the emerging stage compared to October and May.

The second question in this study was: Do the students show imaginative ideas while writing narrative text? To test this I used a narrative rubric to examine the imagination and content focus trait. Table 4 shows the actual scores for

each month in grades 1, 3, and 5 for the trait imagination/creative ideas and content focus. The results for this study showed that in first grade looking at the trait imagination and content focus that most of the students stayed in the developing stage, although there was a slight increase in the accomplished stage. In third grade for imagination and content focus the results showed that the students stayed in the developing stage, although again in January there was a decrease in the developing stage and increase in the emerging stage compared to October and May.

	Emerging Oct./Jan./May	Developing Oct./Jan./May	Accomplished Oct./Jan./May	Exemplary Oct./ Jan./May
1 st n=32	21/17/13	10/14/12	1/1/7	0/0/0
3 rd n=32	10/15/11	19/14/16	3/3/5	0/0/0
5 th n= 29	11/7/4	15/22/20	3/0/5	0/0/0

Table 2: Narrative Writing Rubric

Name:		Title:			Date:	
Trait	1 Emerging	2 Developing	3 Accomplished	4 Exemplary	Score	
<i>Organization</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and/or conclusion lack focus. • Sequencing of details is not clear. • Transitions are not evident. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and conclusion. • Attempts to establish focus. • Sequencing of details is limited. • Transitions are limited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective introduction and conclusion are clearly linked and establish focus. • Sequencing of details is logical. • Transitions attempt to tie the ideas of the paper together. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memorable introduction and conclusion are clearly linked and establish focus. • Sequencing of details is effective and logical. • Transitions effectively tie the ideas of the paper together. 		
<i>Imagination & Content Focus</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach is common. • Story idea is uninteresting. • Focus on topic is not clearly defined. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh approach to topic is attempted yet lacks support which will aid the reader's understanding. • Story idea is generic. • Focus on topic is somewhat defined. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh (uncommon) approach adds to the reader's understanding. • Story idea is interesting. • Focus on topic is clear. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh (uncommon) approach to topic holds the reader's attention. • Story idea is unusual and imaginative. • Focus on topic is clear and definite. 		
<i>Word Choice</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited vocabulary searches for words to create a picture in the reader's mind. • Verb and noun choice is rather general. Adjectives and phrases lack definition. • Language choice and phrasing is inappropriate, repetitive or lacks meaning. • Dialogue, if used, is limited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ordinary word choice attempts to create a picture in the readers mind. • Verbs, nouns adjectives and phrases are adequate. • Language choice and phrasing lack inspiration.. • Dialogue, if used, sounds forced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correct, adequate word choice creates a clear picture in the reader's mind. • Lively verbs, specific nouns, and appropriate adjectives and phrases add to the meaning. • Some colorful language and unusual phrasing encourage reflection. • Dialogue, if used, sounds appropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Precise, vivid, natural language creates a clear and complete picture in the reader's mind. • Powerful verbs, precise nouns, appropriate adjectives, and phrases enhance meaning. • Original phrasing and memorable language prompt reflective thoughts and insights. • Dialogue, if used, sounds natural. 		
<i>Sentence Fluency</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentences contain unnecessary words that detract from the meaning. • Sentences offer little or no variety in beginnings, length and structure. • Sentences lack rhythm or pattern when read aloud. • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentences contain some unnecessary words: however, meaning is fairly clear. • Sentences offer some variety in beginnings, length and structure. • Sentences follow a predictable pattern and rhythm when read aloud. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentences contain words that are necessary for the meaning to be clear. • Sentences vary in beginnings, length and structure. • Most sentences sound smooth and rhythmic when read aloud. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentences contain words that are relevant so the meaning is enhanced. • Sentences vary in beginnings, length and structure. • Sentences sound smooth and rhythmic when read aloud: they invite expressive reading. 		

Scorer:

Date:

Total Score:



The third question in this study was: In expository writing do the students use a high quality of organization? To answer this question the expository rubric for organization was used (See Table 5). The results are as followed. In fifth grade for organization most students stayed in the developing stage with growth in May in the accomplished stage.

The last question in this study was: Do the students show thought and creativity while presenting ideas in expository writing? To investigate this question I used an expository rubric looking at the trait creative ideas and content focus. The results of this study showed that in fifth grade for this trait the students stayed in the developing stage. There was a decrease from October to January in the accomplished stage but there was growth in that stage in May.

As a part of this study I also examined two important aspects of writing, word choice and sentence fluency. These two traits were included on both the narrative rubric as well as the expository rubric. Table 6 shows the actual scores for grades 1, 3, and 5 for each of the three months. The results showed that in the first grade that most students were in the emerging stage in word choice with a slight increase in January and May in the developing and accomplished stage. In the third grade for word choice the results showed that the students stayed in the developing stage. The results showed that in fifth grade the students also stayed in the developing stage for word choice. In fifth grade there was a decrease in scores in the accomplished stage in January but there was growth in that stage in May.

Table 6: Word Choice

	Emerging Oct./Jan./May	Developing Oct./Jan./May	Accomplished Oct./Jan./May	Exemplary Oct./ Jan./May
1 st n=32	27/12/10	4/17/15	1/3/7	0/0/0
3 rd n=32	3/7/7	24/19/22	5/6/3	0/0/0
5 th n= 29	9/8/4	16/20/21	4/1/4	0/0/0

The results of the study examining sentence fluency (Table 7) showed that first grade students had a great increase in the developing stage and the majority of students stayed in this stage. For the trait sentence fluency in the third grade

students also stayed in the developing stage. The results showed that for sentence fluency in fifth grade students stayed in the developing stage. There was also a significant increase in the accomplished stage in May.

Table 7: Sentence Fluency

	Emerging Oct./Jan./May	Developing Oct./Jan./May	Accomplished Oct./Jan./May	Exemplary Oct./ Jan./May
1 st n=32	30/7/6	2/23/24	0/2/2	0/0/0
3 rd n=32	8/9/3	20/16/22	4/7/7	0/0/0
5 th n= 29	5/3/1	20/21/14	4/5/14	0/0/0

Table 5: Expository Writing Rubric

Name:		Title:			Date:	
Trait	1 Emerging	2 Developing	3 Accomplished	4 Exemplary	Score	
<i>nizati Orga on</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The writing needs more structure. The introduction and/ or conclusion may be attempted. Developmental paragraphs are limited in focus and may be confusing. Transitions need improvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The writing is fairly organized. The introduction is obvious. Each developmental paragraph attempts to address a specific topic. The closing is attempted. Transitions are limited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The writing is clearly organized. The introduction is inviting. Each developmental paragraph addresses a specific aspect of the topic. The closing reminds the reader of the importance of the subject. Transitions work well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The writing is organized in a way that enhances meaning or helps to develop the central idea. The introduction is inviting. Each developmental paragraph addresses a specific aspect of the topic. The conclusion is satisfying (ends at the right spot). The sequence is effective and moves the reader through the paper- the order may or may not be conventional. Transitions work well. 		
<i>Creative Ideas & Content Focus</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The writing presents information about a specific topic by providing facts or directions, explaining ideas, or defining the terms. The focus is unclear. Nothing imaginative or thoughtful about the ideas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The writing presents information about a specific topic by providing facts or directions or defining terms. The focus is unclear. Sound, but unimaginative ideas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The writing presents important information about a specific topic by providing facts or directions, explaining ideas or defining terms. The focus is stated clearly. The topic comes alive, with some imaginative ideas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The writing conveys ideas in a controlled and interesting manner. The focus is stated clearly. Clear, relevant directions, examples, and /or anecdotes develop and enrich the central focus. The writing shows insight- a good sense of the world, people, and situations. The writing is rich in thought and imagination. 		
<i>Choi c Word e</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Word choice limits the clarity of the intended message. Verbs, nouns, and/or modifiers lack the ability to convey an image. Expression is lacking: vocabulary is limited and restricting or too technical. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Words are reasonably accurate and convey the intended message in a general manner. Some verbs provide energy; some simply link one point to another. Some nouns are specific, but other nouns are fairly general.. Modifiers attempt to be descriptive. Expression is limited: figurative language, if used, may or may not be effective; vocabulary is either common or attempts to be uncommon and leads to confusion; technical terms and notations are limited in their effectiveness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well chosen words convey the intended message in an interesting, precise, and natural way. Powerful verbs, specific nouns, and descriptive modifiers enhance meaning. Expression attempts to be fresh and appealing: original unusual phrasing adds to the meaning: figurative language, if used, is generally effective; vocabulary is striking but, at times, overdone; technical terms and notations are effective. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well- chosen words convey the intended message in an interesting, precise, and powerful way. Lively, powerful verbs provide energy. Specific nouns add color and clarity. Modifiers work to provide strong imagery. Expression is fresh and appealing: original or unusual phrasing adds to the meaning; figurative language, if used, is effective; vocabulary is striking but not overdone; technical terms and notations are effective. 		
<i>Sentence Fluency</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sentence beginnings, length, and structure lack variation. The writing lacks fluency when read aloud. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Varied sentence beginnings, length, and structure help to convey meaning. Sentences are sometimes concise and sometimes too wordy. The writing sounds businesslike. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong and varied sentence beginnings, length, and structure help to convey meaning and invite expressive reading. Sentences are appropriately concise. The writing sounds smooth and rhythmic when read aloud. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong and varied sentence structure clearly conveys meaning and invites expressive reading. Sentences are appropriately concise. The writing has a natural flow and rhythm when read aloud. 		

Scorer:

Date:

Total Score:



As a result of this study, trends are evident across the grade levels. Progress is apparent from first through fifth grade in every trait. First grade showed the greatest improvement within the grade level. Grade 5 has mostly developing writers.

Limitations

The expectations of the scorers could have affected the results as well as the expectations set forth for each trait in the rubric. Although all students were administered the writing prompt on the same day, the time of year could have skewed the results. The January prompt was given soon after the return of winter break. The topic of the writing prompt may have also had an impact on the results. Some of the prompts did not lend themselves to good story writing. Some of the prompts were vague and/or confusing. The population of the sample could have also affected the results. Many of the students lack the background knowledge and experiences necessary to produce effective writing pieces. Many of the students' first language was not English. There was not a modified prompt for the special education students. At the time of the study there was no formal, consistent writing program in place. Some teachers used the old language series as a guide while others used writing ideas from the reading series. And some teachers used programs from previous teaching experiences. In many classrooms there was no explicit instruction in writing. Students were moving from grade to grade without a systematic writing program being followed. There was no progression in skills from year to year. Students had to readjust each year to how the teacher decided to teach writing. All of these factors could have placed limitations on this study.

Implications and Conclusions

The results from this research will help teachers to plan explicit instruction in the deficient areas that will improve the quality of

student writing in our school. Writing is used across all subject matters to enhance student learning. Maxwell (1996, p.1) states, "Writing is not used in content areas so that students will improve their writing skill, but because students understand content better when writing becomes part of their learning activities." Writing serves many different purposes in our daily life. Preparing students to write for these different purposes will be beneficial to their lifelong learning.

The results from this study showed that the following would benefit from:

- In the first grade the instruction needs to focus on moving students from the emerging stage to the developing stage in all four traits. The introduction and conclusion need to be connected. Students need to see an organized piece.
- Teachers need to model good writing. Students will benefit from teacher modeling with developing interesting story ideas and using a fresh approach to writing. The student's use of word choice will also improve. Students will be able to hear fluid sentences.
- In the third grade the instruction needs to focus on moving students from the developing stage to the accomplished stage. Teachers should continue to model and use guided practice with gradual release of independence in the writing.
- Students need to include a main event with elaboration and suspense in their narrative pieces.
- Instruction in the fifth grade needs to focus on the use of less contrived language. Students should be shown a fresh approach to keeping structure instead of repeating the same sentences throughout the writing. They need to be more concise and less repetitive.

Throughout the grades the use of imaginative/creative ideas was limited although there

was progress across the grades. It seems that video games, clothes and Smiles Recreation Center played a big role in the lives of the students. Many were unable to think beyond these areas and it was the focus of their papers. It was very generic in thought, without any creativity or adventure into the unknown. The students need to take a risk in their writing and use creativity. For example in a narrative writing piece one student talked about a bed made out of cotton candy and his clock was a shell. Another student used his imagination and sought help from the king of clowns in the fairy world. These are the imaginative ideas that we want to encourage in student writing. A suggestion for further research would include a follow up study analyzing the current year's writing samples. Results could be compared to the results of this study to see if the newly implemented writing program has improved the noted areas of weakness in the student's writing. Another suggestion for further research would be to analyze the results of the writing samples grouping the various populations, comparing girls to boys or regular education, special education and ELL.

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Connecticut High School Teachers' Knowledge, Needs, and Expertise in Teaching the New Literacies of the Internet and other Technologies: A Summary of the Connecticut Association for Reading Research Investigation.

Julia Kara-Soteriou, Catherine Kurkjian
Co-chairs of CARR Research Committee

This Connecticut Association for Reading Research (CARR) investigation focuses on what reading scholars refer to as New Literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004) of the Internet and other information and communication technologies. Educators in Connecticut are expected to be teaching their students new literacies skills, including how to assess online resources, how to follow copyright and citation rules, how to demonstrate appropriate network etiquette, and how to use technology to conduct research and communicate information and ideas (Connecticut State Board of Education, 2004; Connecticut State Department of Education, 2006). The purpose of this study was to investigate how high school teachers, who teach in the areas of English, reading/language arts, remedial reading, social studies, and technology education, as well as librarians and media specialists, understand and apply the new literacies. The overall goal of the study is to inform public policy in light of the Connecticut State Department of Education's published position statement on educational technology and information literacy (CSBE, 2004), as well as the Department's framework on information and technology literacy (CSDE, 2006) and the increased use of technology by students in and out of school (Levin & Arafeh, 2002).

The Approach

To assess teachers' understanding and implementation of new literacies, a survey was developed by the CARR research committee with the assistance of experts in the field of reading and the new literacies. The survey was posted online and was available to participants in a paper

format, as well.

A randomly selected stratified sample of 1476 participants was selected from a population of 3955 Connecticut high school teachers (grades 9-12). The participants were assigned in three groups, based on their areas of expertise: Group 1 consisted of English teachers, reading/language arts consultants, and remedial reading teachers; group 2 consisted of social studies teachers; and group 3 consisted of librarians, media specialists, and technology education teachers. A total of 465 participants (or 31.5% of the sample) returned the survey. Group 1 represented 49.0% of the sample (versus 53.7% of the population), group 2 represented 28.1% of the sample (versus 30% of the population), and group 3 represented 22.8% of the sample (versus 16.3% of the population).

The collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative analysis procedures. In particular, the data analysis focused on how proficient teachers felt they were with the use of certain technologies inside and outside their classrooms, how much access to technology teachers had in their schools, what teachers thought about past professional development as it related to the integration of literacy and technology, what teachers expected from future professional development, and what the teachers' educational background was with respect to literacy, technology, and the new literacies.

Recommendations for Stakeholders

Based on the results of this investigation and the recommendations made by several professional organizations in the field (i.e., International Reading Association/National Council of Teachers of English, 1996;

International Society for Technology in Education, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c), the Connecticut Association for Reading Research offers the following recommendations to the Connecticut State Department of Education and other policymakers, school districts, principals, and other educators, as well as universities that prepare pre- and inservice teachers:

State Department of Education and Other Policymakers

- Offer complete and varied types of support to help school districts, schools, and teachers to ensure that they meet the expectations of the Connecticut State Department of Education with respect to educational technology and information literacy (CSBE, 2004; CSDE, 2006).
- Legislate policies and create funding that support rather than deter teaching, learning, and assessing of technological and new literacies. This may involve a rethinking of the curriculum and what it means to be literate in an informational age, as well as a consideration of the impact that high stakes assessment may have in preparing students for their technological literacy futures.
- Allow for transparent and seamless integration of technology and new literacies in the curriculum through the appropriation of resources and funding. This includes, but goes beyond ready access to computers and technological equipment, and entails securing money for:
 - Sufficient and timely technical support;
 - Management and maintenance of equipment;
 - Support personnel who will engage in collaborative and instructional projects to support the curriculum; and

- Professional development that addresses ongoing developmental needs during the course of teachers' careers.

School Districts, Principals, and Other Educators

Curriculum, organizational, and instructional/assessment structures should be in place or strengthened to support the learning, teaching, and assessment of technology and new literacies. These structures should include a *school/district technology plan* that is integral to the curriculum and should promote higher academic learning that incorporates new literacies. The development of this plan should comply with federal and state mandates to include key stakeholders and articulate a vision of technology that should include new literacies in a way that is integral to subject areas and overall curriculum. This plan should also incorporate ongoing program evaluation and learning outcome assessments.

As part of a school-wide technology plan, district/school administrators should actively support teachers in a collaborative endeavor to teach the new literacies by creating *supportive forums*, such as flexible scheduling for team teaching and shared planning, and structures that facilitate teacher collaboration, including time for teachers to help each other develop the new skills, plan, experiment, and teach/assess new literacies skills. Financial support or other incentives to take graduate or non-credit courses with a focus on new literacies, as well as technology and foundational literacies, should be provided to help teachers acquire the technology or literacy instruction skills they are lacking due to a limited educational background in the areas of concern. More specifically, school districts, principals, and other educators should:

- Provide access to courses with a focus on the development of technology skills, particularly for English/reading/language arts and social studies teachers whose technology background is not as strong as



the librarians/media specialists and the technology education teachers.

- Provide access to courses on the foundational literacies, as well as the instruction of the new literacies in relation to both technology and the traditional/foundational literacies, particularly for social studies teachers, librarians, media specialists, and technology education teachers with limited background in literacy instruction.
- Provide professional development that enhances and that is clearly aligned with the school/district technology plan. Our recommendations for professional development are grouped under general and more specific guidelines:

General Guidelines for Professional Development:

- Provide professional development that is ongoing, addressing developmental needs of participants, focusing on teaching, and is hands-on and practical.
- Provide professional development that is supported by learning communities in which participants collaborate on a shared focus that is aligned with their technology plan and is integral to the participants' content areas and curriculum.
- Provide professional development that offers time for collaborative planning, experimentation, development of a comfort level, and implementation.

Specific Guidelines for Professional Development:

- Provide professional development that makes distinctions between online and offline reading/writing, and places new literacies more as a literacy concern and less as a technological issue.

- Provide professional development that is fine-tuned to address the needs of a variety of marginalized student populations with the goal to differentiate instruction.
- Provide professional development for English teachers, language arts teachers/consultants, remedial reading teachers, social studies teachers, technology education teachers, librarians, and media specialists, which offers learning opportunities on the pedagogical aspect of the new literacies, rather than simply the use of a new technology.
- Provide professional development that helps teachers to use and teach the use of multimedia and visual information on the Internet for constructing meaning from online texts. Particular support should be offered to the English/reading/language arts teachers.
- Provide professional development that offers opportunities to learn to produce and teach students to produce electronic information that makes use of visuals. Particular support on this skill should be offered to the English/reading/language arts teachers. The social studies teachers will find more useful the learning opportunities that are more focused on the pedagogy of this new literacies skill.
- Provide professional development that helps educators learn how to publish online and how to teach their students to publish online. Particular support could be offered to the social studies teachers.

Universities

- Conduct more research and self-assessment to find out how the new literacies are currently addressed and assessed in literacy, technology, and other content area courses, whether new literacies are embedded, and whether they are seen as a literacy issue.

- Prepare undergraduate and graduate student populations to use hardware, software, and other technologies that are frequently found in schools. Make the connections between technology tools and new literacies.
- Collaborate with schools to develop field placements that provide best practices in teaching and learning of new literacies.
- Develop and offer literacy and other content area courses that either embed the new literacies or focus primarily on the instruction of the new literacies as they relate to the foundational literacies and the other content areas (i.e., social studies and technology education).
- Develop and offer graduate level courses that explicitly and extensively embed the new literacies.
- Develop and offer graduate level courses that focus on the theoretical underpinnings and the teaching of the new literacies.

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The **Full Report** of the study (126 pages) is available on CD and in print format for \$15 (to cover the cost of printing and postage). The **Summary Report** and the **Executive Summary** are available for free through the Connecticut Reading Association website (<http://users.ntplx.net/~ctread/>), under the CARR link. A hard copy of the **Executive Summary** is also available to all CARR members for free. For more information on how to obtain any of these documents, please contact Drs. Catherine Kurkjian (kurkjianc@ccsu.edu) and Julia Kara-Soteriou (karaiou@ccsu.edu).

CARR Events, Grants & Scholarship Winners

Events

March 25, 2009

Speaker: Rich Long

Topic: The New Administration: What Can We Expect?

Saturday, May 31, 2009

Breakfast Meeting

Scholarship winners presentations

CARR Research and Scholarship Grants

CARR encourages research in reading, writing and the language arts through two types of scholarships.

CARR members may apply for a mini-grant of \$200 dollars for action research in the classroom. Graduate students in a program leading to a reading/language arts consultant certification or certification as a remedial language arts teacher or a doctorate in curriculum and instruction may apply for the \$750 Wirth-Santoro Research Scholarship.

For further particulars on either of these grants contact Rena Shove at renashove@hotmail.com.

Scholarship Winners for 2008-2009

Connecticut Association of Reading Research wishes to congratulate the scholarship winners for 2008-2009 --- Sandra Lynch, Mildred Martinez and Elizabeth Murratti. They will be presenting their results at the CARR annual breakfast meeting on May 30, 2009 and their work will be published in the *CARRReader* in fall 2009. It is noteworthy that this year's winners collaborated as colleagues to create and conduct their study