

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE  
LOUISIANA COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM  
READING/ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS  
IN SELECTED FIRST GRADE CLASSROOMS

A Dissertation

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By

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## ABSTRACT

This case study investigates the implementation of the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum English Language Arts in selected first grade classes. The teaching of the specific language arts skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as directed by the Comprehensive Curriculum are examined. Four first grade teachers from a large urban school district, from an original sixteen first grade teachers, are observed during the hour and a half literacy instruction block once a week over a period of four weeks. These same four teachers are interviewed one-on-one by the researcher during two interview sessions. Three themes developed throughout the observations from all four classes: phonics instruction, reading instruction, and language arts instruction. The investigation determined that this sampling of grade one teachers were implementing the Comprehensive Curriculum English Language Arts by means of integrating the instruction into both the phonics instruction and the reading instruction

## CHAPTER 1.

### INTRODUCTION

Student achievement is in need of improving, and the primary reason is that curriculum and instruction do not meet the needs of all students (Barton, 2003). The “how to” increase student achievement has long been debated in the field of American education. These debates are the results of various factors. Some, but not all, of these factors include: teacher quality (Rockoff, 2003), scheduling (Andrews, 2003), class size, and socioeconomic status (Betts, Zau & Rice, 2003). In the findings of a comprehensive study concerning student achievement conducted by Reginald Clark (2002), he stated his findings as:

results of the analysis revealed that 51 percent of the variation in students test scores was accounted for by school process factors and family process factors. Findings suggest that the factors that matter most for student achievement on standardized tests are teacher instructional actions; teacher expectations for students; students’ total weekly out-of-school time in high-yield activities, activity quality, parental standards, beliefs, and expectations; and teacher-parent communication actions (p.3).

The student achievement debate continues today with concerns that the curriculum determines student instruction without enough input from teachers. Currently, this debate is being dictated by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation of 2002.

In order to have a full appreciation of the effects that the NCLB Act has on today’s schools, teachers, students, and student achievement, it is necessary to be cognizant of earlier legislation that has led to the NCLB Act. Legislation passed during the tenures of presidents, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Lyndon B. Johnson, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and Bill Clinton, has had a direct influence on the NCLB mandates. The two most important were the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA), and Title I legislation. The establishment of the Elementary and Secondary Act was the direct result of the findings of a study conducted by James Coleman.

This publication has become known as the Coleman Report (1966). The next major legislation occurred in 1983 during the presidency of Ronald Reagan. Recommendations were made relative to student achievement as a result of the findings of a report titled, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform* (1983). The report strongly suggested that America's "education foundations are being eroded by the rising tide of mediocrity" (p.1). Many recommendations occurred as a result of this report. The five major recommendations addressed content, standards and expectations, time, teachers and leadership, and fiscal support. Many in the field of education believe that this report provided the impetus for reform efforts that our nation is currently experiencing.

The most current changes affecting the education of children across the United States have occurred in the administration of the current president, George W. Bush. This legislation known as the No Child Left Behind Act has resulted in the establishment of many new guidelines by state education agencies such as the Louisiana Department of Education.

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed the NCLB Act. This current legislation has required state departments of education and local education agencies (LEAs) across the United States to revisit their accountability efforts in order to comply with these new mandates. The term "high stakes accountability" is most frequently used to describe the results of the review. The work of Marshall Smith and Jennifer O'Day (1991), establishing the importance of state-level standards and assessments, has often been cited as influencing systemic school reform that has led to "high stakes accountability" (Cawelti, 2003).

One of the first actions taken by states to address the No Child Left Behind mandates was to develop standards for the content areas of Math, English Language Arts, Science and Social Studies. Once the standards had been developed in Louisiana, 1997, benchmarks were then

established to ensure the standards would be addressed at each grade level. According to *Reaching for Results—Louisiana English Language Arts Content Standards* (Louisiana Department of Education, 2003), a benchmark is a “broad statement of process and/or content that is used as a reference to develop curriculum and to assess student progress” (p. 32). The next component developed was the Grade Level Expectations, 2001 (GLEs). The Louisiana Department of Education, Office of Standards, Assessments, and Accountability defines GLEs as a “statement that defines what all students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade level. GLEs add further definition to the content standards and benchmarks” (p. 13). The GLEs are not the entire curriculum, but “represent the core content that should be mastered by the end of the school year” (p. 11).

The most recently developed component of the state of Louisiana’s education accountability plan is the Comprehensive Curriculum, published in April, 2005. To accompany this document, the Louisiana Department of Education also created the “Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum: Frequently Asked Questions” (2006). The following is taken from the document to give clarification to the Comprehensive Curriculum:

The purpose of the Comprehensive Curriculum is to align content, instruction, and assessment. Research has shown that when these are aligned, students’ achievement increases. Actually, the use of the Comprehensive Curriculum provides uniformity in content taught across the state in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies (p.1).

The implementation of any new program, be it in business or in school classrooms, is frequently met with resistance from administrators, teachers, students, and/or parents. Factors such as lack of teacher knowledge and understanding, weak administrative support, and absence of commitment, adversely impact the state’s ability to implement a rigorous program.

## Statement of the Problem

Historically, the American educational system has been influenced by the latest “trend” designed to improve teachers’ teaching capabilities, and students’ learning capabilities as a means to increase achievement levels. These trends are typically determined by mandates that originate at the national level. The mandates are then passed on to state departments of education, then local districts, then school administrators, and finally, classroom teachers whose responsibility it is to implement the mandates.

In the article, “*Views From the Classroom: Teacher’s Opinions of Statewide Testing Programs*” (2003), Abrams, Pedulla, and Madaus note that the state test has become a powerful influence on teaching practices. Teachers are beginning to use much of their instructional time preparing students for test preparation. Abrams et al. also conclude from their survey-based study, that teachers’ perceptions of state testing programs are organized around four main topics: (a) impact on classroom practices in terms of the content of instruction and the strategies used to deliver instruction, (b) the pressure to prepare students for the state test, (c) impact on teacher and student motivation and morale, and (d) view of accountability.

In their 1999 paper presented at the American Educational Research Association’s Annual Meeting, McMillan, Myran, and Workman reported that since the implementation of statewide testing, teachers were concerned that their classroom instruction was focused more on breadth, rather than depth. In his May 2008 dissertation, *Teachers’ Perspectives of the Unintended Consequences of High Stakes Testing*, David Charles states that there are three areas in which teachers are reporting the affects of high-stakes testing. These areas are pressure, morale, and commitment to the teaching profession. In a survey conducted by Shepard and Dougherty in 1991, they found that teachers reported feeling pressure to improve test scores.

The implementation of state standards, benchmarks, GLEs and the Comprehensive Curriculum to prepare students for annual statewide testing is largely the responsibility of the classroom teacher; therefore, this study will explore the implementation of Louisiana's Comprehensive Curriculum in English Language Arts in selected first grade classes.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The intent of the Comprehensive Curriculum is to ensure that the content being tested is taught to students. The person ultimately responsible for this task is the classroom teacher. The extent to which the teacher understands the reason for the implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum, and its possible affect upon increasing student achievement is unclear. The purpose of this study is to assess the implementation of the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum in English Language Arts by a sampling of selected first grade teachers.

### **Background**

America has a history of imposing mandates in an attempt to improve the quality of teachers as well as the achievement levels of students. Many of these initiatives have been the result of federal education policies with the most recent of these being the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation; however, there are programs prior to the NCLB Act that have influenced the current state of schools and student accountability in the American education system.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 directed the Commissioner of Education, Francis Keppell, to conduct a study "concerning the lack of availability of equal educational opportunities for individuals by reason of race, color, religion, or national origin in public education institutions at all levels in the United States." The principal investigator charged with the task of gathering the data for the study was James S. Coleman from Johns Hopkins University. Congress wanted to determine "what strategy was more likely to equalize educational opportunities for poor minority

students---compensatory education or racial integration?” (New York State Department of Education, 2008). The results of this extensive study were issued in a report titled, Equality of Educational Opportunity Study (EEO, 1966). Coleman wrote” Our interpretation of the data is that racial integration per se is unrelated to achievement insofar as the data can show a relationship---compensatory education---whether offered in racially integrated or in racially segregated schools---was similarly unlikely to improve achievement levels” (Coleman, 1966). The report indicated that schools did not make a significant difference in student achievement; however, family background was the major determinant of student achievement (Lezotte, 2005). This capstone event has led to “high stakes accountability”, and the intensifying of the federal government’s influence on educational policy making at the state and local levels. During President Lyndon Johnson’s tenure, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was enacted. The ESEA legislation is cited as being responsible for the largest allocation of federal funds in history to meet the needs of educationally deprived children in public and nonpublic schools. Another milestone in American education that occurred during President Johnson’s administration was the establishment of Operation Head Start.

Coleman’s report, which postulated that schools do not and cannot make a difference, was challenged from some educational quarters. One of these challenges emanated from the publication, Effective Schools Movement led by Ron Edwards, Wilbur Brookover, and Lawrence Lezotte, which was an analysis of a number of studies that “supported the premise that all children can learn and that the school controls the factors necessary to assure student mastery of the core curriculum” (Lezotte, 2001, p. 2). While not diminishing the important role that families play in the education of their children, the belief was, and research substantiated the belief, that regardless of a student’s socioeconomic or family background, effective schools can

and were successful when it came to educating all students.

The first task for the researchers of the Effective Schools Movement was to identify existing schools that were successful in educating all students. Once these successful schools had been identified, researchers examined correlates which substantiated student achievement. These correlates were: clear school mission, high expectations for success, instructional leadership, frequent monitoring of student progress, opportunity to learn and student time on task, safe and orderly environment, and home-school relations (Association for Effective Schools, Inc., 1996).

In 1981, during the presidency of Ronald Reagan, the Secretary of Education, T. H. Bell created the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The Commission was composed of 18 members from the private sector, government, and education and was chaired by David Pierpont Gardner. Their task was to study the quality of education in the United States, and report the findings to Secretary Bell within an 18-month period. Their findings were published in the 1983 document, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform*. An important finding reported was “the rising tide of mediocrity” in American’s schools (Jones, 2001). The Commission recommended that a common core curriculum be established, and made recommendations based on the belief “that everyone can learn, that everyone is born with an urge to learn which can be nurtured, that a solid high school education is within the reach of virtually all, and that life-long learning will equip people with the skills required for new careers and for citizenship” (*A Nation at Risk*, 1983). The thirty-eight recommendations offered by the Commission were divided into five major categories: content, standards and expectations, time, teaching and leadership, and fiscal support. It was also during this time period that the current emphasis on curriculum standards began. Organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the National Council of Teachers of English, the National Science

Teachers Association, and the National Council for the Social Studies developed standards for their content area.

In 1989, President George H. W. Bush held the National Education Summit Conference with governors from all 50 states in attendance. This group developed six goals for student to achieve “competency over challenging subject matter in various disciplines” (Jones, 2004, p. 5). Grades 4, 8, and 12 were targeted as the grades where students would demonstrate competency, and national standards were drafted in the areas of math, science, social studies, technology, language arts, fine arts, foreign languages, and physical education and health. In 1991, President George H. W. Bush’s administration proposed the development of “national standards, national standardized testing, and the involvement of researchers, business, and labor” in curriculum development. This proposal was known as the America 2000 Act. Although it did not pass, funds were allocated for the support of voluntary national curriculum standards.

The National Education Standard and Improvement Council (NESIC) was established in 1994 during President Bill Clinton’s presidency. In 1996, the second National Education Summit was held at the urging of L. V. Gerstner, Jr., CEO of International Business Machines Corporation (IBM). Governors and CEOs “began Achieve, Inc., a group whose role was to help states establish and implement standards. In addition to Achieve, Inc.’s efforts, other groups were dedicated to helping schools create accountability plans” (Jones, 2004, p. 5). In 1991, President Bill Clinton determined that the federal government would establish “broad guidelines,” and individual states would be responsible for specific standards and objectives, testing, and accountability.

The third National Education Summit was held in 2001, and was focused on student testing. In 2002, the No Child Left Behind legislation was established with the goal of permitting states

to set educational standards while the federal government's role was to monitor the progress each state made toward improving student achievement. In words from the NCLB website:

On January 8, 2002, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). This new law represents his education reform plan and contains the most sweeping changes to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) since it was enacted in 1965. It changes the federal government's role in Kindergarten-Grade 12 education by asking America's schools to describe their success in terms of what each student accomplishes. The act contains the President's four basic education reform principles: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expander options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work.

### **Significance of the Study**

Surveying teachers' perceptions relative to the Comprehensive Curriculum should lead to a better understanding of how the curriculum could be appropriately implemented. This investigation was intended to explore these perceptions, and to serve as a guide for future planning for staff-development activities vis-à-vis the Comprehensive Curriculum.

### **Research Questions**

Based on a review of the literature and an examination of the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum, the following research questions were developed to guide the study.

1. Do teachers find the Comprehensive Curriculum clearly written?
2. Do teachers use the activities provided in the Comprehensive Curriculum?
3. Have teachers had adequate in-service related to the implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum?
4. Do teachers believe that their school administrator provides appropriate support in implementing the Comprehensive Curriculum?
5. Do teachers use resources other than the Comprehensive Curriculum?

6. Has the Comprehensive Curriculum impacted teachers' instructional planning?
7. Are teachers cognizant of the state's mandated policies regarding the Comprehensive Curriculum?
8. How has the implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum impacted instruction in the participating teachers' classroom?

### **Definition of Terms**

The recent education reform movement and the No Child Left Behind legislation have given rise to new vocabulary and acronyms which are ubiquitous throughout the study to include:

**accountability:** The concept of holding educators responsible for student learning. Also, that funding invested in education has led to measurable gains.

**achievement test:** A standardized test designed to measure the amount of knowledge and/or skill a person has acquired, usually as a result of classroom instruction. Such testing produces a statistical profile used as a measurement to evaluate student learning in comparison with a standard or norm.

**alignment:** The degree to which what schools say they are going to teach, what they actually teach, and what they assess are aligned. Also referred to as curriculum alignment.

**benchmark:** A broad statement of process and/or content that is used as a reference to develop curriculum and to assess student progress; the specific body of knowledge required under a strand, e.g.,

Earth and Space Science:

Standard1: Understands the basic structure of the universe.

Benchmarks: Grades K-2

Knows the names of the planets in the solar system

Knows the sun applies heat and light to the Earth

Comprehensive Standard: Curricula developed by the state of Louisiana to align instruction with Louisiana's standards, benchmarks, and grade-level expectations with the goal of improving student achievement across the state. The curricula was developed to help districts build a bridge between classroom activities needed by students to master Grade Level Expectations for a given course by the end of the school year.

Content Curriculum: A description of what students should know and be able to do through subject matter, knowledge, and proficiencies gained as a result of instruction.

Criterion Referenced Test: A test in which the results can be used to determine a student's progress toward mastery of a content area. This is the type of test most often used for high stakes testing. The purpose of the test is to test students on a set of criteria or standards to determine their level of mastery. The student is being tested against him/herself rather than against a norm group---as norm-referenced test such as an achievement test. Louisiana developed the LEAP (and currently the iLEAP is being used) (Louisiana's Educational Assessment Program) as the state's Criterion-Referenced Test (CRT).

formative assessment: Procedures used to determine the degree to which students know or are able to perform a given learning task, and which identify the part of the task that the student does not know or is unable to perform. Outcomes suggest future steps for teaching and learning.

grade-level expectations (GLEs): GLEs are statements that define what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade level. Each GLE further defines an existing Louisiana content standard and benchmark.

high stakes testing: Any testing program whose results have important consequences, such as promotion and/or graduating students.

norm-referenced test (NRT): A standardized test that compares a student's level of achievement to that of students of the same age in a preselected group, called a norm group. The results are reported as percentiles, stanines, quartiles, NCEs (normal curve equivalents), etc.

standardized test: A test developed by a commercial testing company that measures how well a student performs relative to others at his or her age or grade level.

summative assessment: Evaluation at the conclusion of a unit or units of instruction. Outcomes are the culmination of a teaching/learning process for a unit, subject or year's study.

### **Assumptions**

The researcher made the following assumptions about the procedures and participants:

1. Teachers have reported their views accurately concerning the degree of implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum.
2. The questionnaire was comprehensive enough to provide credible data relative to the Comprehensive Curriculum.
3. Data collected came from a representative sample of teachers in the district.

### **Summary**

The mandates for high stakes accountability for America's public schools was specified in the

2002 No Child Left Behind legislation. State departments of education around the country began designing their plans to ensure that the NCLB legislation would be appropriately implemented. The state of Louisiana developed a Comprehensive Curriculum in the areas of reading, math, science, social studies, and the English language arts. The extent to which classroom teacher are implementing this curriculum and their level of its understanding is unclear.

This investigation surveyed teachers in a large metropolitan school district for the purpose of determining the extent to which the Comprehensive Curriculum in selected first grade classrooms is being implemented. The researcher anticipates that data obtained from this study can assist local school agencies in planning staff-development activities effective related to the implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum.

**Table 1**

Participating Schools

School	Demographics
School 1, Hilltop Elementary School	Population: 442 African American: 99.8% Caucasian: .2% Male Population: 64.08% Female Population: 39.92% Free or Reduced Lunch: 96.79% Pupil/Teacher Ratio: 19:1 Grades: Pre-K-5

**(Table 1 continued)**

School	Demographics
School 2, Seaside Elementary School	Population: 479
	African American: 90%
	Hispanic: 5.4%
	Caucasian: 2.1%
	Asian: 1.9%
	Other: .6%
	Male Population: 54%
	Female Population: 46%
	Free or Reduced Lunch: 89%
	Pupil/Teacher Ratio: 17:1
Grades: Pre-K-5	
School 3, Lakeview Elementary School	Population: 792
	African American: 64.1%
	Hispanic: 19.4%
	Asian: 13.6%
	Caucasian: 1.6%
	Other: 1.3%
	Male Population: 53%
	Female Population: 47%
Free or Reduced Lunch: 93%	

**(Table 1 continued)**

School	Demographics
School 4, Mountaintop Elementary Schools	Pupil/Teacher Ratio: 17:1 Grades: Pre-K-5 Population: 616 African American: 81.5% Caucasian: 12.5% Asian: 2.9% Other: 1.6% Hispanic: 1.5% Male Population: 49% Female Population: 51% Free or Reduced Lunch: 83% Pupil/Teacher Ratio: 17:1 Grades: Pre-K-5

## CHAPTER 2.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

America's public education system has a tradition of addressing declining student achievement, which has in turn resulted in concentrated efforts to reform our national education system. Motivations for the reforms have ranged from concerns regarding the economy to the fear of losing our position and influence as a major world power.

In October, 1957, the United Soviet Socialist Republic (U.S.S.R.) launched the first orbiting satellite, Sputnik, which was followed almost immediately in November, by the launching of yet another Russian satellite, Sputnik II. Historians later referred to this period in history as "the race for space" (Clowse, 1981). In 1958, as a response to the launching of the Russian satellites, Congress approved what was known as the "emergency National Defense Education Act" (NDEA), (Rudolph, 2002). President Eisenhower's own concerns were expressed when he stated "the United States need to outdo its foe, the Soviet Union, on the Communists' own terms- outmatching them in military power, general technical development, and specialized education and research" (Clowse, 1981). As a result, the NDEA provided funds for school programs that focused on science, mathematics, engineering, and foreign languages. The funds were allocated for the purpose of "shoring up the nation's educational and research facilities, fostering technical development, and trying to improve students' academic achievement levels" (Clowse, 1981).

A brief reiteration of three critical initiatives is presented for the reader's edification. From 1963-1968, Lyndon B. Johnson's administration ushered in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in which large sums of federal dollars were allocated to help meet the needs of students described as educationally deprived.

During Ronald Reagan's administration the report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for*

*Educational Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education---NCEE, 1983) was published, which stated that American schools were failing. The report called for a “nationwide system of standardized test” (*A Nation at Risk...*, 1983). Stressing “achievement and accountability” as prerequisites for government aid, Reagan’s administration stipulated “if schools did not produce higher scores, they would lose federal aid” (NCEE, 1983).

Under the administration of President George W. Bush, 2000-2008, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) had been the guiding force in America’s current education reforms. President Bush and congressional leaders create:

a new, high specific metric to assess annual progress for all elementary and secondary schools and to determine which schools, districts, and states would be sanctioned for failure to meet progress targets. The formula had three elements: (1) By the year 2014, all students must be performing in reading, mathematics, and science at ‘proficient’ level; (2) in each school, each year, student ‘adequate yearly progress’ (AYP) must increase at such a rate that 100% proficiency would be met by 2014; and (3) the annual rate of progress applies not only to the aggregate student enrollment of a school district, or state, but also to ‘disaggregated’ groups of students according to income, race, gender, English language ability, and special education status. If any of the groups are below expected progress rates, the entire school is considered ‘failing’ and in need of improvement to be realized through Presidential sanctions (Federal Education Policy and the States, 1945-2004, pp. 73-74).

### **Louisiana’s Comprehensive Curriculum**

It was the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation that prompted many states to develop standards for areas such as math and reading. In order for teachers in the state of Louisiana to increase their understanding of the accountability process, it would be beneficial for them to examine the chronology of Louisiana’s accountability plan.

The state of Louisiana’s Comprehensive Curriculum Coordinator indicated in email conversations in October 2006 and March 2008, that in 1997, rigorous K-12 standards were

approved for math, English, language arts, science, social studies, foreign languages, and the arts. Although Louisiana had an established testing program, results from these tests were used primarily for the purpose of collecting data. As a result, students performing poorly on the test were allowed to move to the next grade level with no attention given to their achievement gaps. The establishment of “rigorous” standards in 1997 was the beginning of Louisiana’s High Stakes Accountability system. No longer would students be promoted to the next grade level without passing the tests developed for grades 4 and 8. What once was considered passing with “basic skills” would no longer be an acceptable standard for promotion. The Louisiana Department of Education leaders began to develop a hierarchy of skills, or a scope and sequence, necessary for students to function in today’s world (Sessions, 2006, 2008).

In December 2002, Data Recognition Corporation (DRC) was selected by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) as the contractor to help manage the data gathering and the various steps involved in the Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) project. To understand the national perspective related to student achievement, the LDE examined what other states across the nation were doing concerning this issue. The next step involved asking teachers from across the state of Louisiana to serve on various committees for the purpose of assisting in the development of the state’s GLEs. Once this information had been delineated, drafts were developed for more in-depth evaluation. The drafts were then submitted to the LDE, and the process of editing and redrafting began. Once the drafts were finalized, they were made available to focus groups for the purpose of obtaining input concerning the documents. Parents, teachers, and other stakeholders were permitted to view the documents via an online/electronic format, and provide feedback which was an integral part of the process before finalizing the drafts for external review (LDE website).

Before submitting the document to the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) for approval, an external review was conducted. State curriculum developers from outside the state of Louisiana were invited to participate, along with content experts and representatives from the university level, for the purpose of conducting an external review of the documents. At least three different people read each document. Once this process was completed, the department leaders felt the documents would help achieve the goal of ensuring that all Louisiana school children would meet their academic needs.

The Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) gave the GLEs its approval, and the LDE began offering pre-workshops and awareness workshops. These workshops were held for the purpose of identifying the educators' roles as it related to curriculum and assessment (GLE Handbook).

In Chapter 1, the researcher defined the progression of Louisiana's High Stakes Accountability plan, which included developing content standards first, followed by benchmarks, and the Grade Level Expectations (GLEs). In April, 2002, the final component developed for the accountability plan was the Comprehensive Curriculum (CC), which is aligned with the state's content standards.

The Comprehensive Curriculum is organized into "coherent, time-bound units with sample activities and classroom assessments to guide teaching and learning" (Comprehensive Curriculum Handbook). The 2007-2008 school term marked the third consecutive year that Louisiana schools have implemented the curriculum.

The design for the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum was influenced by the work of Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe. Their book, *Understanding by Design* (1998), focuses on the importance of educators being "interested in enhancing student understanding and in designing

more effective curriculums and assessments to promote understanding” (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998).

Wiggins and McTighe’s framework for instruction is based on their “backward design model and the six facets of understanding” (1998). Their backward design model begins with identifying the desired result, then determines acceptable evidence for these results, and finally, plans learning experiences and instruction to produce these results. They state that the six facets of understanding include being able to explain, interpret, apply, perceive, empathize and demonstrate self-knowledge (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998).

The 2005-2006 school year was the first year that the Comprehensive Curriculum was implemented in Louisiana’s public schools. At the conclusion of the first year, the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) conducted a survey focusing on the implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum. Out of the seventy-five agencies that participated in the survey, seven agencies reported that they implemented the curriculum activities as written by the state. Sixty-eight agencies implemented the activities with some modifications allowed. There are explicated as follows: thirty-one agencies allowed modifications to be made by district level committees made up of teachers and staff; twenty-seven agencies allowed individual teachers to choose equivalent activities or to make modification; seven agencies allowed modifications to be developed by school level committees comprised of teachers; and three agencies chose other methods of modifications (LDE, Comprehensive Curriculum District Implementation Survey Report, 2006).

The survey determined that forty-six of the districts provided curriculum maps or pacing guides to be followed by classroom teachers, and twenty-nine districts chose other methods by which teachers would implement the Comprehensive Curriculum. Teachers in some districts

followed time frames suggested by the state, while other designed their own pacing guides to follow. Teachers, in some districts, were allowed flexibility in adjusting the curriculum maps to meet the needs of individuals. Still other districts provided collaborative planning sessions and allowed grade level teachers and teacher coaches to map the curriculum (LDE, Comprehensive Curriculum District Implementation Survey Report, 2006, CCDI).

The 2005-2006 Comprehensive Curriculum Implementation Survey also requested that agencies/districts identify professional development activities that enhanced the teachers' ability to use the curriculum effectively in their classrooms. Some of the activities reported were as follows: training representatives at each school site to work with the teachers (training the trainer); teacher generated lists of resources necessary to make use of the Comprehensive Curriculum activities; in-service sessions offering hands-on workshops in which the Comprehensive Curriculum resources are displayed for teacher exploration; study groups established within the schools for teacher sharing and feedback; in-service provided by the Region Service Centers and the Department of Education; and teacher participation in curriculum mapping/pacing chart sessions to provide teachers a better understanding of the GLEs and the Comprehensive Curriculum (CCDI Survey, 2006).

### **Local District and the Comprehensive Curriculum**

The Local Education Agency (LED/district) in which the researcher gathered data, also participated in the state survey. The district made modifications to ensure the successful implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum. District level committees consisting of local teachers and district office staff were created. The district formulated a plan for professional development that presented clear guidelines for effective utilization of the curriculum (CCDI, Survey, 2006).

The district used the train-the-trainer model with the classroom teachers. Each school in the district had access to an Instructional Management Team (IMT) made up of a curriculum representative from all content areas in addition to writing across the curriculum. The members of the IMTs were trained by the Curriculum and Instruction Department of the district office. The staff then imparted the information to the school faculty as a whole group, department, team, or individual. The IMT members offered assistance within their schools when needed. The Curriculum and Instruction staff were also available for support when requested by the principal, school assistant staff, and/or teachers (CCDI Survey, 2006). The Curriculum and Instruction Department (CID) staff also correlated textbooks, and any supplemental materials and made them available to all teachers (CCDI Survey, 2006).

In the 2006-2007 school year, the district developed pacing guides (Appendix C) for each unit of study for all content areas and grade levels. These were employed by the writing teams for each of the content areas along with the classroom teachers, assisted by their Instructional Management Team. The district requires the units be taught in the same order the state units are sequenced; however, teachers may rearrange the order of the activities provided within each unit of study. The activities were determined by the district committees, but each unit includes additional activities that can be used to re-teach or reinforce skills.

District tests are issued to classroom teachers at the completion of each unit in strict adherence to the pacing guide. Teachers then have five to seven days to administer to tests and enter test results in the district's data base system (CCDI Survey, 2006).

The researcher, focusing on the English Language Arts Grade 1, had access to the pacing guide and district level units. The pacing guide for English Language Arts (ELA), Grade 1, is divided into eight units. The teaching time allowed for each unit varies from a minimum of

fourteen days to a maximum of twenty-four days. The dates for teaching the English Language Arts began August 13<sup>th</sup> and ended May 13<sup>th</sup> (1<sup>st</sup> Grade ELA, 2007-2008, District Pacing Guide).

The English Language Arts for the elementary curriculum is composed of eight units. The titles of each unit, and the order in which units are to be taught, matches the titles and order as outlined by the state's Comprehensive Curriculum, ELA, Grade 1. This provides evidence that the local district adheres to state mandates. There are several other items that match the district's document with the state's Comprehensive Curriculum. All units have the same titles at both the state and district level. The GLEs and Benchmarks identified at the state level are also used at the district level; however, the similarities end there. The state's documents offer sample activities that have GLE alignment. The Comprehensive Curriculum activities are suggestions given in broad statements. Many of these statements are phrased "students listen, teacher reads, teacher will, students discuss,..." (Comprehensive Curriculum, English Language Arts, Grade 1, p. 5-6). The state's document offers examples of general assessment procedures followed by suggested activities ( p. 8-9).

The district level documents are more thorough. For example, the state's Comprehensive Curriculum, ELA, Grade 1, has a page count of forty-six, while the first eight units at the district level has a page count of seventy-eight. Each unit at the district level contains weekly lesson plans, suggestions for center activities, recommendations for the use of technology and other lesson components to aid teachers in their implementation of each unit. The district's rationale for including these extensive plans is stated in the District's Elementary Curriculum, English Language Arts, Grade 1, Unit 1:

After aligning *Harcourt Collections* to the Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) and the Comprehensive Curriculum, we discovered that some of the GLEs were not adequately covered at all in the basal text aligned to the curriculum. Therefore, the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in collaboration with

teachers of the local school district have developed model lessons plans for targeted Grade Level Expectations (GLEs). Fellow educators, please keep in mind that these lessons are not required nor mandated; however the focus GLEs must be adequately addressed, as students will be given Edusoft benchmark assessments.

Each week's plans include specific websites to visit that identifies both story and high frequency vocabulary, assessment instruments, accommodations that can be used, work station activities for art, computer, library, math, publishing, reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency activities), and social studies. Each day's plan suggest extension for the lesson, daily homework, assignments, and resources for the week's lesson (Unit 5, pp. 8-11).

The unit plans are divided into four weekly plans with a recommended daily plan for teachers. The lesson plans are outlines and include the components of effective teaching, which include an introductory activity, the procedure, the closure, and the activities for independent practice. Recommendations and suggested activities are described within each component. Suggested assessment instruments in the form of cloze tests, vocabulary test, and high frequency words checklist are included. All poems needed for the week's lesson are included in the final stage of each week's plans (Unit 5, pp. 14-18).

### **Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, and Curriculum Alignment**

In her article, *How-to: Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment---A Brief History on National Standards*, Judy Jones (2004) states, "I am convinced that we can only reach the goal of excellence in education for all children if we have a curriculum based on standards..." (p. 5).

In his unpublished doctoral dissertation, T. S. Wishnick (1989) responds to the question, "Does alignment have an effect?" by stating "results indicate that instruction and alignment are powerful predictors of standardized test performance in this study. The higher degree of item

alignment between the Unit Test and Standardized test cluster, the higher the performance on the Standardized test. Low achievers do better when the instructional outcomes are clear, and instruction is congruent with post-instructional assessment” (p. 150, 154, 159).

A study examining curriculum alignment and student achievement conducted in 1997 by Gamoran, Porter, Smithson, and White “found high positive correlations between end-of-semester teacher surveys of content taught and student achievement gains. Such high correlations, they concluded, indicate a strong alignment between the taught curriculum and the assessment existed” (p. 330).

S. A. Cohen (1987), found that when instruction and assessment were aligned both low and high aptitude students scored well. Based on his findings, Cohen argues that the “lack of excellence in American schools is not caused by ineffective teaching, but mostly by misaligning what teachers teach, what they intend to teach, and what they assess as having been taught” (p. 18).

The preceding review of current literature appears to support the theory that when curriculum, instruction, and assessment are aligned, everyone involved, students, teachers, parents, administrators, and school boards have a higher probability of measuring progress. The evidence suggests that curriculum, instruction, and assessment are critical to effective instruction.

### **Design of Effective Accountability Systems**

In the 1999 publication, *How States can Hold Schools Accountable*, Sarah Brooks identified seven key elements of an effective accountability system.

Fair, reliable, relevant, and understandable indicators of school performance; predictable and consistent incentives or consequences for performance; opportunities for schools to build their capacity, ensuring tools and resources for schools that need to improve; flexibility for schools to adapt to help their students learn and meet state standards of performance; a safety net, providing functional

learning opportunities for students when school improvement is not possible; a comprehensive public information campaign that helps schools and the public understand the process; and an independent body guiding the system and providing checks and balances on the political oversight of the system

These seven elements offer a framework within which schools and school districts can improve student achievement and teacher performance. It is unrealistic to expect to find all seven items in all accountability programs; however, they do provide higher levels of expectation for school districts.

The Louisiana School Accountability System is modeled on “The Five Key Building Blocks/Components of the School Accountability System”. These five components are: challenging content standards, assessment programs, school performance monitoring and reporting, corrective actions/assistance, and recognition and rewards. This model has proven to be a critical factor in the state’s progress toward improving public education.

In 2001, a report titled, *A Primer on State Accountability and Large-scale Assessments*, published by the National Association of State Boards of Education, addressed purposes of assessment systems and elements of effective assessment systems. The report stated that assessment systems are designed to ensure that standards are taken seriously, guide teaching and learning, help individual students meet the desired standards, and assist policy makers provide all students with a quality education.

Claycomb and Kysilko stated in their 2000 article, *The Purpose and Elements of Effective Assessment Systems*, that “the ultimate goal of state standards and assessments is not to sort students into ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ of knowledge, but to enable all students to meet the standards”. They presented six components of an effective assessment system. The system is aligned with rigorous state standards, addresses specific goals and purposes, balances validity,

reliability, and efficiency, informs instruction and provides consequences, has mechanisms to encourage schools and districts to align their instruction and evaluation with the state system, and has a clearly articulated relationship with national measures of student performance. They also delineate limitations to accountability programs in their support by suggesting that testing does not improve schools, people do. They contend that data can often be misleading, more data are not always better, and no one test can relate the entire story of a school system, school, or individual student.

One challenge for many states and school districts when they design their accountability system is in determining what is essential to teach. Wiggins and McTighe, authors of *Understanding by Design* (2005), confront this challenge by focusing on what is important to learning and enduring ideas, and contend that principle should guide decision makers.

Doug Reeves, author of *Leaders' Guide to Standards* (2002), has created the term, Power Standards, which focuses on three concepts; “does the standard have endurance, does the standard have leverage and does the standard provide readiness for the next level of instruction?” Further defined by Reeves, a standard with endurance will consist of the knowledge and skills used by students for several years after obtaining these skills and knowledge. A standard will have leverage if it aids students in other academic areas. Readiness for the next level of instruction is based on the concept that if the standard is not necessary for building more skill/knowledge it should be discarded.

When examining Wiggins and McTighe's concept of enduring understandings, both knowledge and understanding are central to learning, however, these two components of learning are different in that knowing something is far different than understanding something. In their book, *Understanding by Design* (2005), Wiggins and McTighe identify six facets of

understanding; we understand when we can explain, interpret, apply, when we have perspective, when we can empathize, and when we have self-knowledge.

## **Teachers**

Teachers occupy a central role in the implementation of curriculum in a school district. If newly developed curriculum is to be effective, it must be created with teacher in mind, since teachers interpret curriculum based on their knowledge, beliefs, and experiences.

According to Huberman (1989), teacher anxiety and insecurity can be misinterpreted as resistance to change when undertaking changes in curriculum. Michael Fullan (1990) believes it is the failure to “recognize the support teachers need to thoroughly understand new initiatives being implemented” that is the real problem. He postulated that in order to implement change, one must have a personal stake in the process, and must be knowledgeable about the issues when under review.

In his research thesis titled, *Support: Providing for Teachers Implementing Core Curriculum* (1995). Vance Mokolky states that administrative support is essential in assisting teachers cope with change, and that teachers who are actively involved in the implementation process are more receptive. As a result, they become more committed to change, which Mokolky suggests, can be accomplished through staff development programs that give teachers appropriate assistance during this process.

The research is clear concerning the importance of well-trained teachers in implementing new programs. Researcher Linda Darling Hammond (1999), found “that improving the expertise of teacher, dollar for dollar, results in far greater gains in students learning than do investments in test, materials, or programs.” In a question and answer session held with Ms. Hammond, the question was posed as to the effect teachers have on how well students do in school. Citing

research over the last ten years, Linda Darling Hammond stated “it’s now clear that the single most important determinant of what students learn is what their teachers know/” Knowing the important role the teacher plays in delivering the Comprehensive Curriculum to students, it is crucial that staff-development sessions are restructured to meet the needs of the classroom teacher.

The Louisiana State Department of Education conducted a survey of school districts after the first year of implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum that indicated that of the seventy-five respondents, sixty-five permitted modifications, while ten did not. The results of the survey further indentified professional development activities that were effective in assisting teachers implement the Comprehensive Curriculum. Some the these activities included staff from the Regional Service Centers demonstrating instructional strategies specifically designed for use with the Comprehensive Curriculum, state curriculum facilitators conducting sharing meetings with teacher, state department personnel providing training to local districts on curriculum implementation, mandating six days of district staff development sessions designed exclusively for the Comprehensive Curriculum, and whole faculty study groups focusing on the implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum.

### **Summary**

The roots of the current reform efforts can be traced back to 1957, when the United States was shocked by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic’s placing a satellite into orbit around the earth. This initiated the United States’ efforts to reclaim its perceived birthright as the world’s greatest democracy, and super power. One corollary of this event was the so-called “race for space”. Another consequence was the renewed emphasis on education, especially in science and math. These efforts to improve educational systems have resulted in a plethora of reform

movements, including the most current effort to ensure that every student will be on grade level by 2014, known as The No Child Left Behind Act. The NCLB legislation has fostered an environment similar to the late 1950s and 1960s, in which high stakes testing and accountability is the norm, and expectations for success are high. Most states, and particularly Louisiana, have adopted accountability programs that emphasize testing to meet higher and higher standards. Louisiana's efforts to develop state standards and benchmarks dates back to 1989 as shown in Table 2. Louisiana's primary vehicle for reaching these goals is the Comprehensive Curriculum. Although the implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum is the responsibility of the classroom teachers, local education agencies must restructure staff development activities in order for teachers to be successful in this effort to improve educational institutions in Louisiana.

**Table 2**

Louisiana's High Stakes Testing and Accountability Plan Time Line

Date	Item(s) Developed
1989	Louisiana developed state standards and benchmarks.
1997-2005	High Stakes Testing Program developed.
Spring 1999	Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP-CRT) test for English Language Arts (ELA) and Math administered to grades 4 & 8.
Spring 2000 & 8	LEAP test for Science and SS were administered to grades 4 & 8
Spring 2001	Graduate Exit Exam (GEE) ELA and Math administered to grade 10.

(Table 2 continued)

Date	Item Developed
Spring 2002	GEE Science and SS test administered to grade 11.
1998-2005	Louisiana students at grades 3, 5, 7 & 9 were assessed. using the Iowa Test, a norm referenced test---NRT.
Spring 2006	<i>i</i> LEAP ( <i>Integrated</i> Louisiana Educational Assessment Program) administered to grades 3, 5, 6, 7 & 9. The <i>i</i> LEAP was developed to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, requiring that state assessments be aligned to state content standards. The <i>i</i> LEAP yields both CRT and NRT scores. Thus, this combination results in one assessment tool meeting both the NCLB requirements and Louisiana’s state law requiring NRT assessments.
2003	Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) were developed as a continuation of Louisiana’s effort to expand and extend the content standards. GLEs identify what all students should know and be able to do by the end of a given grade level from Pre-K-12. Developed as a result of NCLB.
2005	Development of the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum (CC) in the areas of ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies. The purpose of the CC is to align

**(Table 2 continued)**

Date	Item Developed
Spring 2008	<p>content, instruction, and assessment. The use of the CC provides uniformity in content taught across the state of Louisiana. The units that make up the CC are arranged so that the content to be assessed will be taught before the state's testing dates.</p> <p>Revisions of the Comprehensive Curriculum. The revisions were made based teacher feedback, external review, and comments from course writers. New features include the integration of literacy strategies and Blackline Masters for each course.</p>
(Sessions, LDE, July, 2008)	

## CHAPTER 3.

### METHODS

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The focus of this study was to observe the behaviors of first grade teachers in implementing the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum (2005) in English Language Arts. The results of the study describe the culture, its people, and their behaviors (first grade teachers, classroom, LCC/ELA). The methodology used in this study was qualitative research in the form of case studies.

#### **Case Study---Participant-as-Observer**

Historically, qualitative research has had its roots in the area of social sciences, particularly anthropology; however, during the late 1970s and the 1980s, Robert Stake (1978), Robert Yin (1981), and Sharan Merriam (1988) advocated using case studies for educational research. Lou Smith (1978) defined the case as a bounded system in order to determine what the case is or is not. The term “bounded” was added to stress the importance of determining the boundaries of the system (Johnson & Christensen, 2000, p. 376). For the purpose of this investigation, the researcher conforms to the definition of case study research as defined by Johnson and Christensen (2000, p. 376). Case study research is research that provides a detailed account and analysis of one or more cases.

“Participant observation is the process enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities. It provides the context for developing of sampling guidelines and interview guides” (De Walt & DeWalt, 2002). Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999) define participant observation as “the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities,

people, and physical aspects of the situation” (p. 54).

R. L. Gold (1958) developed a four-stage continuum for observations that also addresses participation (Shank, 2002). The four stages are the complete observer, the observer-as-participant, the participant-as-observer, and the complete observer. One stage is generally established as the primary venue for the researcher; however, if the researcher is in the field for an extended time period, it is possible to be cast in all four roles at different times during the study (Johnson & Christensen, p. 188). Time is the primary factor that typically determines which one of the four roles is used by the researcher. The researcher, as complete participant, does not notify members that they are being studied, and will assimilate into the group. As participant-as-observer, the researcher informs the members that they are being studied and spends time with the group. Observer-as-participant informs members that they are being studied and devotes limited amounts of time observing the group and its members. The role of complete observer does not inform members that they are being observed, and as a consequence, the researcher observes as an outsider (Johnson & Christensen, pp. 189-190).

The study examined the implementation of the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum English Language Arts by selected first grade teachers with the researcher in the role of participant-as-observer.

### **Research Questions**

1. Do teachers find the Comprehensive Curriculum clearly written?
2. Do teachers use the activities provided in the Comprehensive Curriculum?
3. Have teachers had adequate in-service related to the implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum?

4. Do teachers believe that their school administrator provides appropriate support in implementing the Comprehensive Curriculum?
5. Do teachers use resources other than the Comprehensive Curriculum?
6. Has the Comprehensive Curriculum impacted teachers' instructional planning?
7. Are teachers cognizant of the state's mandated policies regarding the Comprehensive Curriculum?
8. How has the implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum impacted instruction in the participating teachers classroom.

### **Qualitative Methodology**

Just as case study research can include both single-and-multiple-cases, case study evidence can be collected, analyzed, and reported utilizing solely qualitative methodology, solely quantitative methodology, or a mixed methodology utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods (Yin, 1994). The qualitative method was determined to be the most appropriate for this study. The natural settings permitted the researcher to describe human behaviors and events as they occurred. Data was gathered and analyzed inductively as themes and patterns emerged thus contributing to the holistic understanding of the social situation under study (Bryan, 1998). Qualitative methodology allowed the focus to remain on the process rather than the outcome (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

According to Shank (2002), it is essential that all possibilities are explored in order to arrive at appropriate conclusions (p. 101). The researcher developed a questionnaire to determine teacher perception of the Comprehensive Curriculum (Appendix A). The researcher selected six elementary schools in the district in which the investigation took place. Permission was granted by the six principals to distribute the questionnaire to all first grade teachers; this was a total of

sixteen teachers. The researcher distributed the questionnaire to the sixteen teachers after receiving verbal permission from each principal. The results from the teacher questionnaire are listed in Chapter 4 in Table 3. The six schools selected for the purpose of distributing the teacher questionnaire reflected the school district's diverse student population.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The most common data collection methods include observations, interviews, and questionnaires in interpretive research. Interviews enable data to be collected through direct verbal interactions between individuals and are routinely used in interpretive research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Also, interviews are predicated on the belief that knowledge can be generated by individuals through conversation, and that the perspective of others is meaningful (Patton, 2002). Questionnaires are typically more focused and structured than interviews and observations, and are most often used to discern patterns and/or to identify persons possessing specific attributes (Bryman, 2001). The methods of data collection for this investigation included the questionnaire, interviews, and observations. Data was collected from responses to the questionnaire, the field notes from the observations, and the discussions with the teachers.

According to David Garson (2002), case study dissertations seek to provide theoretical or policy insight, and as a result, a triangulation protocol for credibility is recommended. The triangulation technique for this study involved the use of a questionnaire, observations, and interviews. The reason for combining these methods for the purpose of credibility to overcome possible weaknesses or intrinsic biases (Yin, 1984).

### **Selection of Participants**

The schools participating in this study were chosen by purposive sampling. They were selected on the basis of student diversity, locations across the district, and ethnic populations

reflective of the school district.

The researcher designed a questionnaire consisting of eight items for teacher response. The title of the questionnaire is *A Teacher's View of the Comprehensive Curriculum*. The questionnaire used a five point Likert scale (5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, and 1=strongly disagree). Questionnaires were distributed to all sixteen first grade teachers within the six school sites with instructions to complete and return the questionnaire to the researcher. Results from the questionnaire can be found in Chapter 4, Table 3.

Research for this investigation began in the spring of the school year. Annual testing occurs across the state of Louisiana during the spring semester. Because of the time constraints created by the testing, only four of the original six school sites were selected to participate in the observations and interviews portion of the investigation. Each school's population consisted of students in grades Pre-K-5. Within each of the four school sites, one first grade teacher was selected to participate in the research study, which consisted of classroom observations and one-on-one interviews. The participating teacher was selected based on teacher willingness to participate in the study and principal recommendation.

## **Ethics**

“Because qualitative methods are highly personal and interpersonal, because naturalistic inquiry takes the researcher into the real world where people live and work, and because in-depth interviewing opens up is inside people---qualitative inquiry may be more intrusive and involve greater reactivity than surveys, tests, and other qualitative approaches” (Patton, 1990). Every effort was made to address issues in a professional and ethical manner while implementing the study. The identities of all individuals participating in this study remained confidential, and were reported through pseudonyms (American Education Research Association, 1992). Identities of

participating schools remained anonymous as well.

## **Observations**

James Spradley's Developmental Research Sequence (DRS) protocol was used when observing and documenting the dimensions of social behavior, space, actor, activity, object, act, event, time, goal, and feelings (Spradley, 1979). According to Daniel Zalles (2005), one of the advantages of using observations for data collection is because they are "good for capturing the dynamics of behaviors taken from actual situations (interplay of participants, characteristic of the setting, and sequence of events as they unfold)".

The researcher observed each teacher one time a week over a period of four weeks. Phonics and reading instruction occurred during the hour and a half observation time. Portions of Unit 5, *Words in a Fun Way---Poetry* and Unit 6, *Discovering is Exciting---Reading/Writing Nonfiction*, of the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum English Language Arts, Grade 1 were included in the teachers' lessons during the observation periods. Information from these units of the Comprehensive Curriculum were observed as integrated into the phonics curriculum and reading curriculum.

## **Interviews**

The researcher conducted a minimum of two one-on-one interviews with each first grade teacher. The purpose of the first interview was to establish rapport and trust between the researcher and the teacher. The researcher noted that as the study progressed, the teachers felt more at ease, thus responding with more natural dialogue. The purpose of the second interview was to have a more structured conversation relative to the Comprehensive Curriculum.

Questions asked during the first interview are listed in Appendix D. As mentioned before, the purpose of the first interview was to garner general information concerning each teacher and to

establish a comfortable and positive rapport between the researcher and the teacher. The information gathered during the second interview was for the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of each teacher's belief, implementation, comments, concerns and overall opinion of the Comprehensive Curriculum. The researcher used the eight questionnaire questions for this purpose (Appendix A). However, each of the eight questions were discussed at a more in-depth level than just the ranking of responses. It was information gained during the second interview that gave a deeper understanding of the level of implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum to the investigation.

### **Bias**

Researchers must always be aware of the issue of bias in qualitative research. Berg and Smith (1988) raise the question, "where do we (social scientists) position ourselves in connection with our research?" They also emphasize the responsibility qualitative researchers have to science, and to participants of the study to examine their relationship with their research.

Bogan and Biklen (1992) state that the following should be considered when viewing qualitative studies: "qualitative studies are not impressionistic essays made after a quick visit to a setting or after some conversations with a few subjects; the researcher's primary goal is to add knowledge, and not pass judgment on the setting; and qualitative researchers guard against their own biases by recording detailed footnotes that include reflections on the subjectivity".

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness describes the extent to which an inquirer can persuade audiences that the findings are credible. Credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability served as guides for the investigator in establishing the trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## **Credibility**

This study was approached with the intent to document and report findings as they occurred throughout the study. Evidence for this study was gathered at four school sites within the selected school district. Observations and interviews during the course of the study provided the impetus for gathering data from which certain themes emerged. Scheduling observations and interviews in a structured format provided data that was obtained in a recurring manner, increasing the reliability of the information.

## **Transferability**

Transferability is most often established in a qualitative study through the use of thick description (Geertz, 1973) in which the researcher has provided accurate and adequate descriptive data of the settings, methods of data collection, findings, and conclusions. Future readers, including, but not limited to, educators or researchers, will determine the level of transferability of this study to their own settings.

## **Dependability and Confirmability**

The researcher made every effort to interpret the data collected in an objective manner. Notes gathered during the observations and interviews were shared with the participants for comments and feedback at the conclusion of the data analysis. The researcher attempted to eliminate any personal opinions, which enhanced the trustworthiness of the data, and in so doing, established confirmability.

## **Summary**

The researcher conducted an investigation to determine the extent to which the implementation of the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum English Language Arts in selected first grade classrooms had occurred. The study was conducted using qualitative research

methodology, with the researcher serving as a participant observer. Case studies were used to report the results. The researcher used a questionnaire, observations, and interviews for the purpose of gathering information that document the findings.

## CHAPTER 4.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The primary focus of this study was to investigate the implementation of the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum English Language Arts in selected first grade classrooms. Information from teacher observations, interviews, and a questionnaire was studied to give insight to this inquiry.

#### **Teacher Questionnaire**

The first research tool used was the teacher questionnaire designed by the researcher. The questionnaire (Appendix A) consisted of eight statements based on a Likert scale. Responses ranged from 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 4=disagree, and 1=strongly disagree.

The questionnaire was administered to first grade teachers at six public elementary schools, four of which were selected for the case studies. These school sites were determined by means of a purposive sampling. The researcher administered the questionnaires to first grade teachers at the six schools. Some were completed while the researcher waited, and others were picked up by the researcher later in the week. The total number of first grade teachers participating in the questionnaire was sixteen. Results from this questionnaire are found in Table 3.

Information gathered from this sampling of first grade teachers indicated that a larger percentage believed that the Comprehensive Curriculum is easily understood as compared to fewer teachers who experienced difficulty in understanding the curriculum. Teachers suggested that they are aware of the state's policies concerning the curriculum; however many are ambivalent in their understanding of the equivalent activities component.

According to the results of the questionnaire, teachers agreed that their administrators direct their use of the Comprehensive Curriculum, most decry a lack of training concerning the

curriculum itself. A large percentage of the teachers are knowledgeable relative to state policies regarding the curriculum in all four core subjects.

**Table 3**

Questionnaire Results: *A Teacher's View of the Comprehensive Curriculum*

Statement	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% Neutral	% Disagree	% Strongly Disagree
The CC's Easily Understood	0%	62%	25%	12.5%	0%
I Use the Activities from the CC	25%	56.25%	18.75%	0%	0%
I Have Had Adequate In-Service to Use the CC	6.25%	12.5%	37.5%	43.75%	0%
My Administrator Directs My Use of the CC	37.5%	43.75%	18.75%	0%	0%
I Use Other Resources with the CC	62.5%	37.5%	0%	0%	0%
The CC has Impacted What I Plan for My Students	31.25%	50%	18.75%	0%	0%
I Know the State's Policies Concerning the CC	50%	25%	12.5%	12.5%	0%
I Understand the Equivalent Activities of the CC	25%	31.25%	18.75%	18.75%	6.25%

81.25% of the teachers reported that they use the activities suggested for instruction that are included in the Comprehensive Curriculum. A large percentage of the teachers indicated that they use other resources than the Comprehensive Curriculum to instruct their students. Teachers revealed that their overall planning for their students has been significantly impacted by the mandate to use the Comprehensive Curriculum.

### **Case Study**

According to Creswell (1998), a case study is an explanation “bounded system or a case over time through detailed, in-depth collection involving multiple sources on information rich in context. The bounded system is bounded by time and place, and it is the case being studied---a program, an event, an activity, or individuals”. This study is considered a bounded system as dictated by the time, place, and program allowed for by the observations, interviews, and questionnaire. The daily time allowed for data collection was from 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.; the place allowed for data collection was the elementary school classroom setting (4 school sites) and the program was the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum, English Language Arts, Grade One (2005). The investigation took place in the spring semester of the school year. Observations were made in four classrooms over a four week period. This resulted in a total of sixteen observations.

The issue at the center of this case study is the implementation of Louisiana’s Comprehensive Curriculum English Language Arts in a sampling by grade one teachers. The researcher postulates that all too often, mandates are delivered to the classroom teacher with insufficient preparation to ensure that the teacher who is responsible for implementing these mandates is fully cognizant of the purpose and the “how to” implement the mandates.

Steps taken to address the issues of implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum began

by the selection of four elementary schools from the school district in which the investigation took place. Once the location of the schools had been determined, it was established that one first grade teacher from each of the four sites would serve as the school's participant in the study. Teachers signed a consent form (Appendix B) to participate in the study and understood that the researcher would visit their classroom one time a week over a period of four weeks for the purpose of observing literacy instruction. Teachers also understood that their participation would include several one-on-one interviews. All four schools were reflective of the school district's ethnic makeup.

The results garnered from the observations in the classroom identified three emerging themes: phonics instruction, reading instruction, and language arts instruction. Additional, impacting factors emerged as well, although they were not themes. Teacher knowledge of the Comprehensive Curriculum, staff-development, and administrative support are the impacting factors that emerged. The one-on-one interviews revealed information more closely related to the Comprehensive Curriculum itself. The information included teacher attitude, teacher implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum and teacher training.

### **Themes**

The three themes that emerged from the data collected included: phonics instruction, reading instruction, and language arts instruction. The researcher spent equal amounts of time during the morning instructional period in each of the four first grade classrooms. Students were receiving phonics instruction upon arrival at each school site. The first instructional block for all students was scheduled from 9:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. All students were engaged in whole group lessons based on the *Open Court Phonics Program*. This program is considered a direct instruction type of teaching format. Components that make up the *Open Court Phonics Program* are:

- Decodable Books: Each book supports the instruction of a new phonics element and incorporates elements and words that have been learned earlier. The primary purpose is to provide practice reading the words.
- Fluency: Fluency is the effortless ability to read words with seemingly little attention to decoding. It also involves grouping words into meaningful units and using expression appropriately. Fluency is critical but does not ensure comprehension.
- Oral Blending: Oral blending focuses on hearing sounds through a sequence that introduces the most easily distinguished word parts, and systematically transition blending that contains all the challenges of phonic decoding.
- Sound Cards: The sound cards help remind students of sounds in the English Language. The cards are displayed in the classroom.
- Dictation: The purpose of dictation is to teach students to spell words based on sounds and spellings. Learning dictation gives students a strategy for reflecting on the sounds they hear in words to help with their writing.
- Spelling: Spelling lessons are organized around different spelling patterns.
- Reading Comprehension Skills : Author's point of view, sequence, fact & opinion, main idea & details, compare & contrast, cause & effect, classify & categorize, author's purpose, drawing conclusions, and making inferences.
- Vocabulary: The purpose of vocabulary instruction is to teach students a range of strategies for learning, remembering, and incorporating unknown vocabulary words into students' reading, writing, speaking, and listening vocabularies. Vocabulary cards are displayed in the classroom.

The assessment portion of the *Open Court Phonics Program* includes:

- Spelling: The week's spelling list involves students writing the spelling words, answering multiple choice questions, & writing dictated sentences.
- Comprehension: Multiple choice & short answer questions about the week's literature study.
- Vocabulary: Multiple choice questions on the week's vocabulary words.
- Grammar Lesson Quiz: Students identify parts of speech and correct sentence structure.
- Comprehension Quiz: Students read a short story that they have not read before & then answer 6 multiple choice questions.

(McGraw-Hill/SRA, 2004).

Reading instruction began after the completion of the phonics instruction. The district-wide reading series is the Harcourt Reading Program titled *Collections* (2002). According to Harcourt, "*Collections* is a balanced, comprehensive program that provides the materials and support teachers need to help students become fluent, lifelong readers. The foundation of *Collections* is research-based instruction and organized in practical, easy-to-use lessons and components." Oral language, phonological awareness, literature, letter-sound knowledge, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing are the focus of the *Collections* reading program.

### **Boswell's Grade One**

#### School One---Hilltop Elementary Schools

Observation conducted in Ms. Boswell's first grade class began in February, 2008 and continued until March, 2008. Observations were made during the phonics, reading, and language arts instruction block occurring daily from 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. The researcher has reported the specific content instruction, phonics, reading, and language arts as a composite

rather than day by day observations. Observations in each classroom involved in the study occurred once a week for a period of four weeks.

Hilltop Elementary School is centrally located in the urban school district where the study was conducted. The 2007-2008 total student population at Hilltop Elementary School is 442. African American students comprise 99.8% of the school population, and Caucasian students comprise .2% of the school population. Over 96% of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. The student body includes students in grades Pre-K-12 with a 19:1 pupil teacher ratio. Ms. Boswell is a teacher who was displaced from New Orleans, Louisiana as a result of Hurricane Katrina which occurred in August, 2005. This is her second full year of teaching first grade at Hilltop Elementary School. Ms. Boswell plans to return to New Orleans when the rebuilding of her community nears completion.

### **Phonics Instruction Observations**

Among the most significant instructional resources that the researcher noted upon entering Ms. Boswell's classroom for the first time, were the picture/sound cards displayed on the walls. The researcher inquired about the cards, and was informed that they were one component of the *Open Court Phonics Program* materials titled Sound/Spelling Wall Cards (McGraw-Hill/SRA, 2004). According to SRA/McGraw-Hill, "*The Open Court Phonics Program* is designed to provide systematic, explicit phonemic awareness, and phonics instruction? (2004).

The Sound/Spelling Cards have some of the characteristics of the traditional alphabet picture cards; however, these cards offer more detailed information to students. The Sound/Spelling Cards not only have the standard alphabet letter accompanied by a picture that begins with a particular letter, but there are extra cards displaying certain letter combinations. Some of these letter combinations are ow, ou, ar, ew, ea, as well as long and short vowel sound cards.

The researcher immediately established that phonics was explicitly taught first every morning in Ms. Boswell's class. She also observed that the *Open Court Phonics Program* is based on direct instruction, and includes very detailed and scripted lessons.

Students used individual decodable books during the phonics lessons. These books are one of several components of the *Open Court Phonics Program*. Ms. Boswell encouraged students to make predictions about the new stories. She also conducted book walks with all new decodable stories. These walks included discussing the cover of each story, author's name, illustrator's name and table of contents. During one particular observation, Ms. Boswell made students aware of some special elements that they would find when reading the new decodable story. She mentioned fluency, stating that they should try to read the story as she did. Ms. Boswell pointed out that quotation marks would often be used in this story, and asked if anyone could tell her about these marks. Character voice was also mentioned and discussed before students began reading on their own.

After the book walk, students were allowed to read to themselves. Ms. Boswell instructed the students to read silently or low enough so that other students would not be disturbed. She monitored and moved around the classroom noting if students were on task, or if any student was in need of assistance.

Ms. Boswell called on student volunteers to read sections orally following the silent reading component of the lesson. She responded to the students with "good job" or "I like the way you read that page", or some other complimentary phrase. Next, Ms. Boswell instructed the students "point, ready, read", and all students read the page together orally along with Ms. Boswell. The "point, ready, read" process is a strategy that Ms. Boswell used to have all students keep their place as they read. This process continued until the entire decodable book had been read. The

books are very small and made of paper, and typically do not consist of more than ten pages.

Ms. Boswell often used the term fluency and discussed with students how important fluency was to their reading during this block of reading instruction. She encouraged them to use the Sound/Spelling cards to assist them when encountering a difficult word or words with which they were unfamiliar. She often prompted students, when they asked for her assistance, by directing them to the cards, or reminding them of other words that contained the same sound pattern. Ms. Boswell modeled for students by reading orally certain passages within the text, and encouraged students to use illustrations as a tool when reading on their own.

Ms. Boswell divided her students into teams: the red team, the brown team, and the orange team. She would call students by their team color to the whole group rug near the front of the classroom, where she utilized a portable white board.

One particular whole group lesson focused on the beginning letter combination of “kn” and on the ending letter combination of “le”. An additional component to this lesson included homophones. Words such as knife, knee, knob, knight, knead, knuckle, know, night, need, not, prickly, and pickle were written on the white board. Ms. Boswell referred to a previous story read by the students in which the character, Homer, had tied a knot with a string. This reminded the students that some words beginning with “kn” are represented by the phoneme “n”. Students were also asked to locate any homophones among the words listed, and several students responded correctly.

Instruction focusing on syllables was observed while students were shown how to “clap out” syllables. Students counted the number of claps which helped to determine the number of syllables which were contained within that word. Students practiced syllabication listing words that began with “kn” and ended with “le”.

Phonics instruction was consistent during each of the observations periods. Sound cards and decodable text were used to remind students of the sounds that they used daily to practice new vocabulary. Students read the text silently, and orally as a whole group, and then with a partner, and completed worksheets in their phonics workbooks, which were based on the sound patterns that were covered during that day's lesson.

### **Reading Instruction Observations**

Reading instruction occurred daily, after phonics instruction, in Ms. Boswell's first grade. Poetry was always used during the reading block, which usually occurred from 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. and was presented during the first portion of the reading instruction. Several story titles observed were, *I Went Downtown*, *Have a Piece of Fruit* and *Farmyard*. Ms. Boswell encouraged students to be active listeners during the poetry lesson.

Students were directed to the table of contents to determine the story title, the author, and the illustrator for the daily lesson. Ms. Boswell informed students that their current story had originally been written in Spanish, and that this particular story was developed by three different people in roles of author, illustrator, and translator.

Students conducted and practiced both book and picture walks. Students made predictions as to what they thought the story would be about based on the information and illustrations.

Ms. Boswell directed students to "point, ready, read" before reading orally. This strategy assisted students in keeping their place as they read together. Students then read orally, two pages at a time. Ms. Boswell reviewed and discussed the two page passage with the students at the completion of the oral reading. Students were encouraged to give their input. The researcher observed a reading lesson in which the story, *Tumbleweed Stew*, was introduced to the students. Ms. Boswell informed the students that the author and illustrator of this particular story are

sisters. She reminded students that the setting for the story takes place in Texas, and that the story was written in rhyme. The process of “point, ready, read” was continued for this story. Ms. Boswell and students would read two pages at a time orally, after which they would discuss the passage.

*Frog and Toad and Friends* was one of the stories Ms. Boswell and the students read from the reading textbook. The phrase, “spring is around the corner”, was used in the story. Frog kept looking around the corner to see if spring was indeed there. He would see a tree, a flower garden, but according to him, no spring.

### **Language Arts Instruction Observations**

The researcher observed that the language arts instruction was integrated into the phonics and reading segments of the literacy instruction. The first language art skill observed came from the dictation and spelling component of the *Open Court Phonics Program*. The purpose of the dictation was to teach students to spell words based on the program’s sounds and spelling. According to the *Open Court Phonics Program*, “learning dictation gives students a new strategy for reflecting on the sounds they hear in words to help them with their own writing” (2004). Spelling lessons were organized around the different spelling patterns that were taught during lessons aided by the Sound/Spelling cards.

The researcher observed that the dictation/spelling process was used in each lesson. The words and sentences were recorded by students in their notebook, and put their name and the date at the top of the page. Ms. Boswell called out one words that had the sound/spelling the students had been working on for the week; for example, the word “knew” with the “kn” spelling. She would call out the word, use the word in a sentence, repeat the word, and then students would write the word. There were six to eight words given to students to spell, and

several sentences containing at least one of these words for the students to write. She reminded students to use capital letters at the beginning of sentences, and the correct punctuations throughout the sentences. Ms. Boswell rewarded students after she had checked their work at the conclusion of the dictation/spelling lesson. One student was assigned to gather the blue notebooks and store them away in their appropriate box.

Ms. Boswell had students discuss the “describing words” (adjectives) they found in the story during the reading of *The Farmyard*. She also emphasized plurals (head/heads), and the sound/spelling “ight” that would be found throughout the story. Ms. Boswell wrote sentences on the white board, and asked students to proofread the sentences for any corrections involving spelling, punctuation marks, and capital letters. Students were told not to erase words they had misspelled throughout the process of spelling. Students were told to circle the misspelled word, and then to write the corrected word out beside the misspelled circle word.

### **Other Impacting Factors Observed**

The researcher observed that Ms. Boswell was constantly engaged in classroom management strategies throughout all lesson. The strategies did not disrupt instruction, and were embedded in the classroom procedures. It should be noted that this was an ongoing process throughout each observation session.

Some of the strategies noted were: raising two fingers until all student noticed and became silent, using positive feedback to denote a good job; saying “thank-you” for following directions; and putting on soft music and letting students stretch when they needed a break.

There were several occasions when a student would be sent to the behavior chart to “flip” their card, but this was conducted subtly without causing a distraction. Dismissing a student to the “time-out” room was the most drastic step taken by Ms. Boswell for inappropriate behavior.

This occurred only once in Ms. Boswell's class during the observations made by the researcher. It did not disrupt instruction, and she was able to continue conducting the lesson without having lost the attention of the other students.

Another impacting factor in her class was the presence of a reading coach. The reading coach had three to four student sitting with her at a table for the purpose of providing individual instruction. Students in need of assistance staying on task during the phonics and reading lessons, in need of clarifications, or in need of more in-depth instruction were students selected to work with the reading coach. On one visit, the reading coach, and the speech teacher, were providing this service both one-on-one for one student and small group for several other students while Ms. Boswell conducted the whole class instruction.

### **Cartwright's Grade One**

#### School Two---Seaside Elementary School

Seaside Elementary School is located in the southern part of the urban school district where the study was conducted. The 2007-2008 total student population at Seaside Elementary School was 479; 90% African American, 5.4% Hispanic, 1.9% Caucasian, and .6% Asian. Eighty-nine percent of the school population is eligible for free or reduced lunch. The student body includes grades Pre-K-12 with a 17:1 pupil teacher ratio. Ms. Cartwright has taught for forty years as a first grade teacher, retiring from teaching at one point, and later returning to teach first grade again.

#### **Phonics Instruction Observations**

Upon entering Ms. Cartwright's first grade classroom, the researcher was immediately exposed to a print rich environment. Posted around the room were various categories of vocabulary, including environmental print, a graffiti wall where students could write words,

classmates' names, and content words from science, social studies, and math. There was a pyramid shaped poster listing the levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, which was present in all four of the first grade classrooms observed by the researcher. Apparently, this was designed to demonstrate a commitment to emphasizing the development of comprehension within the various classrooms as well as the awareness of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS).

Ms. Cartwright used the Elmo projector to teach decodable books during the phonics lesson, which permitted the students to follow along in their text as Ms. Cartwright taught the lesson. During the whole group portion of phonics instruction, Ms. Cartwright would prompt students to determine if the book illustrations assisted them in decoding a word they were not sure how to pronounce. She used prompts such as "did the picture go with the story?" to assist the students in learning vocabulary.

During the phonics lesson, Ms. Cartwright again used the Elmo projector for the purpose of assisting students in following her in their decodable text. The title of the book being taught was *The City Bus*. Ms. Cartwright underlined the word "city", and asked students to identify the ending sound of the word "city". Only one student responded correctly; however, all students were asked to read the title aloud. Following this activity, Ms. Cartwright instructed students to read fluently, to read with pizzazz, and to listen for the long "e" sound.

The reading portion of the phonics instruction includes the following activities: (1) the student read the decodable text to themselves; (2) the teacher asked student questions concerning the passage they read; (3) one student read the passage orally to the class as Ms. Cartwright pointed to the text using the Elmo projector; and (4) all students read the passage together, or (5) Ms. Cartwright read the story orally. At the conclusion of this process, students would find a partner and go to another part of the room to read the decodable text together. Students took

turns reading until the entire decodable book had been read by both students.

On one visit, the researcher had the opportunity to walk around the room while students read together. One student was having difficulty reading one particular word, and his buddy told him to skip the word and to keep reading. This same student assisted her buddy throughout the reading of the book. The student offering assistance to the other student read with a great deal of fluency, and the other student had the opportunity to hear her model how the text should be read. This process continued with each student reading alternate pages until the end of the book.

Upon completion of buddy reading, students returned to the rug for whole group discussion. Ms. Cartwright told students that the purpose of this strategy was to examine the extent to which they had comprehended the story. Students were encouraged to use their copy of the book to assist them, if they needed help remembering.

Ms. Cartwright read the story, *The City Bus*, to the students. She explained the word “city” by naming three smaller areas within the students’ school district with which they were familiar. She explained that these areas helped make up their city.

Prior to students reading one of the decodable stories, Ms. Cartwright introduced that day’s vocabulary on flash cards. Once all the words had been presented and discussed, Ms. Cartwright asked students to come up and act out the words.

Ms. Cartwright’s pattern of teaching the *Open Court Phonics Program* consisted of utilizing the sound/spelling cards for the purpose of teaching phoneme/grapheme correspondences, and as a resource for students in asking for assistance in decoding and spelling words. She used the Elmo projector to help students understand what she was referencing as they read the decodable stories. After discussing the text with Ms. Cartwright, students read the text silently back and forth between two students, and then read the page orally together. Students would buddy read

the story, and to assist each other as they, they were encouraged to use story pictures to make predictions about the stories. By giving personal meaning to the term “city” and having students act out vocabulary, Ms. Cartwright deepened the students’ comprehension.

### **Reading Instruction Observations**

Reading instruction at Seaside Elementary School occurred immediately after phonics instruction. The time block allocated for reading instruction was 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

The transition from phonics instruction into the reading portion of the daily schedule was accomplished by dismissing students one set of tables at a time. Often students were encouraged to “get out their wiggles” before joining everyone on the whole group rug. Once students had gathered onto the rug, the reading lesson typically began with a poem, which in this instance was a poem entitled *Bears*. The author was anonymous, and Ms. Cartwright discussed this term and its meaning with the students. She first had students repeat the word several times and told them it was now their word. Students then sang a song entitled *Sing a Bear Song*. Ms. Cartwright posted a Know/Want to Know/Learned (K/W/L) chart and began soliciting from students things they knew about bears. The students responded, and she recorded their answers, which indicated what they knew about bears. She asked students to tell her what they would like to know about bears. She recorded these responses under the “W” on the chart indicating what students wanted to know or learn about bears. Ms. Cartwright then directed students to a posted poem titled *5 Little Fish*, which students chorally read several times. Reading poetry was an exercise that occurred during the reading lesson.

Ms. Cartwright introduced a bear story entitled *I Will Always Love You*. She challenged the students to determine if the story was fiction or nonfiction. Students responded that the story was fiction based on the fact that a picture in the story showed the bears sitting at a table.

Several students hold Ms. Cartwright that real bears do not sit down at a table. Ms. Cartwright then introduced another book titled *Bears*. She conducted a picture walk through the book with the students. Then she read several pages from the book to the students. Ms. Cartwright asked students if they felt this book depicted bears accurately, and the students responded in the affirmative. The book gave factual information about bears, such as they are mammals. She indicated to the students that the term for this type of story is nonfiction. Ms. Cartwright told students that she was going to read some statements, and if they thought the statements were true to indicate by a thumbs up and if the statements were false to indicate by a thumbs down.

This particular reading lesson concluded with two activities. Ms. Cartwright asked students to tell her what they had learned about bears. She recorded these responses on the K/W/L chart under “L” for what they have learned. She then placed a Venn diagram on the Elmo projector, labeling one side Bears, the other side Fish, and the middle Both. An activity with the students discussing exclusivity related to fish, bears, and commonalities between them concluded the lesson.

During another reading lesson, Ms. Cartwright read a poem about a mouse. After she read the poem several times, she asked students to recall some things they heard in the poem about the mouse. Some of the responses included “they have no chin, they have a long tail, and they have a small face”.

The story, *Absent Minded Toad*, was the reading selection for the last day of the researcher’s observation. Students had read the selection the prior day, and Ms. Cartwright reviewed the story with the students by asking questions. Each student was given a straw in the shape of a square and were asked to find certain words in the story. The first word was “blue”, shown on the Elmo projector; a student told the group the word was on page 127. Students turned to the

page, found the word “blue” and placed their straw frame around the word. Students spelled the word b-l-u-e together. Other words students found in the story and framed were “warm, orange, and smiled”.

Students were assigned characters from the story and acted out the story for the class. Ms. Cartwright reminded the students that their part of the story must occur in the correct sequence for the play to be logical, which was difficult for many of the students. Students were informed that they would practice the story more the next day, and it was very important for them to comprehend it before they could correctly act it out.

Ms. Cartwright used various methods and activities when teaching reading to her students, which allowed them to become more actively involved in the process; thus developing the ability to gain deeper understanding of the stories.

### **Language Arts Instruction Observations**

The language arts instruction that took place in Ms. Cartwright’s class was observed as being integrated into the phonics and reading lessons. The dictation and spelling component of the *Open Court Phonics Program* was observed on several occasions. In these lessons students used a spiral-bound notebook for spelling, in which they wrote their name and the date at the top of their paper. As the lesson began, Ms. Cartwright pronounced a word that contained the spelling pattern emphasized during the phonics lesson. As the word was pronounced, used in a sentence and pronounced again, students wrote the word. Two sentences, which contained several of the sound patterns from the week’s phonics lesson, were read and the students dictated the sentences. They were reminded to use correct punctuation as they completed the sentence dictation. Students were instructed not to erase any word they misspelled, and they were instructed to circle misspelled words and write the correct spelling next to the circled word(s).

Vocabulary and word study were included in both phonics and reading lessons. Students were frequently exposed to high frequency words, not only during instructional time, but having them posted around the room in various venues, such as on an environmental print bulletin board, a graffiti wall, and content area word walls. These words were not just placed randomly for the sake of having word walls posted. Words such as destination, anonymous, fluency, comprehension, fiction, nonfiction, and chinchilla were not only introduced to students, but were also referred to while having conversation with students; thus attaching meaning to the words.

The concept and use of compound words were included in both phonics and reading instruction. The appropriate use of such conventions as periods, question marks, quotation marks, and capital letters were stressed as students completed their written assignments. The appropriate use of dictionary skills was the focus of another lesson observed during the study. Each student had a dictionary at their desk, along with pencil and paper. Ms. Cartwright would show the class one particular word on a large index card and have students find the word in their dictionary. When the first student located the word in the dictionary, he/she raised their hand and Ms. Cartwright asked that student to give the page number so that other students could turn to that particular page. Once all students found the page, they would be called to read the various meanings listed in the dictionary, which they recorded. This process involved one word at a time, giving students many opportunities to practice dictionary skills which reinforced understanding.

### **Other Impacting Factors Observed**

Ms. Cartwright was constantly engaged in implementing classroom management strategies. As a result, students were rarely off task, because of the conversational style she employed to control off task behaviors. Phrases such as “I see that you are talking now; I will wait until you

are finished before I begin talking because I know it is rude to speak while someone else is talking; now that you all are quiet, I can begin to talk; I like the way you respect me by listening to what I have to say; and I will teach and you please learn and listen”, were used throughout the lessons.

The use of items such a Venn diagram, a K/W/L chart, and a circle map during various lessons exhibited Ms. Cartwright’s emphasis on higher order thinking skills, which was further demonstrated by her use of polysyllabic words with the students during conversations. Students experienced the importance of correct sequencing by acting out stories which deepened their understanding of a relatively abstract skill for first graders.

### **Perkins’ Grade One**

#### School Three---Lakeview Elementary School

Lakeview Elementary School is located in the northeast area of the urban school district in which this study was conducted. The 2007-2008 total student population at Lakeview Elementary School is 792; 64.1% African American, 19.4% Hispanic, 13.6% Asian, 1.6% Caucasian, and 1.3% other. Ninety-three percent of the school population is eligible for free or reduced lunch. The student body includes Pre-K-5 with a 17:1 pupil teacher ratio. Over 200 of the 792 students are considered English Language Learners (ELL). As a result, Lakeview Elementary School maintains four full-time ELL teachers. The ELL students are primarily from Vietnam, Mexico, El Salvador, Cuba, India, Jordan, Israel, and several countries in Africa.

Ms. Perkins is the first grade teacher at Lakeview Elementary School who participated in the study. She has taught a total of fourteen years, four of which have been in first grade.

#### **Phonics Instruction Observations**

The researcher, upon entering Ms. Perkins’ room, noted the same sound/spelling phonics

cards that were in the two previous first grade teachers' classrooms. There were also various centers set up around the room. Ms. Perkins had the largest classroom of the four teachers participating in the study. The sound/spelling cards, a component of the *Open Court Phonics Program*, were posted around the room.

During the first observation, Ms. Perkins was reviewing some of the letter combination sounds; \_art, \_it, and \_un. After the review, she introduced the new sounds of “ow” as in cow and “ou” as in ground. The poster poem titled *Poor Brownie the Cow* was available for the students to see and read. Ms. Perkins informed the students that they would blend words that contained the “ow” sound. The blending process is an integral component of the *Open Court Phonics Program*. The words “now, how, down, powder, clown, shower, crown, owl, prowl, town, brown, crown, towel, crowd, power, tower, shower, flower, and nightgown” were written on a white board. Ms. Perkins led students in reciting the words, and emphasized the “ow” sound. She pointed out the fact that “nightgown” is a compound word.

Ms. Perkins wrote the following sentences onto the white board: “The town tower fell down. Did you know the brown owl is asleep?” She called on one volunteer to read the sentences; then students read the sentences orally together. Ms. Perkins called attention to the word “know.”

Students were asked which sound/spelling card the word “know” represented, and they responded with the ‘kn’ card. Students were dismissed to go to their desk, and take out their phonics workbook. Ms. Perkins set a timer for three minutes, and students completed a two page assignment independently. She walked around and monitored students as they worked. Ms. Perkins checked each student’s work once it was completed. One of the students distributed spiral bound notebooks to each child after students put away their phonics workbooks. They were instructed to write their name and the date at the top of the page. Ms. Perkins informed

students that they would be writing a list of words, and asked them to guess what they thought each word would contain. The response was “ow”. As the teacher called out numerous “ow” words, students wrote them down into their notebook. Ms. Perkins then dictated several sentences to the students. All sentences had words containing the “ow” spelling sound.

Another phonics lesson observed in Ms. Perkins’ first grade class began by asking students to name the initial sound card of the words she called out. Students identified the specific card after they heard the word, e.g. washer/w, thimble/th. Ms. Perkins introduced the new sound/spelling sound “aw” as in “hawk”. As with the “ow” sound, students were shown words with the “aw” sound: saw, draw, claw, shawl, awful, lawn, claw, caw, and crawl. The spelling words with “aw” along with the sentences were dictated to students and they wrote them in their notebooks. She reminded students not to erase words they misspelled, but to circle them and write the correct spelling of the word next to the circled misspelled word.

The final phonics lesson observed by the researcher dealt with the phonemes represented by the graphemes “oo”, “ly”, “y” and homonyms. The lesson was followed by students completing two pages in their phonics workbook.

### **Reading Instruction Observations**

Reading Instruction in Ms. Perkins’ first grade class followed phonics instruction. Again, this instruction occurred between 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

Several students were allowed to distribute the reading text book. Ms. Perkins then reviewed short vowel sounds, blend sounds, and long vowel sounds with the students. The story *Splash* had been read the previous day and Ms. Perkins reviewed the story by asking students to recall facts from the story. Students turned to the story in their text, and read orally along with their teacher. She encouraged all students to use their finger and point to words as they read.

Ms. Perkins assigned students to a literacy center after they completed reading the story.

The researcher observed various activities in which students were engaged during center time. One student had a fly swatter in the shape of a hand. She used this as a pointer to read a posted poem titled *Five Little Valentines*. Another student used a pointer to point to words on a word wall; as she pointed to each word, she read the word aloud. One student read a big book, while another copied down words from a word wall. Ms. Perkins had created a file folder that had picture stories in it and several students read these stories. A magnetic board held magnetic alphabet letters and students made words using these letters. Several sentences were written on chart paper. Each sentence had one blank and a block at the bottom of the sentences held single words that could be used to complete each sentence. One student used a clip board to copy and complete each sentence. A complete set of alphabet stamps with paper was in another center. Several students composed sentences using the stamps. Several other students removed vocabulary words from a sealed plastic bag and place the words in alphabetical order. Ms. Perkins worked on certain literacy skills with several students in a small group setting. A timer was set and when it sounded, the student with whom Ms. Perkins was working rotated to a center. Students who had been working in centers rotated to other centers and Ms. Perkins worked with a new group of students. The process continued for thirty minute time blocks.

On another visit, Ms. Perkins taught the lesson in small groups during the reading instruction block. She and several students worked together with their reading text at the reading table. While these students were with Ms. Perkins, others worked in literacy centers. When the timer sounded, the rotation occurred and another group of students joined Ms. Perkins for reading instruction at the reading table.

Ms. Perkins ask the small group of students to read to themselves. She told students that they

did not have to read silently, but could read aloud quietly. She encouraged them to make sure that they understood the story. When she realized that they did not, she asked the student to reread the text for a better understanding. She often helped students by giving them clues when they encountered difficulties.

The last story in the section of the reading text was titled *Little Bear's Friend*. Ms. Perkins read the story orally to the students and instructed them to listen and follow along. When Ms. Perkins finished reading the story, she asked students to identify *Little Bear's* new friend. The students responded "Emily". Students were given a writing assignment and told to write what had happened in the story. Ms. Perkins worked at the reading table with one student during this specific reading assignment.

### **Language Art Instruction Observations**

The researcher observed that language arts was integrated into the phonics and reading lessons during all observations conducted in Ms. Perkins first grade class. Center activities provided opportunities for students to participate in independent reading and writing.

Ms. Perkins created a center activity that allowed students to develop the skill of using contractions. Inside a sealed plastic bag were words written on strips of paper and contractions written onto index cards. Students were to find two words and match the words to one contraction (e.g. do not; don't).

The teaching of homonyms was another language arts lesson the researcher observed during one visit. Know/no, nose/knows, not/knot, new/knew, and knight/night were homonyms students worked with during this lesson.

### **Other Impacting Factors Observed**

Adjacent to Lakeview Elementary School is Lakeview High School. Two students from the

high school worked with several students in Ms. Perkins' class during the literacy block. The high school students worked individually with several students for thirty minute sessions. They worked with vocabulary flash cards for the purpose of increasing the students' high frequency word vocabulary.

Ms. Perkins monitored students' work by walking from desk to desk while they worked on their assignments. When students were off task, she gently reminded them of their responsibility. If she saw a student having difficulties, she would assist him or her with the work.

Ms. Perkins' classroom management was ongoing during all observations. She used phrases such as "I appreciate those who are using their finger to help them read". She often randomly awarded students with stickers when they complete their task.

Differentiated instruction was evident in Ms. Perkins' first grade. Students were given more than one option to reinforce and to address literacy skills. Ms. Perkins designed her centers to address individual needs and learning styles.

### **Taylor's Grade One**

#### School Four---Mountaintop Elementary School

Mountaintop Elementary School is located in the south central area of the urban school district. The 2007-2008 total student population at Mountaintop Elementary School is 616; 81.5% African American, 12.5% Caucasian, 2.9% Asian, 1.6% other and 1.5% Hispanic. Eighty three percent of the school population is eligible for free or reduced lunch. The student body includes Pre-K-5 with a 17:1 pupil teacher ratio. Mountaintop Elementary School is located in Mountaintop subdivision, which was the first subdivision developed in the 1950s in the urban school district; as a result, the neighborhood has a large population of residents over

the age of sixty who take great pride in their schools.

Ms. Taylor is the first grade teacher at Mountaintop Elementary School who participated in this study. She has taught for a total of nine years, seven of which have been in first grade. Her classroom was quite small but very neat in appearance and organized such that it was conducive to learning.

### **Phonics Instruction Observations**

Phonics instruction took place daily from 9:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. Ms. Taylor use her large white board for the purpose of writing out vocabulary and sentences. She labeled each line L1, L2, L3 to L6. Three to five words were written on each line; for example L1, line, sigh, try, frighten, L2, climb, fly, tried, high, nine. Before beginning instruction, Ms. Taylor reviewed a selection of sound/spelling cards and their respective sounds. She directed students' attention to the words that had been written on each line and they read them in chorus. As each word was read, Ms. Taylor emphasized the phoneme that was the focus in the word.

Ms. Taylor worked with the two sentences that were written on the board which were "The bat will fly high." and "The sandwich has bread and meat." Students were directed to read the sentences and were reminded to concentrate on their fluency. Ms. Taylor then asked several questions concerning the sentences, "What will the bat do?" and "What has bread and meat?" Students responded correctly to the questions.

At the conclusion of the above activity, students were instructed to take out their phonics workbooks and turn to pages 188-189. Ms. Taylor told them that she would read the story aloud, and they were to listen for any words that contained the long "i" sound. Students were instructed to circle these words in each sentence and write all of them at the bottom of the page. Ms. Taylor and her assistant monitored the students by walking around and viewing their work.

At the completion of this assignment, students were told to put away their phonics workbook and prepare for their dictation. They prepared their paper by writing their name and date at the top. Ms. Taylor reminded students that they could use the sound/spelling cards to help them with difficult words. Students wrote the words as Ms. Taylor read them and then checked their work themselves. The assistant wrote the correct spelling of each word on the board so students could correct their work. Student were to circle any word misspelled and write the correct spelling beside the circled word.

Ms. Taylor introduced the day's decodable book whose title was *Super Hero to the Rescue*. Students were asked to skim through the story and then to read to themselves. Again, students did not have to read silently, but were asked not to read too loudly. Students were monitored by the adults as they read to themselves. The adults offered assistance as needed. Ms. Taylor asked the students to tell her the title of the story after they had completed reading the story. One of the students read the title orally to the class. The assistant then read the story orally and students were asked to follow along in their text. Ms. Taylor led a discussion of the story once the story was completed.

The phonics lesson followed the same procedure each day Ms. Taylor was observed. Words had been written on the white board, the particular sound/spelling card emphasized in the words was reviewed, students read the words, and the sentences written under the words. The students were then instructed to write both words and sentences and check their work when complete. Students were instructed not to erase misspelled words but to circle them and write the correctly spelled word beside the circled word. Two pages in the students' phonics workbook would then be completed. Students would read and work throughout the week in decodable books. Ms. Taylor offered variety to these lessons by playing language games with the students and by

allowing them to race against the clock when reading all the word posted. The consistency of this lesson format allowed students to know what was expected of them on a daily basis, thus eliminating confusion and unnecessary behavioral issues.

### **Reading Instruction Observations**

Similar to the other classes observed, reading instruction was scheduled after phonics instruction. Students were instructed to take out their reading books and read the complete story silently. Adults monitored students reading and offered assistance as needed. Ms. Taylor asked students to identify the story's problem and to decide how it was solved at the end of the story. Students were told that they would take their reading test as soon as everyone had put away their reading book. Students were given a laminated file folder into which to put their tests. Students were told to write their name and date at the top of the test. The teacher directed them to read the test by themselves. She told students not to rush but to take their time reading. The first eight items of the test were bubble-in items. The last two items on the test were questions that students had to answer. Some students answered by writing a sentence while other drew pictures. Both methods were acceptable.

Students had a discussion about a story that they had read the previous day. Ms. Taylor led the discussion with questions such as "How did the boy get Cecil (the robot)?, What is Cecil good at doing?, and What kind of cake is Cecil going to make?"

Ms. Taylor told her students they would listen to their new story *Visit the Robot Zoo* on tape and instructed them to follow in their readers. Students prepared themselves for the reading test after the story was completed and were issued privacy folders for the test. Students were asked to take their time and to read the test questions very carefully.

Before beginning the next story, Ms. Taylor introduced a poem whose rhythm and rhyme was

such that students were able to supply any of the words that she left out as she read to them. The title of the new story was *The Absent Minded Toad*. Ms. Taylor asked several students if they knew what the term “absent minded” meant. Ms. Taylor also asked students if they thought Toad would forget that there were six focused vocabulary words in the story. Students seemed to enjoy this thought. In the story, Toad goes to the market for some food items. Ms. Taylor had placed a circle map on the white board with the word “market” written in the center. She asked the students to give her suggestions for the different types of markets to place on the map. Responses from the students included flea market, stores, mall, clothes and food.

Ms. Taylor then conducted a story walk with students, two pages at a time. To the question “What do you think Toad may forget?”; a student responded “oranges”. This discussion continued until the end of the story. Other questions asked included “What do you think Toad is doing?”, “Do you think the mark may be special and why?”, “Is the market in the country or town?”, and “Will you describe Toad please?”. Students sang along with a song at the conclusion of the story.

### **Language Arts Instruction Observations**

Language arts instruction in Ms. Taylor’s class, as well as with the other three teachers, occurred as an integrated component of the phonics and reading lessons. Speaking, listening, reading and writing were integrated throughout the one and one-half hour of literacy instruction.

Ms. Taylor informed students that she was going to play a language game with them. “I am thinking of a word that means a color; something you eat; something that you follow; something you eat with; and something that flowers do”. When a student gave the correct response, he or she was allowed to go to the board and erase the correct word. This language game was played on several different occasions. A timer would be set and students had to have all the words

erased, based on clues given, before the timer sounded.

Another game allowed students to make as many words as possible from a given list of letters: n, t, be, e, l, a, k. Students shared words from the list they created after the timer sounded. The researcher found herself motivated by these games as well. The game in which Ms. Taylor gave clues for students to guess the word required higher levels of thought processing, as oppose to answering literal questions.

### **Other Impacting Factors Observations**

Ms. Taylor employed classroom management techniques throughout the literacy instructional period as did the other three teachers. She would alert students to the desired behavior, e.g. “all eyes on me”. Ms. Taylor constantly monitored for off-task behavior when students were involved in independent practice.

Ms. Taylor used comments like “kiss your brain” when students worked particularly hard or did outstanding work. Her use of a timer during activities kept students on-task and focused.

Ms. Taylor made her expectations clear to the students, but occasionally, different students had to turn their behavior cards over. This was always conducted in a very quiet, non-disruptive manner.

Higher order thinking skills were promoted by Ms. Taylor’s use of graphic organizers and, by her use of different “language games” in which students were given clues in order to ascertain the correct answers. In this game they were racing against the timer to get all the vocabulary words erased before the timer sounder. The primary purpose of these games was to assist students make as many words as possible from a certain amount of letters.

Ms. Taylor’s classroom, although small in size, was very organized and arranged in a manner conducive to learning. Ms. Taylor and her assistance worked very well together and appeared to

have established an effective routine. Ms. Taylor also made effective use of volunteers who would take students from the classroom from one-on-one tutoring.

### **Data Analysis**

Data gathered for the purpose of this investigation were analyzed and classified into comprehensive categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); phonics instructions, reading instruction, language arts instruction, and other impacting factors observed. Each school's information was analyzed, synthesized, and reported as single cases. The Developmental Research Sequence (Srpadley, 1979) was used to analyze data gathered during classroom observations and individual teacher interviews.

The purpose of this investigation was to determine whether the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum, English Language Arts (2005) was being implemented in selected first grade classrooms. The themes that developed, phonics instruction, reading instruction, and language arts instruction were evidenced in all four classrooms. Similarities and differences of the themes from within each class were determined and reported during the analysis phase of this investigation, resulting in a cross-case analysis.

#### **Phonics Instruction: Similarities**

The researcher determined after four days, during the first week of observations, that phonics instruction occurred first in the instructional day in all participating classrooms. This had the potential to become monotonous; however, to young students, this predictability gave them a sense of control and security of their world.

The phonics instruction occurred from 9:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. in all four classes using the *Open Court Phonics Program* with the sound/spelling cards was the central component of the phonics instruction. All teachers referenced and directed student to use the cards to assist them

in determining sounds in words they found difficult to pronounce.

Decodable books, books used to reinforce the sounds presented during the week's phonics lessons, were also a common factor observed by the researcher. The decodable books "are written so that most of the words can be figured out by beginning readers because the sounds and spellings have been explicitly taught in the classroom. The sight words that are included are also introduced and practiced in class. Teacher expect each student to read each decodable text a minimum of ten times" (SRA, 2004). The process for using the decodable texts with students was more similar in all classrooms. High frequency words used in the text were introduced, students read aloud the title, author, and illustrator, and then read the first page of the text to themselves. The researcher observed that students in all four classrooms did not have to read silently, but were instructed to read quietly to themselves.

Students in all four classes were reminded to reference the sound/spelling and alphabet cards when encountering difficulties with words. Also, blending was another strategy students were encouraged to use when experiencing difficulties.

The spelling/dictation activity concluded the phonics instruction in all four classes. This began with single word spelling and concluded with sentence dictation. Teachers pronounced a single word, used the word in a sentence, repeated the word, and instructed students to write the word. Students were always encouraged to look over their work for errors. Sentence dictation took place once single word dictation was completed. The teachers dictated a complete sentence and reminded students to use a capital letter for the first word in the sentence and a period or question mark at the end of the sentence. Words and sentences were checked by students themselves at the conclusion of the dictation. Students were told to circle any misspelled word(s) and write the correct spelling by the circled word.

### **Phonics Instruction: Differences**

Differences observed during phonics instruction were insignificant when compared to similarities. One teacher would use the white board to post high frequency words, while another teacher would use the Elmo projector. The teachers using the Elmo projector would teach decodable text with the projector while teachers would have students work at their desks or on a rug during instruction.

### **Reading Instruction: Similarities**

The reading program used in all classrooms was Harcourt's *Collections*. *My Robot*, *The Absent-Minded Toad*, *Tumbleweed Stew*, and *Litter Bear's Friend* were stories observed during reading instruction in all four classes. Poems, which accompanied the stories, were introduced prior to the reading of the stories within the reading text.

Identifying titles, authors, illustrators, making predictions about each story, and taking picture walks were elements all four teachers included in each reading lesson observed. Silent reading was common to all four classes and daily review of the prior's day story was directed by each teacher before beginning the focus of the new day's lesson.

### **Reading Instruction: Differences**

Each teacher in the investigation had her own blueprint and methods that she used during the reading instruction period. The differences observed were more dispositional rather than instructionally related; the personal delivery may have been different, but the quality was relatively the same.

One teacher would use the signal "point, read, read" before her students began the oral reading of a passage. This was to assist students keeping their place and staying on task during their reading of the text.

Monitoring of students' reading behavior(s) during the entire reading period was the hallmark of one of the teachers engaged in the study. Using terms such as "let's get the wiggles out" and "let's park all that movement in the parking lot before we begin our reading" is how she would often redirect students of task behaviors. This teacher had students actively engaged in one particular story by allowing them to dramatize the story. Students were assigned the roles of various characters within one particular story the students had read. The students were then asked to portray that character's actions found in the story. The skill of proper sequencing was not only emphasized to students but was required for the proper retelling of the story.

Assigning students to literacy centers while the teacher worked with small groups for story reading is how one other teacher conducted reading instruction. Center activities such as reading poems, reading word walls, reading big books, creating vocabulary via magnetic letters, arranging sentence strips in proper order, completing unfinished sentences, and writing sentences were activities the teacher provided students for independent work. While students were working in the literacy centers, the teacher worked with a small group of students on the day's reading lesson. Students would rotate from centers to the teachers and back to centers. This was repeated until all students had worked in a small group with the teacher for the purpose of their small group reading instruction.

The researcher observed another teacher using taped versions of the story. The reading lesson followed a distinct pattern from beginning to end. The lessons were introduced with a poem. The teacher would then discuss the new story's title and introduce vocabulary that students need to know when reading the story. Students made predictions concerning the story and they participated in a story walk and discussions. Brainstorming would occur with the aid of a circle map. Students followed along in their reading text while they listened to the story on tape after

the story had been introduced by the teacher.

### **Language Arts: Similarities**

The most prominent similarity among all four teachers regarding language arts instruction was the total integration of the language arts into both the phonics instruction and the reading instruction. Spelling was observed daily as an integral part of each teacher's daily phonics instruction. Students would spell individual words and have sentence dictation during the phonics portion of the instructional day. The words used were ones that contained the letter sound combinations that had been the focus of that day's lesson. Also, sentence structure was emphasized by reminding students to use appropriate punctuation marks and capital letters where necessary.

The use of adjectives, plural words, and word families were observed in both phonics and reading lessons. Vocabulary, high frequency words, and word study were integrated into both phonics and reading lessons. Vocabulary with emphasis on particular letter combination sounds were included in every phonics lesson observed. These were addressed before students were asked to read their decodable book. Students discussed the words prior to reading then searched for the particular sound/spelling patterns as they read their decodable book. A discussion concerning the story vocabulary always preceded the reading of the story and word study was reinforced with the posting of word walls and environmental print.

### **Language Arts: Differences**

One teacher taught the use of compound words by having students identify the words as they used them in their reading text. When a student would locate a compound word, the teacher asked the student to explain what two words when combined form that particular compound word.

In one of the classrooms observed, dictionary skills were reinforced by requiring students to use their dictionary to locate certain words. When the first student locating the word raised his/her, he/she was asked to read one of the definitions. Other students were then called on for the remaining definitions. Students would then write the word(s) and the meaning into their notebook. The skill of determining the number of syllables in words was accomplished by having students clap out the word(s) and then count the number of claps.

One of the teachers had set up literacy center activities. One of the activities reinforced the skill of alphabetical order. Students would take words from a sealed plastic bag and arrange them into the correct order according to the alphabet. Two other center activities involved contractions and homonyms. Students removed words from a plastic bag, some of which were contractions, while other were words that when combined, would be the two words that the contraction represented. Students would find a contraction, locate the two words that represented the contraction and place them side by side. The same procedure was followed for an activity focusing on homonyms. Students would take words from a plastic bag and match the two words that had the same sound but different spellings and different meaning; words such as night/knight, new/knew and more.

Although each teacher used her personal approach, all four teachers integrated the mandated language arts content skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in their daily lessons.

### **Other Impacting Factors Observed**

Classroom management was an ongoing process throughout the literacy lessons. Each teacher had her own method of management and the method that each teacher used was effective for her and her students. If a similarity can be noted, it is the fact that all four teachers constantly addressed , redirected, and kept students on task during the entire one and one-half hours of

of instruction.

Reading coaches, teacher assistants, field experience students, and/or volunteers were present in three of the four classrooms. They assisted the teachers by monitoring students and worked individually with during literacy instruction. In one particular classroom, high school students from the neighboring high school assisted two students by reinforcing high frequency words.

Instruction emphasizing higher order thinking skills (SKILLS) was observed in all four classrooms with teachers using methods such as Venn diagrams, bubble maps, and KWL charts. It should be noted that a pyramid shaped poster listing the levels of Bloom's taxonomy was observed in each teacher's classroom.

### **Research Question 1**

#### **Do Teachers Find the Comprehensive Curriculum Clearly Written?**

The researcher discovered similarities and differences in teacher responses to this question. The initial response of all four teachers was that they were overwhelmed when they first received their copy of the Comprehensive Curriculum; however, after examining and using the curriculum, they began to have a clearer understanding of the document.

The teachers stated that the math curriculum was the easiest to understand while the science and social studies curricula were not as specific. The lack of detail made it more difficult for the teachers to have a sense of direction concerning these two curricula. Several of the teachers stated that the science and social studies curricula were not aligned with the textbooks used in their classrooms. Teachers offered positive feedback concerning the English Language Arts curriculum because they felt this particular curriculum was more clearly written and suggested activities that could be easily implemented.

Teachers participating in this investigation stated the English Language Arts portion of the

Comprehensive Curriculum was user friendly. As a result, teachers felt motivated to implement the English Language Arts either as an independent curriculum or by integrating the units and skills into daily instruction.

The English Language Arts portion of the Comprehensive Curriculum contains eight units, each addressing specific literacy skills. Each unit gives an approximate time frame that should be spent teaching the unit. Also included is a description of the unit, student expectations as related to the unit, guided questions recommended to ensure that student expectation will be achieved, the Grade Level Expectations covered in the unit, specific activities as related to the unit, and sample assessments to assess each student's achievement of the unit information. Teachers indicated that this format made them feel as though this portion of the Comprehensive Curriculum was within their capabilities and time parameters to implement.

The preface to the Comprehensive Curriculum English Language Arts component offers recommendations for the use of various nationally recognized assessment instruments for assessing both listening comprehension and oral expression. The recommendations include Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), Oral and Written Language Scales-List, Comprehension/Oral Expression (OWL: LC/OE), Peabody Picture Vocabulary III (PPVT III), and Test of Early Language Development---Third Edition (TELD-3).

The preface to the English Language Arts Comprehensive Curriculum also addresses handwriting, rhyming and alliteration, the use of sound and word walls, independent reading dictionary use, vocabulary development and reading comprehension. These are the English Language Arts components that scientifically based reading research indicates should receive attention in literacy programs intended for Pre-K-4.

The four first grade teachers participating in this study indicated they felt that the English

Language Arts portion of the Comprehensive Curriculum is more closely aligned to material and resources currently being used in their reading/literacy program.

The response to research question one by the four participating teachers reflected the responses of the sixteen teachers who answered the questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire revealed 62.5% of teachers felt the Comprehensive Curriculum is easily understood, 25% were neutral and 12.5% disagreed and none of the teachers strongly agreed that the Comprehensive Curriculum English Language Arts was easily understood.

## **Research Question 2**

Do Teachers Use the Activities Provided in the Comprehensive Curriculum?

All four teachers participating in this investigation affirmed that they use the activities provided in the Comprehensive Curriculum English Language Arts. Teachers noted that a weakness was the necessity of providing items needed to implement some of the hands-on activities that were not readily available and teachers stated that more specificity should be provided in the activity section of the English Language Arts Curriculum.

The types of activities provided to the teachers is delineated in the following example. Unit 3 is titled, *Let's Read---Poems, Fairy Tales, and Fables*. The state's curriculum document offers seven sample activities that teachers can use to have students read and respond to poetry, fairy tales, and fables. One particular activity states "teachers provide high-interest literature for students to read and respond to, including poems, fairy tales and fables" (Grade 1—English Language Arts, 2005). This is an example of a limitation identified by the teachers during the interviews. Teachers expressed concern that not enough copies of the mandated texts would be available to fully implement the following activity. A comparable example reflecting this limitation is the availability of resources to implement the following activity. "Teachers will

share a story featuring rhyming words, for example, a story by Dr. Seuss. Students should be exposed to poetry daily and rhyming words noted” (Grade 1---English Language Arts, 2005). Concerns about resource availability again begs the question, would there be enough copies for all classes to use?

Responses by the four participating teachers in the study differ in the degree of implementation from the teachers participating only in the questionnaire in that the four teachers in the study stated that they use the activities provided in the Comprehensive Curriculum English Language Arts. Teachers participating in the questionnaire had the following responses: 56.25% agreed that they use the provided activities, 25% strongly agreed that they use the provided activities and 18.75% were neutral concerning their use of the provided activities.

### **Research Question 3**

#### Have Teachers Had Adequate In-Service Related to the Implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum?

The four teachers participating in the study stated “no” to the question concerning adequate in-service on the Comprehensive Curriculum and furthermore, stated they did not receive training that was exclusive to the Comprehensive Curriculum.

One of the participating teachers explicated that first grade teachers at her school divided the curriculum content documents among themselves for the purpose of reading and examining each document. When the teachers met for grade level planning, each teacher would share with the remaining teachers what she had learned by examining her particular document. This was the protocol used to familiarize themselves with the Comprehension Curriculum. She stated that this was very effective for them and that it also relieved some of the anxiety that she and her first grade coworkers felt in the initial phase of implementation.

The remaining three participants state that they now understand the Comprehensive

Curriculum and how to ensure that their students will learn the information required for the First Grade level; however, this understanding was the result of self study, rather than in-service training.

In an article, *Training Teachers: Professional Development to Improve Student Achievement*, published by the American Educational Research Association, Summer 2005, several studies were summarized concerning professional development and its relationship to student achievement. One particular study, conducted by David Cohen and Heather Hill, focused on professional development and curriculum. The researchers stated “these teachers embraced new curriculum materials when they were supported by training, and in some cases, workshops about the new state required student assessment. The study also showed that students of teachers who participated in this kind of curriculum-focused professional development did well on assessments” (Cohen & Hill, 2002).

In their book, *Student Achievement Through Staff Development* (1988), Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers state that their most important finding is that “given the opportunity to practice learning complex teaching skills and strategies, teachers drastically improve their skills in learning”. J. W. Little (1997) states that the “test of effective professional development is whether teachers and other educators come to know more about their subjects, their students, and their practice, and to make informed use of what they know.”

One component of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation addresses the quality that is expected when planning professional development sessions. The NCLB specifically states “that effective professional development is a set of activities that produce a demonstrable and measurable effect on student achievement” (NCLB, 2002). The Elementary and Secondary

Act “emphasizes that effective professional development must be grounded in scientifically based research. Professional development also must be a part of a systematic effort to improve and integrate quality at all stages----preparation, induction, support and ongoing development” (Rollins, 2004). Data gathered during this investigation suggest that professional development designed specifically for the purpose of implementing the Comprehensive Curriculum was not available before teachers began implementing the curriculum.

The responses of the participating First Grade teachers was unanimous and much more adamant than teacher responses obtained from the questionnaire. Responses obtained from the questionnaire indicated that 43.75% of the teacher did not believe that they had received adequate in-service in implementing the Comprehensive Curriculum, 37.5% of the teacher were neutral concerning this issue, 12.4% agreed that they received adequate in-service, and 6.25% strongly agreed that they received adequate in-service and none strongly disagreed.

#### **Question 4**

Do Teachers Believe That Their School Administrator Provides Appropriate Support in Implementing the Comprehensive Curriculum?

Participating teachers in the study stated that their administrators were supportive of them in their use of the curriculum. They felt that their administrators expected them to implement each content area of the curriculum, and further stated that they knew they had the support of their principals during this process.

One example of the importance of support from school administrators to teachers during the implementation of new curricula occurred in California, which has a training program for principals titled AB (Assembly Bill) 76 Principals Training Program (AB 75 Steinberg). The Program, established in 2001 involves 160 hours of training over a two-year period. It “offers high quality professional development and is a component of California’s systematic approach to

school reform strategies for student improvement” (King & Smoot, 2004). According to King and Smoot, “the program is focused on supporting teachers in the instruction and delivery of standards-based curriculum, assessment, technology, and use of fiscal and human-resources---all key components in increasing student academic achievement”. Surveys completed by principals upon completion of the training revealed that school administrators: were more comfortable in the classroom talking with teachers about instruction; could recognize critical direct instructional strategies being used by teachers in the classrooms; understood the importance of school-wide pacing students at each grade level; and understood the value of targeting teacher professional development and coaching to support teachers implementing an instructional program. A direct outcome of this training was that principals refocused school staff meetings and grade-level meeting for the purpose of addressing content issues.

Information obtained from the Louisiana Department of Education’s website indicates that in 1998, “ the Louisiana Department of Education and the State Board of Education (BESE) adopted the *Standards for School Leaders*”.

Teachers’ responses to this research question from the questionnaire revealed that 43.75% agreed that their administrator provided appropriate support for implementing the Comprehensive Curriculum, 37.5% of the teachers strongly agreed that their administrator supported this initiative, 18.7% were neutral and none of the teachers disagreed.

### **Research Question 5**

Do Teachers Use Resources Other Than the Comprehensive Curriculum?

The four teachers participating in the study answered in the affirmative to this question. Each of the teachers stated that they had developed their own extensive files and materials for each content area in the primary grades. They stated that they were confident using these materials

and resources to implement the skills addressed by the curriculum.

The participating teachers suggested that if arrangements could be made to use some of the scheduled staff development days to enhance the recommended activities, they would be more adept at implementing the activities. In 1983, Joseph B. Rappa published the findings of a study conducted for the purpose of determining effective practices of staff in-service training. Rappa found that when examining the needs of teacher, teachers preferred to learn “through hands-on activities and by putting information into practice in their classes” (Rappa, 1983). He found that “workshops which require teachers to develop projects, activities, or curricula for their classes” were particularly successful (Rappa, 1983).

Teachers participating in the questionnaire clearly stated that they did use other resources along with the Comprehensive Curriculum. All teachers strongly agreed or agreed to the statement that they used other resources in conjunction with the Comprehension Curriculum.

### **Research Question 6**

Has the Comprehensive Curriculum Impacted Your Instructional Planning?

The participants responded that the Comprehensive Curriculum had clearly impacted their instructional planning; however, the teachers elaborated more fully on their responses. They questioned the rigidity of the curriculum and its lack of flexibility in providing appropriate instruction for their students. Based on the data analyzed from teacher interviews, the researcher concluded that the teachers bemoaned the loss of control of the instructional process because of the dictates of the curriculum.

In a report titled, *Teacher Survey of Standards-Based Instruction: Addressing Time* (Florian, 1999), the issue of time required to teach standards as compared to the time for instruction was explored. The results indicated “that standards-based instruction requires more than the

available classroom time” that is available during the instructional day based on 5.5 hours of instruction. Studies of this phenomenon reinforce the belief that mandates of this type impinge upon instructional time.

The teacher responses from the questionnaire relative to the impact of the Comprehensive Curriculum were 32.25% of teachers strongly agree, 50% of the teacher agreed, and 18.75% were neutral and none of the teachers disagree.

### **Research Question 7**

#### Are Teachers Cognizant of the State’s Mandated Policies Regarding the Comprehensive Curriculum?

The four participating teachers felt secure in their knowledge of the policies that guide the Comprehensive Curriculum. The stated that after being immersed in the implementation of the curriculum for almost three years, the rationale behind the mandates had become more transparent.

Perceptions can change as suggested in the publication, *When Federalism Works* (Peterson, Rabe, & Wong, 1986). “In the first few years of a program’s existence, there is more likely to be uncertainty over how the program will operate---program adjustments are a common feature in the implementation of new programs---over time, regulations and guidelines are clarified and objectives are modified as feedback and evaluations provide information on how well the program operates” (Peterson, Rabe, & Wong, 1986).

Of the teachers responding to the questionnaire, 50% agreed that they understood state policies concerning the Comprehensive Curriculum, 25% strongly agreed, 12.5% were neutral, and 12.5% disagreed.

## **Research Question 8**

### **How Has the Implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum Impacted Instruction in the Participating Teachers' Classrooms?**

After observing in the four teachers' classrooms and conversing with them, the researcher concluded that their overall instruction has been significantly impacted by implanting the Comprehensive Curriculum. The most significant comment from the teachers is that creativity has been a victim in this rush to standardization. The teacher with the forty years of teaching experience appeared most affected; however, the researcher noted her attempts to integrate creative teaching strategies when opportunities presented themselves in teachable moments.

A positive factor that emerged is that the four teachers in the study applauded the consistency that is a by-product of the Comprehensive Curriculum initiative. One example of this by-product is that when students transfer from one district school to another, they enter the new school at precisely the same point in the curriculum at the school from which they transferred. Another example is that the Comprehensive Curriculum provides stability in implementing instruction across the school year, despite such factors as student mobility, teacher turnover, and changes in administrative personnel.

During the observations, it was noted that instruction in all four classrooms had the appearance of prescriptive instruction in that the researcher knew that when visiting the various schools, she would be observing the same story, the same poem, the same vocabulary and high frequency words, the same decodable books, the same sound/spelling cards, and the same assessments. The instruction seemed almost robotic, creating an environment totally devoid of opportunities to alter the pace to address individual student needs.

The researcher's beliefs concerning the impact on instruction observed during the study is reflected in a statement taken from the work of Chudowsky & Behuniak (1997). Some of the focus on the high stakes accountability and testing seen across the nation currently may result in a narrowing curriculum (Chudowsky & Behuniak, 1997).

Another impact on instruction was the intensity of the instruction delivered by the teachers which at times seemed oppressive; however, there is overwhelming data that supports intensive reading instruction (IRI), especially in school settings with high rates of at-risk students (Center of Instruction, 2006). The intensity of the instruction was magnified by the presence of support personnel in all but one of the classrooms. These personnel included a reading coach and a speech therapist working with small groups. In 2006, the Center on Instruction published *A Principal's Guide to Intensive Reading Interventions for Struggling Readers in Early Elementary Schools*. One paragraph in this guide stated that, "The most efficient way to increase the instruction for struggling readers is to provide instruction in small groups. This allows the instruction to be targeted to the specific needs of the students, and it allows the students to have more opportunities to respond and receive feedback. Intervention classrooms will be most effective if another intervention specialist or paraprofessional is available to work with small groups during part or all of the reading block." The use of small group instruction was clearly evident in three of the four classrooms that participated in this investigation.

The final impact on instruction was classroom management. During the hour and a half of literacy instruction the teachers constantly kept students on task. Method observed included redirecting students who were off task; using pre-established hand signals to get students' attention when the noise level became too loud; addressing individual students' disruptive

behaviors directly, intervening in inappropriate behavior by requiring students to turn over their behavior card.

Each teacher maintained discipline and very little instructional time was lost as a result of redirecting behaviors. As a result, the atmosphere in the classrooms was orderly and conducive to learning. Students in one class were allowed to participate in literacy centers after whole group instruction. During this time, the teacher worked with a small group of students while the other students worked quietly in centers with activities that reinforced reading skills. When the teacher complete work with the small group of students, she rotated them into centers and began work with another group of students. Order was maintained during this process and students used soft voice tones.

Clearly the implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum has impacted classroom instruction. This conclusion is based on the teacher behaviors that were observed in the four classrooms and from data gathered through interviews. Instruction was direct, with more time on task, and systematic.

## **Summary**

Chapter Four began with a discussion of the procedures used in this study. The researcher selected four schools in a large urban school district. The Chief Officer for Accountability, Assessment, and Evaluation for the district granted permission for the study to be conducted within the four schools selected. Principals and teachers at the participating school sites agreed to participate in the study.

Data collected included information gathered from a teacher questionnaire, numerous classroom observations, and individual teacher interviews. Content analysis of the data collected

provided insight into the inquiry of the implementation of the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum.

Findings from classroom observations evolved into three themes: phonics instruction, reading instruction, and language arts instruction. Four cases were developed from classroom observations and similarities and differences among the four cases were discussed.

The intent of the study was to determine the extent to which the Comprehensive Curriculum English Language Arts was being implemented in four first grade classrooms. The data indicated that teachers are implementing and teaching as delineated in the Comprehensive Curriculum.

The four teachers that participated in the study taught most of the skills through an integrated approach and the skills were addressed through reading instruction and phonics instruction. Students were given daily opportunities to reinforce the skills learned during instruction.

The teachers that participated in the study indicated that the Comprehensive Curriculum was user friendly and easy to understand. These same teachers responded that they use the activities included in the curriculum.

These same teachers reported that staff development was insufficient and that they did not receive staff development sessions that were exclusive to the Comprehensive Curriculum.

Teachers reported adequate to strong administrative support related to the implementation of the curriculum and all teachers indicated that they used resources other than the Comprehensive Curriculum when teaching. Teachers were confident in their knowledge of the policies of the state as related to the Comprehensive Curriculum.

Those teachers participating in the investigation state that the CC not only had an impact on what they planned for their students, but also profoundly impacted their classroom instruction.

This impact was mixed with positive and negative results. The one factor about which teachers expressed the most concern was that the CC was inflexible and devoid of creativity. A by-product of this inflexibility was the incongruence between instructional time and curricula demands.

Classroom management was effective with all four teachers maintaining control of their instructional time and student behaviors.

## CHAPTER 5.

### CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS

In his book, *The Art of Case Study Research* (1995), Robert Stake suggested four types of data analysis and interpretation for the case study. These are categorical aggregation, direct interpretation, establishing patterns, and developing naturalistic generalizations. Findings were analyzed using the technique of direct interpretation. Categories and patterns emerged within the data enabling the researcher to arrive at conclusions derived from the naturalistic setting of the teachers' classrooms. Yin (1994) suggests that the use of case study research is preferred in examining contemporary events such as the Comprehensive Curriculum.

The state of Louisiana has developed the Comprehensive Curriculum (2005) in the four core content areas of math, science, social studies, and English language arts in order to meet the national mandates of the No Child Left Behind legislation (2002), which is designed to improve teacher quality and student achievement.

The primary purpose of this study was to ascertain whether or not selected classroom teachers at the first grade level in a particular large urban school district were implementing the Comprehensive Curriculum mandated by the state of Louisiana. The researcher concluded after carefully analyzing the data gathered that the teachers were implementing the Comprehensive Curriculum. Furthermore, teachers were not only focusing on teaching isolated skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, they were providing a more integrated teaching environment for the students in language arts that appeared to be more conducive to learning.

The English Language Arts Comprehensive Curriculum for Grade 1 is comprised of eight separate units. Unit 5, "*Words in a Fun Way---Poetry*" and Unit 6, *Discovering is Exciting---Reading/Writing Nonfiction*", were the units scheduled for instruction during the study. Unit 5

states “this unit provides students with various forms of poetry to listen to, read, and interpret” (2005). Both units address listening and reading. Analysis of the data indicated that listening and reading were embedded into all aspects of the curriculum. This was evidenced by observing the teachers constantly reading to students, thus emphasizing the art of listening. This strengthened students’ ability to attend to detail and improve their listening comprehension. Participating teachers used this process of stressing listening daily by reading orally to the students giving them directions and engaging in discussions. This oral reading not only modeled listening to learn, but stressed intonation and fluency.

Classroom observations verified that the teachers were successfully teaching the art of reading to students. Data from the observations verified that oral, silent, and choral reading methods were utilized by all four teachers. Techniques such as discussions, oral reading, and predictable print were used to assist students in becoming successful readers. Students were instructed to read passages to themselves and then discuss what they had read. Students were called upon individually to read the page orally or in groups.

Unit 5 of the Comprehensive Curriculum English Language Arts Grade 1 introduced poetry to the students. Students recited poems and discussed their meanings with their teacher. Poems were placed on the walls for students to refer to as needed.

The description of Unit 6 states:

This unit focus is reading and writing informational texts to learn about various topics. High-interests multimedia materials provide opportunities to show how information is organized. The activities in this unit should be used throughout the year in conjunction with science and social studies unit (April, 2005).

Student understandings desired in Unit 6 are as follows:

Students use high-interest, engaging nonfiction texts to learn information in science or social studies units. Students will identify the differences in nonfiction and fiction. They will use shared writing activities to report

information learned. With teacher assistance, students in groups will investigate a topic and prepare a presentation for other students.

The skills in Unit 6 are writing, speaking, and visual representation. Students engaged in writing activities, although not creative writing and speaking. Students engaged in more formal speech activities as part of oral reading, poetry, and reinforced through choral reading.

The language arts skills of creative writing and visual representation were infrequently observed during the study. One example of visual representation was observed when students acted out a story. The researcher concluded that this is the result of the emphasis on phonics and reading instructions so heavily stressed in the Comprehensive Curriculum. The data suggests that the school district takes very seriously its responsibility to assure all students will read on grade level. Furthermore, the evidence indicates that a significant portion of the instructional day is used for the purpose of teaching reading and literacy skills.

Visual representation and creative writing were not taught. Data gathered during the study revealed that students wrote spelling words, dictated sentences containing spelling words, wrote test items in sentence forms and in their phonics workbooks, but did not engage in meaningful creative writing activities. Visual representation was observed on one occasion in one classroom. Students acted out the story from their reading text for the purpose of experiencing the process of sequencing. However, this was the only example of visual representation observed during the study. The fact that the language arts skills of visual representation and creative writing received little or no attention may stem from the fact that both require large amounts of time to implement and that time was not available in a heavily phonics-based and direct reading-based program.

Evidence from the data suggests that all four participating teachers were experienced teachers and were confident in their abilities to successfully implement the Comprehensive Curriculum.

The researcher observed instruction that was consistent, accurate, and direct. Data gathered from the interviews reflected that the emphasis was on pacing and more direct intensive instruction tended to adversely impact creativity in the classroom. Although, the teachers attempted to compensate for this weakness in the Comprehensive Curriculum by emphasizing an integrated reading approach, they frequently experienced difficulty in capturing the “teachable moment.” Furthermore, they believed that the present-day emphasis on test scores robbed the classroom teacher of the art of teaching.

Another concern of the teachers was in the area of professional development. The school district is adopting a new reading series with its own phonics component. The new series will begin with the 2008-2009 academic year. This results in eliminating the now familiar *Open Court Phonics Program* and having to prepare and implement a new reading series. The four teachers offered the following suggestions for professional development: work sessions to create “hands-on” activities; released time to allow grade-level study of the new reading series; and summer workshops for the purpose of becoming familiar with the scope and sequence of the new series relative to the Comprehensive Curriculum.

It should be noted, that the Louisiana State Department of Education has created revised versions of the Comprehensive Curriculum. Beginning Fall 2008, teachers will need to become familiar with this new version and the changes it brings not only to teachers but to requirements for students. The Comprehensive Curriculum used for this study was the original published in 2005. The new curriculum is dated 2008.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Continued investigation into the implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum may offer additional insights into the effectiveness of the curriculum. In future studies, an investigation of

not only the curriculum's implementation, but also the impact the curriculum has on student achievement would be highly desirable. Furthermore, this study should be expanded to include more school districts. Although qualitative research is not generalizable to a larger setting, it can be used to examine trends and beliefs. Additional studies should examine the impact of pacing, direct intensive instruction, staff development, teacher experience, and the issue of demand on instructional time compared to curricular demands.

### **Limitations**

The primary limitation of this study is the use of only one grade and four teachers, which prevents the reader from generalizing to a larger setting, and/or population. Including a larger sample of regular First Grade classrooms could lead to broader generalizations for future studies. A study with a broader scope to include a larger sampling of teachers from first grade classrooms, the inclusion of Gifted and Talented programs, and students with special needs could reveal more information relative to the strengths and weaknesses of the concept of a Comprehensive Curriculum. Future studies should explore the impact of the Comprehensive Curriculum on student achievement and the most effective way of implementing such a system.

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APPENDIX A:

A Teacher's View of the Comprehensive Curriculum

Strongly Agree=5      Agree=4      Neutral=3      Disagree=2      Strongly Disagree=1

**Circle the number that best fits you.**      **SA**      **A**      **N**      **D**      **SD**

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The Comprehensive Curriculum is easily understood.  | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. I use activities from the Comprehensive Curriculum.                                       | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. I have had adequate in-service to use the Comprehensive Curriculum.                       | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. My administrator directs my use of the Comprehensive Curriculum.                          | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. I use other resources besides the Comprehensive Curriculum.                               | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6. The Comprehensive Curriculum has impacted what I plan for my students.                    | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 7. I know the state's policies about the Comprehensive Curriculum.                           | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8. I understand the equivalent activities component concerning the Comprehension Curriculum. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

APPENDIX B:

Teacher Consent Form

Principal Investigator: Mary Taylor (Kitty) Ainsworth  
225-328-5984  
Available: Thursday-Friday  
1:3005:00 p.m.

I understand that the title of the project in which I am participating in *The Implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum English Language Arts Grade 1 in Selected First Grade Classrooms*. Part of the investigation will be conducted in my elementary school setting. The purpose of the study is to determine which methods, approaches, and styles of implementation of the Comprehensive Curriculum for the purpose of teacher training are successful in the grade one environment. I was selected for this study by the principal and based on my years of teaching experience at the first grade level.

I understand that for a period of four weeks, once a week, the investigator will observe within my classroom. These visits will last for a period of 90-120 minutes during the Reading/Language Arts teaching period. I also understand that on occasion, brief interviews will be conducted before or after class. Sometimes, field notes will be recorded, while audiotapes will record conversations to be transcribed later.

I understand that the benefit of this study is to help provide a more in-depth understanding of teachers' understanding and their implementing Louisiana's Comprehensive Curriculum. My participation in the study is voluntary. I may change my mind and withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which I may otherwise be entitled. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed in the study; instead, pseudonyms will be used.

The study has been discussed with me and all questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Chairman, LSU Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the researcher's obligation to provide me with a copy of this consent form if signed by me.

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Subject Signature

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Date

APPENDIX C:  
First Grade Pacing Chart

<b>Duration</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Unit</b>
19 Days	Aug. 13-Sept. 7	U1 Story Time
20 Days	Sept. 10-Oct. 5	U2 Put on Your Thinking Cap
19 Days	Oct. 8-Nov. 1	U3 Let's Read—Poems, Fairy Tales, and Fables
20 Days	Nov. 2-Dec. 6	U4 The Information Hunt
24 Days	Jan. 8-Feb. 13	U5 Words in a Fun Way—Poetry
23 Days	Feb. 14-March 17	U6 Discovering is Exciting-Reading/Writing Nonfiction
14 Days	March 18-April 15	U7 How to Learn About People Autobiographies/Biographies
20 Days	April 16-May 13	U8 Creative Writing/Creative Drama

## APPENDIX D:

### Interview Guide for Teachers

1. How long have you been a teacher?
2. How long have you taught first grade?
3. Could you please tell me what you know about Louisiana's Comprehensive Curriculum?
4. Could you please tell me your professional feelings concerning Louisiana's Comprehensive Curriculum?
5. What is the purpose of Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum?
6. What does it mean to say that the Louisiana's Comprehensive Curriculum aligns content, instruction, and assessment?
7. Do you have knowledge of who wrote the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum?
8. Could you tell me the state's policies concerning the implementation of the Louisiana Comprehension Curriculum?
9. How have you gone about using the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum?
10. What is the relationship of the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum and state standards, benchmarks, and GLEs?
11. Do you have knowledge of the "equivalent activities"?
12. Do you deviate when teaching the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum or do you teach it as it is written?
13. What are your procedures for using the activities in the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum in your classroom?
14. Are you aware that the units have timeframes? If yes, are you having any difficulties implementing the time lines?
15. Please tell me how you use your textbooks in conjunction with the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum?

16. How do you work with students performing below or above grade level with grade level GLEs in place? How does this effect teaching the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum?
17. Please tell me about teacher staff development in-services that were provided to educate you and prepare you for implementing the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum?
18. Do you use the assessment(s) with your students provided within each unit of the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum?
19. Do you follow the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum units in the order they are outlined or do you teach them when they are appropriate to your yearly planning?
20. Do you and other first grade teachers plan together?
21. Any comments, questions, or concerns that you have for me?

## VITA

Mary Taylor “Kitty” Ainsworth was born in Laurel, Mississippi, in July 1948 to Dorothy and Theron Taylor. She graduated from Istrouma High School in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in May 1965 and received her Bachelor of Science degree, majoring in education, in 1969 from the University of Southern Mississippi. She served as a graduate assistant at Southeastern Louisiana University while completing her Master of Education in supervision and administration in 1971. Upon completing her master’s degree, she taught second grade at the Laboratory School at Southeastern Louisiana University and at Winbourne Elementary School in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. During this time she began course work at Southeastern Louisiana University for her Educational Specialist Degree in reading. She completed this degree and graduated in 1976.

Ms. Ainsworth has 32 years of professional experience in the public school system of East Baton Rouge Parish schools. This experience was garnered teaching second grade, Kindergarten, Academic Readiness Program, assistance principal, and principal. She began the new Pre-K Program in East Baton Rouge Parish School System by serving as the program’s parish supervisor. Currently, Ms. Ainsworth is an instructor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, Louisiana. She teaches the language arts methods for teacher candidates certifying in Pre-K through third grade; she also teaches children’s literature courses.

Ms. Ainsworth has co-authored over 25 teacher resource books, 8 of which were published by the Carson-Dellosa Publishing Company. She has presented at the national, regional, state, and local level conferences for the International Reading Association, National Association for the Education of Young Children, Kindergarten Teachers of Texas, California Kindergarten Teachers Association, Southern Association for Children Under Six, Save the Children

Conference, and the Louisiana State Department of Education's Annual Early Childhood Educators Conference.

She is a member of National Association for the Education Young Children, International Reading Association, Association for Childhood Association International, Phi Mu Fraternity, Krewe of Romany Ladies' Mardi Gras Krewe and Broadmoor United Methodist Church.

Ms. Ainsworth has held office on several professional organization boards and professional organization committees. Ms. Ainsworth has four sons, Brian, Clint, Brad, and Taylor, two daughter-in-laws, and five granddaughters. She currently lives in Baton Rouge, Louisiana with one son and her three dogs, Jack, Jazz, and Gem.