The effects of a student-centered writing program on the writing skills of gifted sixth and seventh grade students

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ABSTRACT

THE EFFECTS OF A STUDENT-CENTERED WRITING PROGRAM
ON THE WRITING SKILLS OF
GIFTED SIXTH AND SEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS

By

Carol T. Scott
Procedures

The nature of the Student-Centered Writing Program was explained by the teacher and a copy of each of the materials to be used by the students was distributed. Students brainstormed topics for writing assignments, and each was assigned to write a rough draft. The Writer's Checklist was utilized to proofread the rough draft. Each student selected a partner with whom to work (i.e., the Buddy System). The Composition Improvement Checklist was used by pairs of students to indicate errors found on the rough draft. Written recommendations for revisions by the buddy were made at the end of the written work. The teacher monitored pairs of students during proofreading. Misspelled words were corrected by the writer and written on his Individual Spelling List (ISL) page in his notebook for future reference. Following written recommendations, the Buddy Checklist for the Rough Draft and the Writing Score Card for Buddy Evaluations were completed to assess the written work. Rough drafts handed in to the teacher were returned with comments. Each student maintained his own Writer's Log. Final drafts were written and stapled to rough drafts. All writing was shared with peers. While students sometimes scheduled brief conferences with the teacher, more in-depth private teacher-student conferences were scheduled approximately every ten days to help students to analyze their own papers and to encourage continued efforts.

Summative Evaluation/Posttesting: Students wrote on a topic of their choice for the final written assignment. Errors on the pretest
and the posttest were tallied to determine the improvement of written work. The teacher shared the evaluation process with each student in a teacher-student conference. Student's written work was analyzed as a whole, i.e., the holistic approach, by both the teacher and the student to determine the trends and the progress of the student.

Summary of Presentation and Analysis of Findings

1. The opinionnaire showed that over fifty percent of the total group had positive overall attitudes about the program. Seventy percent indicated they did not mind revising for a better grade. While seventy-five percent felt responsible for correcting and proofreading their own work, 55 percent wanted to continue in a student-centered writing program and wanted the same opportunity made available to others in their school. Eighty-five percent reported that good writing skills should be applied to other school subjects, not just language arts.

2. The opinionnaire showed that over 60 percent of the total group indicated that the Buddy System helped them to improve their writing, to locate, errors they (as writers) had overlooked and that they liked the idea of locating and correcting their written work with the aid of a buddy.

3. Of the total group, 45 percent reported that they proofread their first drafts more closely, while 65 percent indicated that they proofread their final drafts more closely as a result of the program.

4. All students appeared to enjoy additional time with the teacher to help with problems that remained unsolved and to seek sympathetic assurance.

5. Writers of the same sex chose to work together, independently sought assistance from various sources such as the dictionary, the thesaurus, and English grammar textbooks, and voluntarily offered suggestions to their peers for resolving problems.
6. Natural insertion of words was made during proofreading and incidental learning occurred when students were answering questions on the Writing Score Card for Buddy Evaluations.

7. Errors experienced by students included capitalization, spelling, agreement of subject and verb, inconsistency of tense, double comparisons, agreement of pronoun and antecedent, split infinitives, and syntax (fragments and run-on sentences). The majority of the errors was in syntax, inconsistency of tense and punctuation.

8. Sixty-five percent of the total group believed that the teacher-student conferences encouraged them to write better.

9. There was a discernible pattern of error reduction in grammar over the nine writing assignments.

10. There was a statistically significant difference between pre- and posttest scores on the writing samples. On the pretest the number of errors in grammar was nine, and on the posttest the number of errors was reduced to zero. Spelling errors on the pretest were eleven and on the posttest were two. There were twenty-seven errors in punctuation, and on the posttest there were five errors. Errors in syntax numbered twenty on the pretest and on the posttest, there were three. Capitalization errors on the pretest were eight, and on the posttest there were four. There were 75 total errors on the pretest and 14 total errors on the posttest.

Conclusions

The findings of this study, based upon an analysis of the data, seem to warrant the following:

1. The Student-Centered Writing Program promoted the reduction of errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, syntax, and capitalization.

2. An increased reduction of errors is likely to occur, given a longer period of time. However,
a plateau is likely to be reached where errors will be made by chance, regardless of practice or instruction.

3. The Student-Centered Writing Program encouraged student independence, fostered positive student attitudes, improved peer relationships, and promoted the application of skills to other written tasks.

4. The Student-Centered Writing Program is an effective instructional approach with gifted middle school students. Student samples showed a significant reduction of errors on the pre- and post-tests.

5. Learning and teaching the mechanics of writing have not proved effective in improving troubled student writing. Focusing attention on correct grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and syntax through the actual written work as they are needed is more effectual.

Recommendations

Consideration of the following recommendations, which resulted from the findings, implications, and conclusions of this study, may assist teachers, administrators, and school systems in the implementation of a student-centered writing program.

1. Students, acting as editors and collaborators in pairs or in small groups, should be permitted to work at their own pace.

2. Private teacher-student conferences should be scheduled approximately every ten days to help students analyze their own progress and to encourage continued efforts.

3. Since students, generally, do not know how to proofread their own writing for errors, it is recommended that teachers assume this responsibility by providing a large How to Proofread Chart in front of the classroom. Consistent referral to this chart before every written assignment is essential.
4. Maintaining accurate records by both the teacher and the students is important in the Student-Centered Writing Program because it provides a visible means for tracking student progress. The tabulation of errors on the Error Chart and the dating of student materials help in the overall evaluative process.

5. School systems should institute workshops and/or in-service courses to train teachers in the implementation of a successful student-centered writing program.

6. Administrators should promote the utilization of student-centered writing programs as an integral component of the English/language arts course in their schools.

7. Since studies are beginning to show that the implementation of teacher-student conferences by professors of English on the college level has achieved success in improving student writing, it is recommended that student-centered writing programs be implemented consistently, beginning perhaps as early as Grade 4 and continuing throughout high school.

8. Random selection of subjects and experimental, as well as control groups, should be given serious consideration in furthering research and study on improving student writing.

9. In respect to the gifted learner, it is recommended that administrators focus attention on ability grouping, acceleration, and enrichment to meet his/her special needs in language arts/English programs. Students demonstrating high ability in English, for example, may be helpful as mentors, assisting their own intellectual peers, as well as other students who may need help in improving their writing.
THE EFFECTS OF A STUDENT-CENTERED WRITING PROGRAM
ON THE WRITING SKILLS OF GIFTED SIXTH
AND SEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
EDUCATION SPECIALIST

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, educators and laymen have expressed alarm concerning the unfortunate and tragic incapacity of students to manipulate the English language with precision, clarity, and color. Educators, furthermore, are hard pressed to determine why this problem has reached epidemic proportions.

The layman appears comfortable in targeting public education for inferior student writing, and, within that framework, the teacher of English bears the lion's share of the responsibility.

Although the decline in student writing has been evident for a long time, the solutions proposed have changed very little over the years. Essentially, two beliefs exist. One, which gained a brief ascendancy during the sixties, holds that children learn best through free, imaginative writing experiences on which adult standards of correctness are not imposed.¹ The other, long popular and now once more ascendant, asserts that strict standards, coupled with systematic instruction in grammar, punctuation, and spelling, are keys to good writing.² Speculation conveys that many children have not responded well


²Ibid.
because of these unbalanced approaches. What is even more unsettling is that far fewer children have become competent, confident writers than their intelligence and abilities in other areas would lead one to expect.

Considering the spotty successes achieved through these two approaches, a functional approach -- one that adopts the motivations and methods of people writing in the real world -- has never attracted a strong following. Functionalism presupposes that "students can learn to write well if they have real purposes for writing, follow realistic procedures, and receive instruction that meets their need at the time of need."³

A functional writing program is necessarily mentioned here because its techniques resemble, at least in part, a student-centered writing program. Both writing programs credit the improvement in student compositions to the active involvement of students in small group and partner activities, especially in the areas of proofreading and editing. Moreover, both writing programs recommend scheduling time for private teacher-student conferences. The teacher's tasks, furthermore, in the functional and student-centered writing programs are to monitor and to provide guidelines for growth.

Rationale

In the last decade or so, teachers have learned through experimentation that reliance on tests for diagnosis of writing skills has proved ineffectual. Many teachers now use the children's own work to

³Ibid.
identify basic writing skills that need to be taught or reviewed. The children practice and review these skills by proofreading their own and each other's work. Moreover, and of great importance in a student-centered writing program, research reveals that children care about and improve in the areas of clarity, grammar, punctuation and spelling when they proofread their own work.4

Concrete examples from a child's own work assist the teacher in planning for specific skill lessons, taught either in informal conferences or in various size groups. Dating these entries also helps teachers to evaluate progress over a long period of time.

Much consideration has been given to placing middle school children in small groupings of two, three, and four. Generally, children in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades seem to enjoy working with one another in small group situations. Gifted sixth and seventh grade students are no exception. They, too, need to assume responsibility for their own learning and improvement. When children are allowed to share in these responsibilities, they seem to grow in confidence, as well as in competence.5

Reading and correcting compositions are time-consuming and discouraging to both teachers and students. Despite the careful noting of errors, there seems to be little improvement in the subsequent writing. Teachers, therefore, feel that their time has been wasted,


5Ibid.
and students become disheartened rather than inspired.

A student-centered writing program would appear to solve two problems at once: (1) It would reduce the time teachers spend correcting papers and (2) it would involve the student in the correcting process. Active participation, then, would help children learn to avoid past errors rather than to repeat them week after week.

In recent years, teachers who once relied heavily on their red pens and who worked frantically the night before to meet deadlines evaluating students' compositions have now discarded their red pens and turned frantic night to peaceful, often rewarding daytime teacher-student conferences, one of the curbstones in a student-centered writing program.

The traditional exchange between the student and the teacher, regarding the student's writing, holds a certain amount of intrigue and anxiety for the student. When a student hands in his paper, the teacher withdraws to some secret place where, by a process mysterious to the student, he arrives at a grade and jots some comments on the paper in red ink. A few days later, the paper is returned to the nervously awaiting student with the teacher's judgement. It is highly unlikely that those who receive caustic remarks/poor grades will digest the notations made by the teacher immediately or in the near future for purposes of improving his writing the next time. It is, however, highly likely and unfortunate that both the composition and its cogent comments will be dropped into a wastebasket at the first opportunity.

6Ibid.
On the other hand, individual teacher-student conferences, quite different in nature to the traditional exchange of papers between teacher and student, offer the following positive psychological advantages for both students and teachers:

1. Students are motivated to rewrite for a better grade.
2. Students are motivated to incorporate the teacher's suggestion in the revision.
3. The evaluating process is demystified by the teacher-student interaction.
4. The student is viewed as a real human being.
5. The student is provided instant feedback.
6. Enthusiastic support by the student is more likely.
7. The student can share the ongoing evaluative process with the teacher.
8. The teacher can provide more feedback per minute orally.
9. Less hours are spent grading papers.
10. The level of concentration and pace is increased.
11. The face-to-face interaction is more interesting and facilitates a more personal, real teacher-student interaction.

---

Those who tend to dominate in the matter of public education have stated repeatedly that students, in general, are being short-changed and cannot, in effect, write an English sentence with decency and correctness. While educators continue to grapple with new approaches incorporated into the curriculum, the problem which seemingly defies solution still exists. Teachers of English, in some instances, have been advised and even intimidated into throwing away their red pens because the psychological effect of red marks in huge quantities is both frightening and overwhelming to students. This tactic, some suggest, may be partially responsible for the collapse of standards altogether. The student who is overwhelmed by correctness, others contend, benefits more by far than the student who is stupefied by the absence of corrective summary. The way to promote better writing, still others argue, is not to cease marking themes, but to make those marks and remarks meaningful. In other instances, workshops and in-service programs to train teachers themselves to write competently and to analyze students' written work are highly recommended. Teachers of English, furthermore, often lament that students need to write more, although there is no evidence that quantity produces quality.

Finally, the notion that students be led to assume the responsibility for correcting their own spelling, punctuation, and grammatical


errors, coupled with teacher-student conferences to provide encouraging feedback and greater attention to what is right about a student's work, has given rise to the now publicized Student-Centered Writing Program.

To be sure, neither the task of producing competent, confident student writers nor the task of writing grammatically correct sentences for far too many students is easy, and unfortunately, there are no miracles, only conjectures and seemingly endless trial and error methods.

It is axiomatic that students care about clarity, punctuation, spelling, and grammar when they are free to proofread their own and each other's work. Thus, they should be given opportunities to demonstrate this caring, sharing, and responsibility through a series of carefully designed activities by teachers who are well-versed in and supportive of a student-centered writing program. What is needed more than miracles, it would appear, is a concentrated, dedicated effort by both the teacher and the student to ensure the kind of writing program that promises optimum results. Perhaps, the Student-Centered Writing Program offers the answer.

While the Student-Centered Writing Program may not provide a panacea for total eradication of troubled student writing, the possibility of its success has gained enough prominence by far-sighted educators who recognize the dire need for improved student writing to merit serious, further examination.
Evolution of the Problem

The researcher, currently a teacher of English for gifted seventh grade students, was stunned by the errors made on weekly written assignments. Seeking ways to decrease the number and kinds of errors made by students in spelling, grammar, capitalization, punctuation, and clarity, the writer of this study began experimentation with weekly teacher-student writing seminars. Admittedly, the beginning stages of these individual conferences lacked the sophistication described by James Moffett, for example, and other educators who are knowledgeable about a properly conducted teacher-student conference, since the writer did, in fact, edit, grade, and make notations on student papers.

After several weeks, it was evident that students looked forward to this time with the teacher to discuss their work when some asked enthusiastically if, indeed, we would continue holding our writing seminars each Thursday.

Next, the idea of allowing students to become more directly responsible for proofreading and editing their own written work was so appealing that a second experiment was conducted. The researcher allowed each student to select his own partner with whom he wanted to work. While students proofread, edited, and made suggestions for revisions, the teacher frequently visited each pair of writers to observe, to listen, and to offer assistance, whenever students needed definitive answers to problems with which they themselves had first
struggled. Sometimes, the teacher utilized the chalkboard to determine how many students were already aware of some problem area or to instruct those who were unaware. The brief interactions between the teacher and the students proved enlightening and beneficial. Also, the first drafts, which were handed in to the teacher for further scrutiny, always included encouraging comments. Each student, then, brought his final draft, which was attached to the first draft, to the teacher at the time he was scheduled for a private conference. Together, the teacher and the student reviewed both papers and made plans for future improvement.

Finally, the researcher designed an instrument which helped each student to evaluate his own work. According to the results, many students had deleted several problem areas which had been persistent prior to this experiment. This success prompted the writer of this study to continue this activity in a formal study.

Those who believe, as the researcher once did, that gifted students, by virtue of their giftedness, automatically write well should prepare themselves for a rude awakening. Gifted students, most assuredly, make some of the same kinds of errors as their peers of average intelligence.

While the researcher's attempts to institute an all-encompassing student-centered writing program were largely limited because research of the literature had not yet begun, a sincere belief that such a program which follows proven guidelines can be effective and successful in the improvement of student writing and served as the piloting philosophy for this effort.
Contribution to Educational Knowledge

The widespread concern over the general decline of students' written communication since the mid-sixties and support for regarding it as an important and necessary skill have been clearly documented. To be sure, the experimentation efforts of some and the pondering of others have failed to produce competent, confident student writers.

The idea that the student who is encouraged to depend upon himself, both in finding his own errors of expression and in editing them, has, in recent years, received enough acclaim to prompt additional, serious examination. Studies are beginning to reveal evidence that improved student writing occurs as a result of direct student involvement.

On the other hand, the idea that direct teacher intervention in the editing process and the teaching of mechanics which can be applied to writing seems passe', now with the advent and success of the student-centered writing approach.

The researcher steadfastly believes that the model and the findings revealed in this study will provide invaluable tools for teachers who realize the need for and sincerely want to assist in significantly improved student writing.

Statement of the Problem

The larger purpose of this study was to determine the effects of a student-centered writing program on the writing skills of gifted sixth and seventh grade students. More specifically, the problem of this study was to determine if proofreading and editing by gifted
sixth and seventh grade students improve clarity and reduce errors in spelling, grammar, capitalization, punctuation, and sentence structure in students' written work.

Research Questions

As an extension of the problem, the following questions guided the collection and interpretation of data:

1. How have student attitudes towards writing been affected by the student-centered writing approach?

2. What effects did the Buddy System have on peer relationships?

3. What major, common or persistent problems in writing did gifted students exhibit?

4. How did teacher-student conferences generally affect teacher-student relationships?

5. What was the error reduction pattern on the nine (9) written assignments?

Hypotheses

The null hypotheses of this study were as follows:

1. There will be no significant difference in the number of syntactical errors made by gifted sixth and seventh grade students on pre and post writing samples.

2. There will be no significant difference in the number of spelling errors made by gifted sixth and seventh grade student on pre and post writing samples.

4. There will be no significant difference in the number of punctuation errors made by gifted sixth and seventh grade students on pre and post writing samples.
5. There will be no significant difference in the number of grammatical errors made by gifted sixth and seventh grade students on pre and post writing samples.

6. There will be no significant difference in the pretest score and the posttest score.

**Limitations of the Study**

The following limitations apply to this study:

1. The two classes of twenty (20) students were predetermined by set eligibility criteria; all students were enrolled in a language arts program designed to accelerate, to challenge, and to meet their special needs.

2. Since the sample size was already small - 13 students in grade 6 and seven students in grade 7 -- a control was unfeasible.

3. The Student-Centered Writing Program was incorporated into the Language Arts Curriculum. Not every class period could be wholly devoted to writing since the Language Arts Curriculum also required instruction in grammar, vocabulary study, literature, and creative activities.

4. The study looked at the number of errors in a given category without reference to the nature of errors.

**Definitions of Terms**

Significant terms which were used in this study are defined as follows:

1. Student-Centered Writing Program - refers to a model of instruction designed to allow active involvement and direct responsibility of students, acting, as collaborators and editors in the proofreading, editing, revising, and evaluating of their own written expression.
2. Gifted - as defined by the Special Education Department of the Fulton County Public School System refers to those students who have met the eligibility criteria determined by test results on the Otis-Lennon Mental Ability Test, (OLSAT), the Cognitive Abilities Test (CAT), the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R), the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT), and the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale. More specifically, students in the Talented and Gifted Program (TAG) in Fulton County have achieved 128 or above on one of the mental abilities tests and at the 96 percentile on one or more achievement tests which include reading comprehension, vocabulary, mathematics, social studies, and science.

3. Writing Skills - refer to demonstrated proficiency and skill in the areas of clarity, spelling, punctuation, syntax, capitalization, and grammar in written work by students.

4. Teacher-Student Conferences - are those private individual conferences between the teacher and the student for the purposes of analyzing written communication with the student, providing encouraging feedback, and assisting the student in assuming the responsibility of evaluation his own efforts.

5. The Buddy System - refers to the partnership between the student writer and a chosen classmate. Together in their roles of collaborators and editors, proofread, edit, evaluate, and make recommendations for revisions regarding each other's written work.

**Summary**

The Student-Centered Writing Program has proven effective in helping students improve their writing. Working in pairs or in small groups, students assist each other in locating and correcting errors on their papers. Teacher-student conferences, furthermore, which have a positive psychological effect on students, provide additional
assistance and encourage productive efforts on future assignments.

Since, as research studies have shown, teaching strategies, such as reorganizing and editing student writing, and the instruction of rules in grammar -- heavily relied upon in the past -- have proved futile in improving written communication, a student-centered writing approach appears to be the most impressive, most beneficial tool yet for improving troubled student writing.

Specifically, this study looked at how the Student-Centered Writing Program affects the writing skills of sixth and seventh grade gifted students by reducing errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and syntax. The null hypotheses stated that there would be no significant differences either in the number of errors for each sub-writing area or in the total error scores between pre and post test performance. Research questions, which guided the collection and interpretation of data for this study, addressed student attitudes, peer relationships, student work habits, student independence, teacher-student relationships, error-reduction patterns, and problematic writing demonstrated by gifted students.
Chapter II

Survey of Related Literature

A survey of literature was made to explore the findings of educators and researchers pertinent to the problem of this study and to focus attention on the following:

1. The definition and nature of a student-centered curriculum.

2. Theories and research on writing instructional strategies for composition.

3. A language arts program for gifted students.

The Definition and Nature of a Student-Centered Writing Curriculum

Within the last several years, educators and researchers have focused considerable attention on the effectiveness of a student-centered curriculum. James Moffett, possibly the leading proponent of such an approach, defines the Student-Centered Curriculum as that which:

1. teaches each learner to select her own activities and materials (individualization).

2. arranges for students to center on and teach each other (interaction).
3. interweaves all symbolized and symbolizing subjects so that the student can effectively synthesize knowledge structures in her own mind (integration).¹

Moffett's three I's (individualization, interaction, and integration) have gained popularity with knowledgeable educators because research has demonstrated the effectiveness and success of a student-centered program and because the traditional way of teaching simply has not worked. Students have suffered, overall, because (1) teachers themselves dread the tasks of reading and grading copious student compositions riddled with the same type of errors which occur repeatedly, (2) teachers themselves have lost touch with the numerous problems associated with writing since they write so little themselves, (3) teachers have no knowledge of the techniques that have been proven successful, (4) teachers feel comfortable utilizing methods with which they are familiar, although they and their students have experienced little or no success, and (4) teachers are incompetent in identifying and diagnosing written communication.

Whatever the reason which might be offered for the decline of writing competence, both educators and researchers have recognized the decline in student writing and continue to seek new and fresh approaches to the improvement thereof.

Continuing to struggle, decade after decade, with approaches which have failed is senseless. Traditionally, "change is considered

risky and radical, but when traditional approaches have clearly failed, it is riskier not to change, to cling to proven failures."\(^2\)

The Student-Centered Writing Program offers a change in traditional educational thought and opportunities for children to become actively involved in proofreading and editing their own writing. "Authorities seem in general agreement that teachers should not correct writing for children. Instead, children should be helped to assume the responsibility for analyzing their own compositions and diagnosing their own problems if improvement is to take place."\(^3\) In support of this idea, Murray affirms that "the ultimate skill of a teacher as a diagnostician comes when he has trained his students to be their own diagnosticians."\(^4\)

Furthermore, two of the most appealing characteristics of the Student-Centered Curriculum are its versatility and adaptability to many age levels. Teachers of composition in the middle grades, for example, can successfully help their students improve the quality of written compositions when they are cognizant of and institute the following factors which influence improvement:

1. Children must have a self-felt purpose for writing.
2. Children must develop a sense of audience.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 49.

\(^3\)Carol Sager, "Improving the Quality of Written Composition in the Middle Grades," Language Arts 54 (October 1977): 761.

3. Children need an understanding of the major factors which contribute to effective writing: (a) a rich, varied vocabulary, (b) elaboration - fully developed related ideas and vivid details, (c) organization - logical arrangement of ideas accurately, effectively, and fluently.

4. Children must become actively involved in evaluating their own writing.

While many concerned innovators in the field of education who have classroom-tested the Student-Centered Writing Program enthusiastically support its effectiveness, the research is also overwhelmingly supportive.

For example, researchers at the English Curriculum Study Center at the University of Georgia found in 1968 that children can indeed be taught to analyze and criticize their own work, and as a result, improve the quality of their writing. An elementary school in Madison, Wisconsin, furthermore, designed a meaning-centered writing program in 1975, largely based upon the ideas espoused by Moffett, and announced success in which the teacher and the student act as collaborators, editors, and critics. Finally, a highly successful comprehensive writing program developed by teachers of English in the Tonawanda Middle School strongly recommends following proven guidelines for improved student writing advocated by Moffett, Judy, Murray,

5Sager, "Improving the Quality of Written Composition in the Middle Grades," pp. 761-762.

6Ibid., p. 762.

and Cooper. "The general teaching approach in this program could best be described as interactive and student-centered." Some recommendations include: (1) students helping each other in pairs and small groups in pre-writing and post-writing activities; (2) teachers training students to work together in groups; (3) brainstorming by students to generate as many ideas as possible on a topic prior to writing; (4) discouragement of assigning grades to individual pieces of written work; (5) student examination and description of growth; (6) helpful, encouraging feedback by teachers; and (7) selection of the best written work for evaluation by both the teacher and the student in personal conferences.

Theories and Research on Instructional Strategies

For many years, teachers of English have believed that teaching formal grammar helps improve student writing. Research evidence, however, shows otherwise. In 1960, Ingrid Strom analyzed more than fifty studies conducted from 1906 to 1939. Based upon this comprehensive analysis, Strom concluded that instructional strategies focusing directly on the writing process are "more effective in improving writing than are grammar drills and diagramming." Summarizing a series of more recent studies, some of which considered the effects of formal study of structural or transformational grammar, Elizabeth Haynes


reported similar findings and concluded that "the effectiveness of 
transformational grammar as an aid in writing seems doubtful."10

Similar studies conducted by stellar researchers, Sherwin, 
Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer, also found no relationship be-
tween teaching traditional grammar and improved student writing. 
Sherwin, moreover, reviewed a number of selected investigations since 
1906, also the beginning date for research conducted by Strom and 
referred to earlier in this study. Sherwin's research showed over-
whelmingly that the study of traditional grammar is an "ineffective 
and inefficient way to teach students to become better writers."11
Braddock, Lloyd-Jones and Schoer, by comparison, voiced unequivocally 
that "the teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or, because 
it usually displaces some instruction and practice in actual composi-
tion, even a harmful effect on the improvement of writing."12

In addition, the notion persists that teaching the rules of 
punctuation and spelling and the teacher correction of such errors 
will, somehow, magically transform student writing from poor, if this 
is the case, to much improved, or even "good." Research evidence, 
however, does not support this notion. Futhermore, what teachers of 
writing seem to know or practice is that the rules for grammar,

10 Ibid.

11 Stephen J. Sherwin, Four Problems in Teaching English: A 
Critique of Research (Scranton, Pa.: International Textbook Company, 

12 Richard Braddock, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and Lowell Schoer, Re-
search in Written Composition (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of 
punctuation, and spelling should not be taught as a separate entity, apart from the child's written work. Rather, research shows that the proven method to focus attention on correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling is through the actual written work. In other words, correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling should become an integral part of the writing and revising of student papers, and direct teacher intervention is not recommended.

The results of the aforementioned studies are conclusive and undeniable. "Grammatical rules and their exceptions are so numerous that they often confuse rather than help."13 In support of this, Hadley concludes, "sentences that are direct and clearly written are almost always grammatical, and it is much more valuable for young writers to clarify what they want to say rather than to try to remember what rules might apply."14

In the meantime, baffled educators continue to ponder why "children do not write much better in the upper grades than in the lower grades even after years of grammar instruction."15

One strategy some teachers employ to encourage student revision is teacher correction, a distinct departure of the student-centered writing concept. Reading a child's paper, teachers revise for the child -- reorganizing, editing for punctuation, capitalization, spell-


14Ibid.

15Ibid.
ling, rewriting awkward sentences and making deletions. Receiving a teacher-edited paper, the child merely makes a final draft by copying the composition with the teacher's changes. "Studies by Ruxton, Clarke, and Adams summarized by Haynes in the January 1978 edition of the English Journal show that intensive marking by the teacher does not necessarily result in heightened writing skills."\textsuperscript{16} In her summary of these findings, Haynes concluded simply that "intensive correction of errors is futile."\textsuperscript{17}

A study by Gee in 1972, however, suggests that teacher-editing resulted in "greater sentence maturity than negative comments or no comments at all."\textsuperscript{18}

Furthermore, both Graves and Moffett dispel the notion that the teacher correction of punctuation and spelling encourages revision and improves student writing. Research investigation by Graves, for example, has convincingly shown that "children learn punctuation marks in the order in which they need them and learn them more effectively through actual writing than through daily punctuation drills and workbook exercises."\textsuperscript{19} Likewise, teacher correction of spelling errors is strongly discouraged by Moffett. Instead, he adamantly emphasizes that the "processes of reading should go on

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{16}Hennings and Grant, Written Expression in the Language Arts: Ideas and Skills, p. 215.
  \item \textsuperscript{17}Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{18}Ibid.
\end{itemize}
among students, who can point out errors to each other in writing groups when they exchange papers."20

Some educators, moreover, operate under the guise that allowing children to write extensively improves student writing. An investigation by Haynes of numerous studies which compared groups given extensive opportunities to write with groups given less opportunities led her to comment:

It seems safe to conclude at present that although some of the studies relating to frequency of writing are inconsistent, most of them point to the contention that mere writing does not improve writing.21

In conclusion, studies reveal emphatically that grammar learning, teacher correction of errors, and frequent writing -- all strategies relied upon in the past by many teachers -- simply have not proved effective for improved student writing.

Research studies are beginning to indicate that students who are directly responsible for the proofreading and editing of their own work do, in fact, improve their writing. Classroom-tested procedures by Hadley which have proved successful reveal that "the benefits of having children learn to edit and proofread their writing are not limited to improved writing skills and performance. They


21Hennings and Grant, Written Expression in the Language Arts: Ideas and Skills, p. 215.
learn to organize their thoughts and pay attention to details, as well. In essence, children learn critical thinking skills."22

Proofreading criteria may be developed either by the teacher, an individual or by the class. If the criteria are developed by the latter, Hadley suggests, they should be limited first to one or two details then expanded later to include further items such as organization, form, and mechanics. Five classroom-tested proofreading and editing techniques which children can be taught to follow are:

1. Reading aloud to themselves what they have written;

2. Reading their material to someone else;

3. Having another person read the material silently and point out errors;

4. Having another person read the material aloud for the writer to listen;

5. Waiting a day or more to reread the material so they can read it as if someone else had written it.23

The rationale offered by Hadley for having written work read by someone else is that the writer himself may not notice mistakes because he is so intent upon thinking about what he wants to say, rather than focusing his attention upon what he has actually written, even though he has reread his material.

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23 Ibid.
Finally, readiness and the capacity to revise are mainly individual. As in other areas of learning, not all children are ready at the same time and not all children will exhibit the same abilities at the same time. Research studies on revisions by children conducted by Graves show the following characteristics teachers can look for to determine signs of readiness and to what extent children will revise:

1. Revision begins when children choose their own topics. Children who quickly arrive at a number of topics learn to exclude some topics and write on others, are learning to revise.

2. Children who can quickly list personal topics for writing and write a series of leads about the same subject demonstrate a strong capacity for revision.

3. When children no longer erase, but cross out, draw lines for new information arrangements, or change their handwriting to a scrawl, they indicate a changed view toward words. Words, for these children, are now temporary, malleable, or clay-like. The words can be changed until they evolve toward the right meaning for these children.

4. Children who write rapidly are more likely to revise in larger units and sustain a single composition for a longer period of time than those who write slowly.24

According to Graves, "the focal point for developing self-evaluative and self-critical powers in the young writer is in individual writing conferences."25 The conference, furthermore, "depending


on the developmental level of the child, may be as often as every five days or every ten days."26 Within the conference setting, the teacher should prompt youngsters to talk about their writing decisions and to identify areas of weakness and strength. The questions asked by the teacher should require young writers to think about what they have written. To handle a conference productively, to be sure, teachers must be competent in diagnosing children's strengths and weaknesses as writers.

"One goal of a conference," according to Moffett, "should be to enhance the student's feeling of mastery and skill development."27 Students should be weaned away, furthermore, from the teacher's judgment and helped to become more responsible for setting their own goals and analyzing their own efforts.

Moreover, the encouragement and the supportive attitude the teacher can and should provide will, research shows, be invaluable to young writers, struggling to improve.

Lou LaBrant, a former president of the National Council of Teachers of English and former instructor and consultant at Atlanta University, recommends five guidelines for teachers who want to induce students to write:

1. The teacher of a successful writing class is one who writes himself.


2. The teacher should instill confidence in the student that his writing will not be scorned, ridiculed or ignored.

3. The teacher should be able to recognize the difficulties of writing.

4. The teacher should ably aid in discovering suitable topics for students.

5. The teacher should provide ample time to write.28

In the teacher evaluation of student progress, furthermore, research indicates that "students respond favorably and with more enthusiasm for continued writing when rewarded with praise instead of criticism."29 The avoidance of negative marks or comments on pupils' papers is advocated since research shows that they "possess a substantial inverse relationship to the students' writing ability as measured on a standardized essay test."30 Groff, however, reviewed studies on the effect of teachers' criticism on students' writing and concluded that, on the whole, research studies do not support the contention that "negative criticism will result in a reduction in the quality and originality of students' writing."31

Finally, the effectiveness of the teacher-student conference and the important role which the teacher plays are not limited to the

28 Lou LaBrant, "Inducing Students to Write," The English Journal 44 (January 1955): 71.

29 Gentry, Language: Classroom-Relevant Research in the Language Arts, p. 114.


31 Fassler, College Teaching 40, p. 190.
very young. Colleges throughout the nation are experimenting and results of the success are being made public. One such report was made by Barbara Fassler, a teacher at Central College in Iowa and chief architect of an institution-wide basic skills program. According to Fassler,

Red ink has long been the staple of composition teachers, but Central's English faculty has come to believe that the twenty-minute individual student-teacher conference is in some surprising ways the most efficient, and certainly the most effective way for the teacher to give direction to students about their writing.32

A Language Arts Program for Gifted Students

Addressing an increased awareness about the kind of language arts program which might be appropriate for the academically talented, Endres, Lamb, and Lazarus (1969) developed a comprehensive series of objectives, using five major dimensions: perceiving, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These objectives, which seem especially suitable for gifted and talented middle school students, fall into broad categories of receptive abilities, expressive abilities, and integrating or associative abilities. Among the objectives related specifically to writing are the following:

1. To produce written signs and symbols with a sense of exploration and discovery.

2. To develop an awareness of writing styles as a result of continuous exposure of literature.

32Fassler, College Teaching 40, p. 190.
3. To enjoy writing prose and verse; to enjoy writing various genres and modes (haiku, free verse, stories, fables, skits, etc.).

A strong language arts program, furthermore, should help students become more sophisticated in interpreting the motivations of those he or she encounters. Interestingly enough, gifted students who are often extremely sophisticated in book knowledge are incredibly naive about the information of others he is receiving. Recognizing that a person's communication with him may have more than one intention, therefore, is as important a goal personally as familiarity in several content areas. Student judgment, then, should be one of the primary purposes of a language arts curriculum for the gifted.

In addition, "the gifted student should be encouraged to express himself with imagination, to develop original and unusual ideas, and to learn skills that will provide him with the mechanisms for more effective expression."  

An interesting study by House et al. (1972) indicated what actually happens in language arts programs in heterogeneous classrooms and in classrooms that are grouped for ability. More specifically, House and his colleagues conducted an extended evaluation, involving classroom observation, in programs where gifted students were found attending classes with students of high ability and in classes in which there was a wide range of ability.


34Ibid., p. 178.
Based upon this study, "there is a higher proportion of talk by the teacher in the average program, the textbook seems to be followed rather rigidly, and all assignments are clearly stated." These assignments do not necessarily reflect the teacher's wishes, but the feeling of responsibility by the teacher that since the standards do not have basic skills, practicing those skills until they are learned is essential.

In direct contrast to these programs, House reports that "in the programs where students are grouped for ability in language arts, there is a greater freedom to encourage creative and reflective thinking on the part of the student." It should be noted, also, that House et al. point out that gifted students in the normal program did not have an opportunity to proceed as easily as they may have because of the responsibility the teacher felt for the entire range of abilities within a class.

Language arts, frequently, is a favorite subject of gifted students. In some instances, fortunately, it offers the academically talented many opportunities to think divergently, to produce original work, and to prepare for future leadership positions — among other positive characteristics. On the other hand, unfortunately, depending upon the lack of teacher imagination and administrative rules to "cover" the textbook at any cost, gifted students, far too often, are subjected to numerous rules, tedious drills and exercises, meaning—

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35Ibid.
36Ibid.
less repetition, and virtually no opportunity to grow academically. Small wonder, then, that gifted students, in this instance, perceive language arts (and school in general) a boring fact of life.

However, in support of the popularity of language arts, research conducted by Rice and Banks (1967) on the opinions of over 100 students in the San Diego program showed high positive judgments in the area of language arts. "Students voted strongly for flexible schedules that would allow for individualized programs but also made an emphatic plea for more literature courses, fine arts, music, and dramatic offerings."37

In addition, students adamantly favored intradisciplinary seminars and discussions that would tend to relate the sciences to the social sciences and to literature. "The talent of the gifted student for interrelating ideas is seen in these types of interest."38 Above, all, it should be noted, the need to be creative, active learners and producers rather than passive absorbers of content was strongly voiced. This emphasis, it would appear, underlies most of the suggestions in a special language arts curriculum for the gifted.

The Committee of the English Council makes the following recommendations for organization of problems for students with special ability in English:

1. Ability grouping with small seminar groups for students in the top 3 per cent

37 Ibid., p. 176.
38 Ibid.
2. Limitation of drill on routine corrections as determined by early administration of diagnostic test

3. Setting of more advanced goals and more rigorous standards of expression for the gifted

4. A literature program that is characterized by reading of original works in their entirety, by attention to broad cultural goals, and by integration

5. A goal of effective expression with appropriate emphasis on both creative and expository writing and speech

The preceding statements seem to suggest the seriousness of planning an extensive, diversified, imaginative language arts program designed to meet the special needs of the mentally superior. Unless educators are willing to contribute their creative energies and to provide an academic atmosphere which stimulates and enriches the potential to become confident, competent leaders of tomorrow will be stifled, having little or no chance to surface.

Several studies in the past have focused attention on the characteristics of gifted children and the effects of grouping for instruction. Among these are interest grouping, ability grouping, enrichment, acceleration, upgraded or cross-graded classrooms, and early admission to school. In more recent decades, research projects to analyze the classroom behavior and cognitive characteristics of children have been directed by Dr. James Gallagher (1963) and Dr. B. Othaniel Smith (1959) at the University of Utah.

Furthermore, it should be noted, researchers Lewin, Lippit, and White (1939), Anderson (1939), Withall (1952), Bush (1954), and Heil (1960) have investigated the influence of the emotional climate upon the behavior of the children in classes or other groups. In these studies, the role of the teacher has been found to be a critical factor in setting the classroom atmosphere; yet, the manner in which a teacher influences the learning of a child or the group as a whole, it was learned, is highly complex. Each encounter between teacher and child involves a particular experiential history on the part of both the teacher and the child.

Inhelder and Piaget (1958) have traced the manner in which types of thought structures characteristically develop from childhood and adolescence and how each child operates intellectually from his own concrete experience. In support of the Inhelder and Piaget study, Hunt (1961) suggests that "a child's functional intelligence is dependent upon the kind of external circumstances encountered and the kind of internal organization already present..."40 Hunt, moreover, emphasizes the importance of a rich educational environment and "self-directed interest and curiosity and genuine pleasure in intellectual activity."41 Finally, Hunt cautions against implying a kind of "grim urgency which has been associated with 'pushing' children."42


41Ibid.

42Ibid.
In the early sixties, Spaulding investigated types of teacher response to fifteen-second sequences of classroom pupil-teacher transaction. Specifically, this study was "designed to test relationships predicted between variables of pupil self-esteem, academic achievement, and creative thinking, and several types or patterns of teacher-pupil interaction which have been identified in past studies -- the 'socially integrative' pattern discussed by Anderson (1939), the 'democratic' type of leader behavior studied by Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939), the 'learner-supportive' category identified by Withall (1948), and three types of teacher behavior described by Bush (1954) -- the 'academic' teacher, the 'counseling' teacher, and the 'creative' teacher."^3

In summary, affective components of teacher behavior in the classroom appear important, primarily, in fostering self-esteem and in providing an atmosphere in which cognitive risk-taking can freely occur. While such a supportive-acceptant climate is necessary, teacher direction, limit setting, and feedback regarding cognitive dimensions of the subject matter at hand, structured in a business-like, orderly manner, are also appropriate factors.

Pilot studies by Suchman and Spaulding support the idea that the teacher must structure the curriculum differently for various types of children. "The creatively gifted, for example, appear most highly motivated and constructively occupied in settings where limits are clearly set, but which permits a wide range of choice for self-

^3Ibid., pp. 227.
direction." The creative thinker, moreover, does not desire to become less involved with classroom activity but to be permitted to enter into each with a certain degree of autonomy and responsibility.

Finally, it might be added, teaching is a challenging profession, demanding the very best of individuals in various endeavors. Teachers, in the true sense of the word, help to shape the attitudes and to develop the potentiality of the young with whom they encounter. Perhaps, one of the teacher's most important roles is to prepare students to become critical, creative thinkers -- among other valuable talents. Providing an effective climate in the classroom, therefore, is not enough. In addition to being acceptant and supportive, "he must come to the point where he cannot only identify the sources of motivation and anxiety in each of his pupils and provide adequate limits and structuring for each child to feel secure, but he must begin to recognize the level at which each child is operating cognitively so that he can help structure his intellectual encounters."45

With this in mind, then, some attention to the student-centered teacher seems appropriate. "The student-centered teacher makes students feel so important that they try harder. They also feel free to make mistakes, which is normal in learning. Simply caring about students and showing this care causes students to become more interested in the subject."46 Very possibly, the student-centered

44Ibid., p. 233.


teacher encapsulates every positive, significant attribute for gifted students found in the studies mentioned earlier.

Once, the gifted child was the least understood and the most neglected in school, as well as by society-at-large. Frequently, his ideas were characterized as "wild" and his behavior regarded as bizarre. Fortunately, for both the gifted and the public, copious research on the gifted, focusing considerable attention on their special needs, has generated positive, new thought and attitudes on how the mentally superior might best be serviced. Without channeling and challenging the so-called wild and bizarre, it would appear, we all lose.

Aside from calling attention to the needs of the gifted student, so much has been written regarding his characteristics. Numerous descriptive students of intellectually gifted children have provided certain generalizations. "The outstanding trait is mental superiority, manifesting itself in intellectual precocity, better-than-normal achievement in school, play interests that are seasoned with an intellectual content, playmates who are nearer their mental age than their chronological contemporaries, and occupational interests that capitalize upon their intellectual gifts."47 Research on the characteristics of the gifted continues, and the generalizations provided above, it might be added, are not to be regarded as all-encompassing. However, in the interest of this study, several specific characteristics of gifted students which are most readily discernible in the

classroom and which may be most suitable for gifted students in the operation of a student-centered writing program are discussed below:

The gifted student "has high critical thinking ability." The opportunity to use this ability is afforded in the teacher-student conference which can be scheduled by either the teacher of the student himself. During the conference, the teacher's role is to lead the student to analyze his own written expression, independent of the teacher's assessment. Although, characteristically, the gifted student "sets high goals for himself," it is more feasible that the student be led to set reasonable goals for future improvement. Furthermore, because the gifted student "responds to goals," it is highly likely that through his own persistence, another trait, coupled by the teacher's gentle insistence of high academic achievement, he will reduce the number of errors and improve his writing.

In addition, the encouragement provided by the teacher during proofreading sessions and teacher-student conferences may vary possibly contribute to the productivity of the gifted student who normally "pushes himself for more and who makes demands on himself." Characteristically, the gifted student "is bored easily if the pace is not appropriate."

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49Ibid.

50Ibid.

52Ibid.
Buddy System, proofreading and locating and correcting errors made on their own written work, are at liberty to proceed at their own pace. Realizing that learning to write is often difficult, the task to achieve a certain degree of competence is taken seriously and responsibly. The gifted student, therefore, who is "usually highly achievement oriented,"53 views the problems associated with writing as a challenge worth his efforts.

Moreover, the gifted student's "ability to profit from experience, including his own mistakes, and to foresee what may happen in similar circumstances shows both intelligence and common sense."54 Foresight, then, involving memory and reasoning, may result in the student's reduction of errors in writing.

Gifted students also are initiative and "often desire to be of service."55 It would not be unusual, for example, for a gifted student to offer assistance to another who may be experiencing some difficulty in writing. The insight to some problem may be better understood and received when it is provided by his peer. While peer tutoring is not novel in the field of education, it can be an effective means of assisting the teacher in both homogeneous and heterogeneous settings which include gifted students.

53 Ibid.


If a gifted student, furthermore, "does not have the knowledge he needs for action, he sets out to acquire it."\(^{56}\) For various kinds of writing, the gifted student needs ready access to a wide range of dictionaries, including a copy of an unabridged dictionary, encyclopedias, Roget's *Thesaurus*, Fowler's *Modern English Usage*, and Walker's *Rhyming Dictionary*, to name a few. Dr. Cutts, an author and the director of graduate studies at New Haven State Teachers College, suggests that a *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* be on the reference shelf as early as Grade 2.

In addition to possessing a rather impressive storehouse of knowledge on a variety of topics, the gifted student, generally, possesses a fairly large vocabulary which he enjoys using in both written and oral communication, and he sometimes demonstrates a unique flair for putting unusual words in unusual places.

Finally, the gifted student's ability to evaluate his own work is an especially important goal of a teacher-student conference because it can greatly assist in the overall evaluative process, involving both the teacher and the student.

In summary, the following characteristics of the gifted student seem especially appropriate for the Student-Centered Writing Program: (1) high critical thinking ability, (2) high goals setting, (3) responsive to goals, (4) persistence, (5) demanding of self, (6) highly achievement oriented, (7) profits from experience, (8) desirous

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\(^{56}\)Ibid., p. 24.
to be of service, (9) initiative, (10) possesses a large vocabulary and an impressive storehouse of knowledge, and (11) ability to evaluate own work.

A student-centered writing approach may possibly encourage the gifted student "to become autonomous in his search for ideas and solutions to problems."57 The gifted, predictors of creativity and future success, possess, most assuredly, the characteristics which ensure optimum results and achievement in a student-centered writing program.

Summary of Related Literature

As a result of the researcher's investigation related to the statement of the problem, the following highlights were drawn from the review:

1. The use of the Student Centered Writing Program (SCWP) is most appropriate for the gifted students who possess many characteristics which seem suitable for and which may allow optimum results and achievement in a student-centered writing program. These characteristics include (1) high critical thinking ability, (2) high goals, (3) responsiveness to goals, (4) persistence, (5) demanding of self, (6) highly achievement oriented, (7) profits from experience, (8) desirous to be of service, (9) initiative, (10) possesses a large vocabulary and an impressive storehouse of knowledge, and (11) ability to evaluate own work.

2. The nature of a language arts program designed to meet the special needs of gifted students should be extensive, diversified, and imaginative, with emphasis on ability grouping, limitation on drill and

57Spaulding, "What Teacher Attributes Bring Out the Best in gifted Children?: Affective Dimensions of Creative Processes," p. 16.
routine, and more advanced goals. Focusing attention on a literature program which advocates the reading of original works in their entirety and creative and expository writing and speech are other considerations regarded as essential.

3. The success of the Student-Centered Writing Program is attributed to less teacher intervention and more direct responsibility assumed by the student motivated by pride, that through self-editing and self-evaluation of his own written communication, does improve his writing skills.

4. Traditional teaching strategies for writing such as the correction of errors, learning the rules of grammar, and frequent writing by students, have not contributed to improved student writing.

5. Students do not apply the rules of grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation when they write. Rather, the application of such rules will be practiced, as they are needed through the actual composition.

6. Teachers who are encouraging and supportive of the writing of their students will motivate and instill the confidence which is necessary for the continuation, enthusiasm, and improvement of their efforts.

7. Teacher-student conferences are most productive when students are weaned away from the teacher’s judgments and assisted in becoming responsible for setting their goals and analyzing their own efforts. Compassionate reassurance on a personal level, provided by the teacher, greatly benefits student writers, struggling to improve.

8. Teachers who foster student self-esteem, give direction, set limits, and offer feedback of the subject matter in a businesslike, orderly manner provide the most appropriate atmosphere for gifted students in which cognitive risk-taking can freely occur.
Chapter III

Research Method and Procedures

Introduction

The larger purpose of this study was to determine the effects of a student-centered writing program on the writing skills of gifted sixth and seventh grade students. More specifically, the problem of this study was to determine if proofreading and editing by gifted sixth and seventh grade students improve clarity and reduce errors in spelling, grammar, capitalization, punctuation, and syntax in students' written work.

The research questions addressed (1) the effects of the Student-Centered Writing Approach on student attitudes, (2) the effects of the Buddy System on peer relationships, (3) the problems in writing experienced by gifted students, (4) how teacher-student conferences affected teacher-student relationships, and (5) the error reduction pattern on the nine (9) written assignments.

Hypotheses

The null hypotheses of this study were as follows:

1. There will be no significant difference in the number of syntactical errors made by gifted sixth and seventh grade students on pre and post writing samples.
2. There will be no significant difference in the number of spelling errors made by gifted sixth and seventh grade students on pre and post writing samples.

3. There will be no significant difference in the number of capitalization errors made by gifted sixth and seventh grade students on pre and post writing samples.

4. There will be no significant difference in the number of punctuation errors made by gifted sixth and seventh grade students on pre and post writing samples.

5. There will be no significant difference in the number of grammatical errors made by gifted sixth and seventh grade students on pre and post writing samples.

6. There will be no significant difference in the pre-test score and the posttest score.

The purpose of the chapter is to describe the research method, procedures, and data analysis techniques.

**Research Method and Procedures**

The quasi-experimental method of research was employed in conducting this study. The term, quasi-experimental, it should be noted, refers to designs which are not true experimental designs. Unlike true experimental designs, quasi-experimental designs provide reasonable control over most sources of invalidity, and they are considered more convincing than the pre-experimental designs.¹

The quasi-experimental method of research, used in a south Fulton County middle school, was appropriate for this study for the following reasons:

1. Randomization of subjects was not possible since the two classes of twenty (20) students were already established and/or enrolled in language arts.

2. Since the sample size was already small -- 13 students in grade 6 and 7 students in grade 7 -- a control group was unfeasible.

Locale and Period of the Study

This study was conducted in a south Fulton County middle school located in a small, middle class residential community in the state of Georgia during the fall and winter quarters of the 1983-84 school year.

Description of Subjects

The subjects were two classes of 20 middle class black students and white students in grades six and seven enrolled in a language arts program for gifted students. In the sixth grade were 13 students, and in the seventh grade were 7 students. Ages of the subjects ranged from 11 to 13, and intelligence quotients ranged from 128 to 141 based upon intelligence tests utilized by the gifted program. Students achieved the 96th percentile on one or more sub-tests in vocabulary, reading comprehension, mathematics, social studies, and science. All subjects were in the middle school program based on teacher recommendations and parent signatures on placement forms.
Description of Treatment

The following procedural steps were implemented:

1. Orientation/Readiness - the nature of the Student-Centered Writing Program was described by the teacher, and a copy of the materials to be used by the students was distributed. An explanation by the teacher of how and when each instrument was to be used was provided. These materials included the following: (a) the Writer's Log, (b) the How to Proofread Checklist, (c) the Buddy Checklist for the Rough Draft, (d) the Writing Score Card for Buddy Evaluations, (e) the Composition Improvement Checklist, and (f) an Opinionnaire on the Student-Centered Writing Program.

2. Initial Activities - (a) Students brainstormed topics which they felt would be appropriate for future written assignments, and a due date was assigned for the first rough draft. (b) An explanation of the Buddy System was provided, and each student was allowed to select his own partner with whom he would work. On the day the rough drafts were due, each pair of students read one rough draft at a time and decided on the errors that had been made, utilizing the Composition Improvement Checklist. (c) Each student was assigned a secret number (1-20) on the Error Chart to ensure his anonymity when a review of errors was made by the teacher following an analysis of errors made on each rough draft. The teacher's remarks were consistently encouraging and positive. (d) The teacher visited each pair of students during proofreading sessions to listen, to observe, and to provide assistance. Students were reminded to utilize the index of their English textbooks to locate a rule for grammar or a dictionary for the correct spelling of a word or a thesaurus for word variations. (e) Students who made spelling errors were reminded to write correctly the word which had been misspelled on his Individual Spelling List page in his notebook and to show it to the teacher. All students were administered an individual test on each word near the end of each quarter. (f) The rough drafts were handed in to the teacher for a cursory review of errors made which may not have been located by either the writer or the buddy. If additional errors were noted by the teacher, the
paper was returned with a comment suggesting that the writer and the buddy proofread again. (g) students scheduled conferences with the teacher for individual help, whenever needed.

3. Teacher-Student Conferences - Private conferences were scheduled approximately every ten days to help students to analyze their own papers, to motivate and encourage continued efforts.

4. Summative Evaluation/Posttesting - Students wrote on a topic of their choice for the final written assignment. Errors on the pretest and the posttest were tallied to determine the improvement of written work.

5. Grading - The evaluative process was shared with the student. The holistic approach was employed i.e., students' written work was analyzed as a whole to determine the trends and the progress of the student.

6. Opinionnaire - Students rated the Student-Centered Writing Program anonymously, by utilizing the key and by following the instructions. A tally in each category (highly agree, agree, disagree, highly disagree) indicated the effectiveness of the program.

Description of Materials

The overall purpose of the materials used in this study was to assist in accurate record-keeping by students and to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Student-Centered Writing Program.

1. The Writer's Log was utilized to record the titles and completion dates of written assignments, the Writer's Checklist, the Buddy Checklist and the revision.

2. The Writer's Checklist was designed to aid proofreading by students in the areas of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, clarity, and grammar before proofreading with a buddy.
3. The Buddy Checklist for the Rough Draft was used to record specific errors which students may have made in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Included on the checklist were instructions to summarize the number of errors, to rate the assignments, and to make recommendations for revisions.

4. The Writing Score Card for Buddy Evaluations was designed to evaluate the writer's paper for content, mechanics, and structure.

5. The Composition Improvement Checklist included a listing of seventeen (17) possible errors ranging from A to Z, in grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and grammar. Errors made by students on the rough drafts corresponded largely with those suggested on the checklist.

6. The Opinionnaire, rated anonymously by students, indicated the effectiveness of the student-centered writing approach.

**Collection and Organization of Data**

The data for this study were obtained from student writing samples, the Error Chart, the opinionnaire, and teacher observations.

The Error Chart was utilized to tabulate the number of errors made and to determine the pattern of reduction and/or increase of errors on the student writing samples. Major areas on the Error Chart included grammar, spelling, punctuation, syntax, and capitalization, respectively.

The opinionnaire was used to elicit student perceptions about the Student-Centered Writing Program. To each item, students responded by placing a check under the heading which reflected their agreement with the statement: highly agree, agree, disagree, and highly disagree. These responses were tabulated, and percentages for each item were found.
The t-tests were utilized to determine if significant differences existed in the pre- and posttest mean error scores for grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and syntax.

Teacher observations of peer relationships, student independence, and/or student behaviors, and student work habits were documented in anecdotal records.

**Analysis of Data**

Data from the Error Chart were analyzed by computing the mean number of errors for each of the nine (9) written assignments. These mean scores were plotted on a graph, and a simple patterns analysis, noting trends in reductions and/or increases of errors, was conducted. In addition, an item analysis was undertaken to note not only the error patterns, but the specific nature of errors in the error categories, as well.

Opinionnaire responses were tabulated and the frequencies for each response were converted to percentages. Responses were categorized into four major areas, including student attitudes, peer relationships, student work habits, and teacher-student relationships. Based on the percentage computed, the opinionnaire showed to what extent the students perceived the overall effectiveness of the Student-Centered Writing Program.

A descriptive analysis was made of teacher observations of student work habits, peer relationships, and student behaviors during the Buddy System and conferences. Particular attention was given to
student independence in editing, compatibility of peers, and productivity of teamwork.

Teacher judgments provided the basis for this analysis of group participation in the Student-Centered Writing Program.

Pre- and posttest data, having been organized into mean scores, were statistically analyzed using the t-test for dependent samples to show the interrelationship between pre- and posttest performance in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, to determine if significant differences existed between the group’s performance.

Findings for the study obtained from student writing samples, the Error Chart, the opinionnaire, and teacher observations showed that the majority of the students reported that the Student-Centered Writing Program was an effective teaching learning strategy for improving all areas of writing skills, (2) the impact of the Student-Centered Writing Program reflected positive attitudes toward the Buddy System, conferences, peer relationships, student work habits, student independence, student behavior, and teacher-student relationships, (3) the Student-Centered Writing Program resulted in significant error reduction between pre- and posttest performance, (4) the dependent samples t-test showed significant differences existed between the pre- and posttest writing scores, and (5) while the Error Chart did show considerable fluctuation, the number of errors gradually decreased over the nine (9) assignments in grammar, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and sentence structure.

The findings of this investigation, based upon an analysis of the data, seem to warrant the following conclusions: (1) The Student-
Centered Writing Program promoted the reduction of errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, syntax, and capitalization, (2) Although a plateau is likely to be reached where errors are made by chance, regardless of practice or instruction, an increased reduction errors is likely to occur, given a longer period of time, (3) The Student-Centered Writing Program encouraged student independence, (4) Learning and teaching the mechanics of writing have not proved to be an effective instructional approach with gifted middle school students, (5) The Buddy System helped foster positive student attitudes and productivity as well as student independence, and improved peer relationships were apparent in the willingness of the students who offered suggestions or solutions to problems as they were needed, (6) According to the opinionnaire, students reported that they were more likely to apply the skills which they had learned to other writing tasks, and (7) The Student-Centered Writing Program is an effective instructional approach with gifted middle school students. Student samples showed a significant reduction of errors on the pre- and posttests.

The implications of this study based upon the findings and conclusions are mentioned below:

Affective factors (i.e., self-esteem and student independence) are significant variables in the successful development of student writing skills. Consistent encouragement provided by the teacher -- especially during teacher-student conferences -- promoted both student self-esteem and improved teacher-student relationships. The Buddy System encouraged student independence as students located
and edited their own errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and syntax. The learning environment provided by the teacher, furthermore, should contribute to positive student attitude and productivity. Students who feel that they can make mistakes without fear of teacher hostility or ridicule are more likely to continue in their efforts to become competent, confident writers.

Assumptions that students who are gifted automatically write well are faulty. The writing samples of the gifted sixth and seventh grade students showed that these students demonstrated some of the same problems in writing as their peers of average ability. Gifted students, sometimes more concerned with creative thought, overlooked or were not entirely aware of errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, capitalization, and syntax.

Summary

Serving as guides to the collection and the interpretation of the data, the research questions presented in Chapter I helped to structure and to focus attention on the problem and purpose of this study: to determine the effects of a student-centered writing program on the writing skills of gifted sixth and seventh grade students and to determine if proofreading and editing by gifted sixth and seventh grade students improve clarity and reduce errors in spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation in students' written work.

In summary, the quasi-experimental method of research was employed and the data from the Error Chart, opinionnaire, teacher
observations, and the t-test for dependent samples was analyzed in this study. The research questions addressed (1) the effect of the student-centered writing approach on student attitudes, (2) the effects of the Buddy System on peer relationships, (3) the problems in writing experienced by gifted students, (4) how teacher-student conferences affected teacher-student relationships, and (5) the error reduction pattern on the nine (9) written assignments.
### TABLE I
RESULTS ON THE OPINIONNAIRE

<table>
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<tr>
<th>OPINION</th>
<th>HIGHLY AGREE</th>
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<th>DISAGREE</th>
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Total Students
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<th>DISAGREE</th>
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Total Students = 20
Chapter IV

Presentation and Analysis of Findings

Chapter IV addresses the effects of a student-centered writing program on the writing skills of gifted sixth and seventh grade students by analyzing the findings of this study relative to the student opinionnaire, student writing samples, teacher observations and anecdotal records, and pre- and posttest performance. Included in the presentation and analysis of the findings are students' perceptions of the influence of the Student-Centered Writing Program, the pattern of error reduction and the nature of errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, syntax and capitalization over the nine assignments. Findings from teacher observations were used to document how gifted students worked and behaved to achieve improvement in writing skills, and finally, the number and nature of errors on pre- and posttest samples were summarized and characterized.

Derived from the quasi-experimental method and generated from the application of the t-tests and verbal analysis, the findings are presented and analyzed in order to achieve the larger purpose of the study which was to determine the effects of a student-centered writing program on the writing skills of gifted sixth and seventh grade students, to answer the research questions which addressed student
attitudes, peer relationships, problems in writing, and the error reduction pattern; to test the hypotheses that no significant differences exist in the number of syntactical, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammatical errors made by gifted sixth and seventh grade students; and, finally, that no significant difference exists in the pretest score and the posttest score.

Presentation and Analysis of Findings

The findings are presented and analyzed under the research questions and hypothesis as listed below:

What is the result of testing the hypothesis?

What are the effects of a student-centered writing approach on student attitudes toward writing?

What are the effects of the Buddy System on peer relationships?

What are the effects of teacher-student conferences on teacher-student relationships?

What are the problems in writing experienced by gifted students?

What is the error reduction pattern on the nine (9) writing assignments?

There is no significant difference in the reduction of errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and syntax.

What is the result of testing hypothesis?

A dependent sample t-test was performed to determine whether a significant difference existed on the pre- and posttest scores of the writing samples of the gifted sixth and seventh grades students. The
t-test yielded at (20) of 2.01, \( p > .05 \), thereby establishing a statistically significant difference of the total pre- and posttest scores of the writing samples.

What Are the Effects of A Student-Centered Writing Program On Student Attitudes Toward Writing?

Several items on the opinionnaire looked at student attitudes concerning the Student-Centered Writing Program and its overall effect on helping students improve their writing skills. These items are numbered 12, 13, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, and 25. As can be seen on Table 1, over 50 percent of the total group (20) indicated that they had positive attitudes about the Student-Centered Writing Program. More specifically, 55 percent reported that they felt good about their writing (#12); 70 percent indicated that they did not mind revising for a better grade (#13); 75 percent felt responsible for correcting and proofreading their own work (#19); 55 percent were of the opinion that they liked the idea of a student-centered writing program (#20); 55 percent felt that they would like to continue in a student-centered writing program (#21); 55 percent reported that the Student-Centered Writing Program should be available to other students in their school (#22); 60 percent indicated that they had become better writers because of the influence of the Student-Centered Writing Program (#23); and 50 percent felt that they had benefited by the Student-Centered Writing Program (#25).

Two items on the opinionnaire looked at students' perceptions of their ability to apply knowledge gained in the Student-Centered
Writing Program to other written tasks. These items were numbered 26 and 27. As Table 1 shows, 40 percent of the total group (20) indicated that their knowledge of the Student-Centered Writing Program influenced them to proofread more closely written work required of them by teachers other than their language arts teacher, and 85% reported that good writing skills should be applied to other school subjects, not just language arts.

What Are the Effects of the Buddy System on Peer Relationships?

Three items on the opinionnaire elicited students' perceptions about the Buddy System as a method of the student-centered writing approach which helped them to locate and correct errors without teacher intervention. These items are numbered 10, 11, and 24. As can be seen on Table 1, over 60 percent of the total group (20) were of the opinion that the Buddy System helped them to improve their writing skills. More specifically, 95 percent indicated that the Buddy System had helped them locate errors that they themselves had overlooked (#10); 70 percent noted that the Buddy System helped them become improved writers; and 65 percent felt that they liked the idea of locating and correcting their written work with the aid of a buddy (#24).

Two items on the opinionnaire -- numbers 4 and 5 -- looked at how students perceived the influence of the Student-Centered Writing Program on proofreading. As Table 1 shows, 45 percent of the total group (20) reported that they proofread their first drafts more closely, while 65 percent indicated that they proofread their final
drafts more closely.

Teacher observations, documented in anecdotal records, included peer relationships, student work habits, student independence, student behaviors, and teacher-student relationships.

The teacher observed that students seemed to enjoy additional time with the teacher. Besides the teacher-student conferences scheduled by the teacher, students themselves were free to and did, in fact, regularly seek the assistance of the teacher when they needed help with problems that remained unsolved when they were working in pairs and when further classification by the teacher was necessary. A few students, the teacher observed, sought reassurance that the teacher was sympathetic and understood that learning to write is difficult.

The teacher observed, furthermore, that some students read words that were not included in a student's written work when they were working in pairs. These students appeared to do so unconsciously and were reminded to guard against its recurrence.

The researcher observed, in addition, that writers of the same sex chose to work together on writing projects, locating and editing errors and making recommendations for revisions. This preference is to be expected and is characteristic of students at this age level.

As the teacher observed and listened to each pair of students, she observed that they discussed the problems at hand and determined together the best solutions. This is not to suggest, however, that there were no disagreements between the two. When a student disagreed
with his buddy, the teacher observed, additional discussion between the two students followed, and one or both students consulted a dictionary, a thesaurus, or the index of their English grammar textbooks for assistance. If a pair of students reached a stalemate, the teacher observed, the students requested the teacher's aid.

In addition, the teacher observed that peer relationships were positive. When, for example, a student or a pair of students appeared to have a problem and needed a second decision, help by a student(s) was offered. Achieving student independence is one of the goals of the Student-Centered Writing Program, and the tutorial service that was offered and provided by some gifted students during proofreading and editing is not unusual, since gifted students, characteristically, desire to be of service whenever possible.

Finally, it was observed that some incidental learning occurred when students were answering questions on the Writing Score Card for Buddy Evaluations used to evaluate student writing. When, for example, a student asked the teacher to clarify a term in grammar, such as double comparison or split infinitive, which was unfamiliar to him, the teacher encouraged student independence by referring him to the index of his own English grammar textbook to locate the term and then to find on his own the information that he needed, at the time needed. If additional assistance on correct usage was needed, it was given. It might be noted, also, that several different English textbooks, ranging in various levels of difficulty, were kept in the classroom for student reference in the event that specific information was not
available in the students' own textbooks.

What Are the Effects of Teacher-Student Conferences on Teacher-Student Relationships?

One item, numbered 16 on the questionnaire, looked at the effectiveness of teacher-student conferences, as perceived by the students. As can be seen on Table 1, 65 percent of the total group were of the opinion that the teacher-student conferences encouraged them to write better.

The teacher observed, also, that students seemed to welcome the opportunity to work quietly with the teacher during teacher-student conferences. It seems fair to suggest, furthermore, that, although gifted students are criticized generally as overly concerned about grades, most of the students took great care to analyze their written efforts both individually and as a whole. In the evaluation of all nine written assignments, with special emphasis on the pretest writing sample and the posttest writing sample, the teacher observed that, in most cases, the student evaluation was one grade lower than the teacher evaluation.

What are the Problems in Writing Experienced by Gifted Students?

Several items on the opinionnaire looked at students' perceptions of the influence of the Student-Centered Writing Program on the mechanics. More specifically, items referring to mechanics numbered 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 14, and 15, included capitalization, spelling, run-on sentences, sentence fragments, commas, and end marks, respectively. As can be seen on Table 1, Over 50 percent of the total group (20)
were of the opinion that they had developed better writing skills because of the influence of the Student-Centered Writing Program. More specifically, 60 percent of the group reported fewer errors in capitalization (#1); 45 percent noted fewer errors in spelling (#2); 75 percent indicated the elimination of sentence fragments (#7); and 50 percent felt that because of the program, they were able to eliminate run-on sentences (#6).

One item on the opinionnaire, number 3, looked at how students perceived clarity. As can be seen on Table 1, 50 percent of the total group (20) felt that they were more careful to say exactly what they intended to say on their written work.

Errors in capitalization, as observed on student writing samples, were made primarily in the title. More specifically, errors occurred because some students capitalized prepositions and articles located within the title itself or failed to capitalize the initial letter of the last word. None of the group, however, failed to capitalize the initial letter of the first word in the title. Additionally, an analysis of the student writing samples showed that some students capitalized school subjects such as math, social studies, and science, while one student in particular occasionally arbitrarily capitalized common nouns in sentences.

On the pretest, the total group made eight (8) errors in capitalization. Errors were classified as capitalization of title on student writing samples, proper nouns, and first word of sentences. Posttest errors for the total group numbered four (4) and were
characterized by carelessness and arbitrary capitalization of common nouns.

Additionally, spelling errors may have occurred for the following reasons: (1) Students failed to utilize a dictionary to locate questionable spelling, (2) Students did not realize that a word had been misspelled, and (3) In an attempt to utilize their extensive speaking vocabularies, some students misspelled words in their sight vocabulary whose spelling was unfamiliar to them. One student, in particular, because of carelessness, sometimes omitted the final letter of some words. Little attempt to proofread probably attributed to this type of error, although the student indicated that he had proofread, when he was asked by the teacher. The reduction of errors in spelling, furthermore, according to the findings on the Error Chart in Table 2, may be attributed to the students' increased willingness to utilize a dictionary to locate the correct spelling of unfamiliar words and to the application of phonics.

On the pretest, the group (20) made eleven (11) errors in spelling. Errors were classified as (1) failure to utilize a dictionary to locate questionable spelling, (2) unfamiliarity of words used, (3) failure to proofread, and (4) omission of final letters. Post-test errors for the total group numbered two (2) and were characterized by failure to proofread.

Errors in grammar on student writing samples were made in agreement of subject and verb with intervening prepositional phrase(s),
agreement of pronoun and antecedent, split infinitives, inconsistency of tense, and double comparisons.

On the pretest, the group (20) made nine (9) errors in grammar. Errors were classified as agreement of subject and verb with intervening prepositional phrase(s), agreement of pronoun and antecedent, split infinitives, inconsistency of tense, and double comparisons. Posttest errors for the total group numbered zero (0).

Finally, most of the errors in syntax were made by four students, in particular, who frequently experienced difficulty in this area. Generally, these students did not appear to notice when they had written run-on sentences and sentence fragments. Individual conferences with the teacher on a regular basis provided the assistance needed. Students were helped to analyze each group of words for completeness and/or the absence of a subject and verb in sentence fragments. Following several individual conferences, the teacher observed on student writing samples, these students and several others began using the semicolon, instead of the comma, to separate two complete thoughts, e.g., sentences, similar in ideas.

On the pretest, the total group (20) made twenty (20) errors in syntax. Errors were classified as sentence fragments and run-on sentences. Posttest errors for the total group numbered three (3) and were characterized by carelessness.

An analysis of student papers showed that most of the comma errors resulted because students either omitted a comma in compound and complex sentences or because students placed a comma before the
conjunction in a simple sentence with a compound predicate. Sometimes, furthermore, additional comma errors, as seen on student papers, resulted in failure to supply a comma following an introductory prepositional phrase, an adverb of sequence at the beginning of a sentence, and a comma(s) to set off transitional expressions, depending upon the location in a sentence. Student papers also showed that students placed a comma between a run-on sentence.

Other errors in punctuation, as seen on student papers, included the omission of an end mark, the omission of an apostrophe in a contradiction, a misplaced apostrophe in possession, and misplaced quotation marks.

Most of the errors in end marks occurred when a few students sometimes failed to supply a period at the end of a declarative sentence.

Overall, while many errors in punctuation on student writing samples probably occurred through carelessness, errors in comma usage, in particular, may be attributed to students' unfamiliarity regarding transitional expressions, introductory prepositional phrases, and complex sentences.

On the pretest, the group (20) made twenty-seven (27) errors in punctuation. Errors were classified as (1) omission of a comma in compound and complex sentences, (2) placement of a comma before the conjunction in a simple sentence with a compound predicate, (3) omission of comma following an introductory prepositional phrase, (4) omission of comma following an adverb of sequence at the beginning of a sentence, (5) omission of a comma(s) to set off transitional
expressions, depending on the location in a sentence, (6) omission of
an end mark, (7) omission of an apostrophe in a contraction, (8) mis-
placed apostrophe in possession, and misplaced quotation marks.
Posttest errors for the total group numbered five (5) and were care-
lessness and students' unfamiliarity and/or lack of prior instruction
in correct comma usage for transitional expressions, introductory
prepositional phrases, and complex sentences.

Figure 1 summarizes the number of errors in the areas of grammar,
spelling, punctuation, syntax, and capitalization, respectively on
students' pre and post writing samples.

The specific breakdown of student opinion by grade level is
seen in the appendix.
FIGURE 1

PRETEST-POSTTEST PERFORMANCE

Grades 6 and 7 Combined
What Is the Error Reduction Pattern On the Nine (9) Written Assignments?

The findings from student writing samples are presented on the Error Chart in Table 2.

The findings from student writing samples, presented on the Error Chart in Table 2, show that the number of errors in capitalization, totaling eight (8), on the pretest was reduced to four (4) on the posttest. While slight fluctuations occurred in the number of errors over the nine assignments, the highest number of errors, occurring on assignment #4, was six (6).

An analysis of student papers also showed errors in spelling. Based upon the findings on the Error Chart in Table 2, the number of errors in spelling, totaling eleven (11) on the pretest was reduced to two (2) on the posttest over the nine assignments.

The number of errors remained at four (4) for three consecutive weeks on written assignments three (3) to five (5) and increased again to eleven written assignments.

There was a discernible pattern of error reduction in grammar over the nine (9) assignments. Table 2 shows a steady decline in grammatical errors on written assignments one (1) through six (6). Students achieved zero (0) errors on two occasions -- on written assignment six (6) and on the posttest. Errors in grammar were reduced from nine (9) on the pretest to zero (0) on the posttest.
### TABLE 2

**ERROR CHART**

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<th>Written Assignment</th>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Spelling</th>
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<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
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</table>
Syntactical errors, consisting primarily of sentence fragments and run-on sentences, were reduced from twenty (20) errors on the pretest to three (3) errors on the posttest. As seen on Table 2, the number of errors steadily declined in the first five (5) written assignments, but increased to eleven (11) on written assignment #6. A marked reduction of errors in syntax, occurring in written assignment number 7, may have resulted in the teacher's individual assistance offered to the students who were experiencing particular difficulty in recognizing and correcting run-on sentence fragments.

Twenty-seven (27) errors in punctuation on the pretest were reduced to five (5) errors on the posttest. According to the findings from the Error Chart, the number of errors in punctuation fluctuated considerably, especially in written assignments 4, 6, and 7 with eleven (11), twelve (12), and ten (10) errors, respectively.

In summary, the total number of errors over the nine assignments shown on Table 2, includes the following: 75 errors on the pretest; 31 errors on assignment #2; 22 errors on assignment #3, 29 errors on assignments #4; 16 errors on assignment #5; 32 errors on assignment #6; 27 errors on assignment #12; and 14 errors on the posttest.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The problem of inferior student writing has long been an annoyance to educators. Until the advent and the implementation of student-centered writing programs around the nation, teaching strategies were ineffectual in alleviating persistent difficulties associated with student writing. Fortunately, however, within the past few years, research studies have shown encouraging results, and far-sighted educators on the secondary and college levels are discovering that student-centered writing programs integrated in the English Curriculum have successfully impacted the writing skills of their students. To this end, therefore, the effect of the Student-Centered Writing Program on the writing skills of gifted sixth and seventh grade students has sparked renewed hope for improvement. Consideration of the implications, conclusions, and recommendations of this study may serve as guidelines for implementation by teachers, administrators, and school systems nation-wide.

The larger purpose of this study was to determine the effects of a student-centered writing program on the writing skills of gifted sixth and seventh grade students. More specifically, the problem of this study was to determine if proofreading and editing by gifted
sixth and seventh grade students improve clarity and reduce errors in spelling, grammar, capitalization, punctuation, and syntax in students' written work.

The research questions addressed (1) the effects of the Student-Centered Writing Approach on student attitudes, (2) the effects of the Buddy System on peer relationships, (3) the problems in writing experienced by gifted students, (4) how teacher-student conferences affected teacher-student relationships, and (5) the error reduction pattern on the nine (9) written assignments.

The null hypotheses of this study were as follows:

1. There will be no significant difference in number of syntactical errors made by gifted sixth and seventh grade students on pre and post writing samples.

2. There will be no significant difference in the number of spelling errors made by gifted sixth and seventh grade student on pre and post writing samples.

3. There will be no significant difference in the number of punctuation errors made by gifted sixth and seventh grade students on pre and post writing samples.

4. There will be no significant difference in the number of grammatical errors made by gifted sixth and seventh grade students on pre and post writing samples.

5. There will be no significant difference in pretest score and the posttest score.

Summary of Major Findings.--The major findings generated by the data and used as the basis for drawing the conclusions and making the recommendations presented in this chapter are summarized below:

1. The opinionnaire showed that over fifty per-
percent of the total group had positive overall attitudes about the programs. Seventy percent indicated they did not mind revising for a better grade. Seventy-five percent felt responsible for correcting and proofreading their own work, fifty-five percent wanted to continue in a student-centered writing program and wanted the same opportunity made available to others in their school. Eighty-five percent reported that good writing skills should be applied to other school subjects, not just language arts.

2. The opinionnaire showed that over 60 percent of the total group indicated that the Buddy System helped them to improve their writing, to locate errors they (as writers) had overlooked, and that they liked the idea of locating and correcting their written work with the aid of a buddy.

3. Of the total group, 45 percent reported that they proofread their first drafts more closely, while 65 percent indicated that they proofread their final drafts more closely as a result of the program.

4. All students appeared to enjoy additional time with the teacher to help with problems that remained unsolved and to seek sympathetic assurance.

5. Natural insertion of words was made during proofreading and incidental learning occurred when students were answering questions on the Writing Score Card for Buddy Evaluations.

6. Errors experienced by students included capitalization, spelling, agreement of subject and verb, inconsistency of tense, double comparisons, agreement of pronouns and antecedent, split infinitives, and syntax (fragments and run-on sentences.) The majority of the errors was in syntax, inconsistency of tense, and punctuation.

7. Sixty-five percent of the total group believed that the teacher-student conferences encouraged them to write better.
8. There was a discernible pattern of error reduction in grammar over the nine writing assignments.

9. There was a statistically significant difference between pre and posttest scores on the writing samples. On the pretest the number of errors in grammar was nine and on the posttest the number of errors was reduced to zero. Spelling errors on the pretest were eleven and on the posttest were two errors. There were twenty-seven errors in punctuation on the pretest and on the posttest there were five errors. Errors in syntax numbered twenty on the pretest and on the posttest there were three errors. Capitalization errors on the pretest were eight and on the posttest there were four. There were 75 total errors on the pretest and 14 total errors on the posttest.

Conclusions

The findings of this study, based upon an analysis of the data, warrant the following:

1. The Student-Centered Writing Program promoted the reduction of errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, syntax, and capitalization.

2. An increased reduction of errors is likely to occur, given a longer period of time. However, a plateau is likely to be reached where errors are made by chance, regardless of practice or instruction.

3. The Student-Centered Writing Program encouraged student independence, fostered positive attitudes, improved peer relationships, and promoted the application of skills to other written tasks.

4. The Student-Centered Writing Program is an effective instructional approach with gifted middle school students. Student samples showed a significant reduction of errors on the pre- and posttests.
have not proved effective in improving troubled student writing. Rather, focusing attention on correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and syntax through the actual written work as they are needed is more effectual.

6. One of the main reasons the Buddy System was enthusiastically received by the students was that the teacher allowed each student to select his own partner with whom to work. It appears safe to assume, therefore, that those who worked together were friendly towards each other and wanted to work together.

7. During proofreading, some gifted students voluntarily assisted their peers who experienced difficulty in resolving problems in writing.

8. Errors in grammar may have resulted because students had little or no prior knowledge in the application of specified grammatical terms and because they had received little or no instruction in the application of specified areas when it was needed during writing in previous years of schooling.

Implications

The implications of this study, drawn upon the findings and the conclusions, should be helpful in the implementation of a student-centered writing program.

Utilization of the Buddy System allows and encourages student independence. Students, acting as editors and collaborators in pairs or in small groups, should be permitted to work at their own pace.

The significant appeal of the Buddy System is that it enables students to assume responsibility for correcting their own errors, thus freeing the teacher of the task of correcting student papers, a procedure which has not, in the past, proved fruitful in helping students to improve their writing skills.
Affective factors (i.e., self-esteem and student independence) are significant variables in the successful development of student writing skills. Consistent encouragement provided by the teacher -- especially during teacher-student conferences -- promoted teacher-student relationships. The Buddy System encouraged student independence as students located and edited their own errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization and syntax. The learning environment provided by the teacher, furthermore, should contribute to positive student attitude and productivity. Students who feel that they can make mistakes without fear of teacher hostility or ridicule are more likely to continue in their efforts to become competent, confident writers.

Assumptions that students who are gifted automatically write well are faulty. The writing samples of the gifted sixth and seventh grade students showed that these students demonstrated some of the same problems in writing as their peers of average ability. Gifted students, sometimes more concerned with creative thought, overlooked or were not entirely aware of errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, capitalization, and syntax.

While traditional teacher correction of errors is not a program practice, teacher monitoring facilitates and reinforces improved writing skills.

Writers of the same sex, furthermore, chose to work together, independently sought assistance from various sources such as the
dictionary, the thesaurus, and English grammar textbooks, and voluntarily offered suggestions to their peers for resolving problems.

Although this study was conducted with a gifted middle class students, there is no reason to believe that a student-centered writing program would not prove effective with students of average ability. Properly conducted, it may be assumed that a student-centered writing program would be beneficial to students of average ability.

**Recommendations**

Consideration of the following recommendations, which resulted from the findings, implications, and conclusions of this study, may assist teachers, administrators, and school systems in the implementation of a student-centered writing program.

Specifically, the following recommendations should assist administrators and school systems:

It is recommended that school systems institute workshops and/or in-service courses for training teachers in the implementation of a successful student-centered writing program. Instruction designed to help teachers refine their own writing skills and knowledge in English grammar and usage should enable the recognition of difficulties associated with student writing. Teachers who write themselves, it would appear, are more likely to be sympathetic to some of the basic problems of writing faced by their students who are struggling to improve.

To ensure some degree of consistency and fluidity in helping to improve student writing, it is recommended that administrators promote
the Student-Centered Writing Program provides the teacher of English with numerous opportunities for flexibility to meet the academic needs of students who need to write correctly and succinctly. Depending on the time frame, allowing the operation of a student-centered writing program, teachers would have the freedom to select all or any part of the program as suggested by this study. Studies, furthermore, are beginning to show that the implementation of teacher-student conferences by professors of English on the college level has achieved success in improving student writing. The possibilities for improved learning throughout the student's formal education are more likely overall in a student-centered writing program.

As suggested in this study, a control group was not feasible and randomization of subjects was not possible. It is recommended, therefore, that, in further studies of the effects of a student-centered writing program, random selection of subjects and experimental, as well as control groups, be given serious consideration.

In respect to the gifted learners, it is recommended that administrators focus attention on ability grouping, acceleration, and enrichment to meet their special needs in a language arts and/or English course. Students demonstrating high ability in English, furthermore, may be helpful as mentors in student-centered writing programs instituted by administrators. In a mentorship program, gifted students would probably be invaluable to teachers in assist-
ing their own intellectual peers, as well as other students who may need help in improving their writing.

The following recommendations should assist the classroom teacher to implement a student-centered writing program:

Classroom strategies (i.e., opportunities for brainstorming and the self-selection of a variety of topics that may be suitable for writing assignments, self-evaluation of written expression, self-pacing, teacher-acceptance within a classroom climate which provides respect for ideas and efforts and which is devoid of destructive criticism, and opportunities for cooperative evaluation provided in an atmosphere which allows students to select their own peers with whom to work) provide an array of experiences for students in their attempt to improve their writing.

It is recommended that private teacher-student conferences be scheduled every ten days to help the student analyze his own paper, to motivate and to encourage continued efforts, and to involve the student in the overall evaluative progress of his written work. More frequent conferences may be scheduled by the students themselves who may require additional time with the teacher to discuss troublesome areas. Teacher-student conferences represent excellent opportunities to discuss the student's strengths and weaknesses and plans for improvement. Emphasis, however, should be on the student's strengths. The teacher's role is not to dominate the discussion, but always to guide the student to see his own errors. A sincere effort to improve writing skills, on the part of the student, should always be received
enthusiastically by the teacher, and constant encouraging comments by the teacher on what is right about a student's paper are both reassuring and stimulating to the student in his effort to improve his writing.

Students, generally, do not know how to proofread their own writing for errors. It is recommended, therefore, that teachers assume the responsibility for teaching students how to proofread. This is accomplished by providing a large How to Proofread Chart, which, when conspicuously displayed in the front of the classroom, can be viewed easily by each student. Each student, furthermore, should be provided with his own proofreading chart, which, when kept in his notebook, is easily accessible. At the start of a student-centered writing program, the items on this chart should be reviewed aloud frequently to remind students of the items that they are expected to look for. Once students familiarize themselves with those items, successful proofreading is more likely.

Maintaining accurate records by both the teacher and the students is essential in the Student-Centered Writing Program because it provides visible means for tracing student progress. The tabulation of errors on the Error Chart and the dating of student materials help in the overall evaluative process. Descriptions of the Error Chart, as well as the student materials used, were referred to earlier in this study.
Appendix
RESULTS OF THE OPINIONNAIRE

GRADE 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Highly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Highly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I made fewer errors in capitalization.</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I made fewer errors in spelling.</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I was more careful to say exactly what I intended to say.</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I proofread my first drafts more closely.</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I proofread my final drafts more closely.</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I eliminated run-on sentences.</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I eliminated fragments.</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I used the dictionary to locate questionable spelling.</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I was more careful to make periods look like periods, not commas.</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The Buddy System helped me to locate errors I had overlooked</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The Buddy System helped me to improve my writing.</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I feel good about my writing.</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I did not mind revising for a better grade.</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I was more careful to use commas correctly.</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8%</td>
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</table>
RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

GRADE 6

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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Highly Disagree</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15. I was more careful to use end marks correctly.</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. The teacher-student conferences encouraged me to write better.</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. My teacher defined and explained clearly and thoroughly how a student-centered writing program works.</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I understand clearly how a student-centered writing program works.</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I feel responsible for correcting and proofreading my own work.</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I like the idea of a student-centered writing program past the eighth grade.</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I would like to continue in a student-centered writing program.</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. I would like to see the student-centered writing program become available to others in my school.</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Overall, the student-centered writing program helped to make me become an improved writer.</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. I like the idea of locating and correcting my work with the help of a buddy.</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>-</td>
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</table>
RESULTS OF THE OPINIONNAIRE

GRADE 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>25.</strong> I feel that I have benefited by the Student-Centered Writing Program.</th>
<th>Highly Agree (4)</th>
<th>Agree (3)</th>
<th>Disagree (2)</th>
<th>Highly Disagree (1)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>26.</strong> Now that I have knowledge about the Student-Centered Writing Program, I am more careful to proofread other written assignments like social studies, science, etc.,</th>
<th>Highly Agree (4)</th>
<th>Agree (3)</th>
<th>Disagree (2)</th>
<th>Highly Disagree (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>27.</strong> I realize that good writing skills also apply to other subjects, not just English.</th>
<th>Highly Agree (4)</th>
<th>Agree (3)</th>
<th>Disagree (2)</th>
<th>Highly Disagree (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>-</td>
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## RESULTS OF THE OPINIONNAIRE

### GRADE 7

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<th>Agree 3</th>
<th>Disagree 2</th>
<th>Highly Disagree 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I made fewer errors in capitalization.</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I made fewer errors in spelling.</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I was more careful to say exactly what I intended to say.</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I proofread my first drafts more closely.</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I proofread my final drafts more closely.</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I eliminated run-on sentences.</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I eliminated fragments.</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I used the dictionary to locate questionable spelling.</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I was more careful to make periods look like periods, not commas.</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The Buddy System helped me to locate errors I had overlooked.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The Buddy System helped me to improve my writing.</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I feel good about my writing.</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I did not mind revising for a better grade.</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESULTS OF THE OPINIONNAIRE
GRADE 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Highly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Highly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14. I was more careful to use commas correctly.</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I was more careful to use end marks correctly.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. The teacher-student conferences encouraged me to write better.</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. My teacher defined and explained clearly and thoroughly how a student-centered writing program works.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I understand clearly how a student-centered writing program works.</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I feel responsible for correcting and proofreading my own work.</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I like the idea of a student-centered writing program.</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I would like to continue in a student-centered writing program become available to others in my school.</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. I would like to see the student-centered writing program become available to others in my school.</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Overall, the student-centered writing program helped to make me become an improved writer.</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# RESULTS OF THE OPINIONNAIRE

## GRADE 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Highly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Highly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24. I like the idea of locating and correcting my work with the help of a buddy.</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I feel that I have benefited by the student-centered writing program.</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Now that I have knowledge about the student-centered writing program, I am more careful to proofread other written assignments like social studies, science, etc.</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>27. I realize that good writing skills also apply to other subject, not just English.</td>
<td>100%</td>
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Bibliography


Sager, Carol. "Improving the Quality of Written Composition in the Middle Grades." *Language Arts* 54 (October 1977): 760-762.


