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Teachers' Perception of Parental Engagement in their Children's School-Based Writing Development

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The three “Rs”, reading, writing and arithmetic have always been regarded as the core of any school curriculum. Over recent years reading and arithmetic have taken center stage despite writing's critical role in school, college and the workplace (National Commission on Writing, 2003). The teaching of writing in schools has only been a focus of significant research since the 1980s (Prior, 2008). Standardized writing assessment nationwide is conducted only at certain grades, which vary state by state – The Florida Writing Assessment is conducted at 4th, 8th and 10th grades as mandated by the 1990 legislature (Florida Department of Education (FLDOE), n.d.). The writing assessment carries less weight than either the reading or mathematics assessments. Both reading and mathematics are subject to annual assessment. As mandated by the legislature, since 2002 third grade students who fail to achieve above a level 1 in the reading assessment, and do not qualify under one of the six exemptions, are retained and not promoted to fourth grade (Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability, 2006). Writing is not assessed annually nor does failure carry a penalty such as the potential for retention at any grade.

Presently, standards are generally in transition. The standards which are currently in place will shortly be superseded by The Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of College and Careers (PARCC) and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) have been awarded contracts by the Department of Education to develop sets of assessments from which the states will select (Long, 2011). To date, 29 states are working with SBAC and 24 are working with PARCC to develop common standards for assessment. The goal of the new standards is to prepare students for employment in a

technology-based, global workforce. Florida officially accepted the CCSS in July, 2010 (FLDOE, 2010) and is among the governing states working with PARCC developing technology-based, comprehensive assessments which will measure the range of CCSS (Hain, 2011). Writing will be particularly affected by the changes since there is a renewed focus on writing as part of the CCSS, "Each year in their writing, students should demonstrate increasing sophistication in all aspects of language use, from vocabulary and syntax to the development and organization of ideas, and they should address increasingly demanding content and sources." (Common Core States Standards Initiative, 2011). From 2012 scoring will be less lenient in regard to structure and spelling; contrived statistical claims and unsubstantiated generalities will no longer be acceptable (FLDOE, 2011). The place of writing in the curriculum will need to change and teachers will need not only to know how to teach to a high standard but it will be important for them to have some knowledge of the support they have from their students' parents and families.

When teachers and parents collaborate student success is facilitated. There have been many previous studies which support the premise that parental involvement leads to student success (Paratore, Krol-Sinclair, David, & Schick, 2010) so teachers are at least theoretically aware that student success is often predicated upon parental involvement and engagement. It is important for both parents and teachers to be engaged to support student learning and it is also important for each to have insight into the other's perspective (Rubie-Davies, Peterson, Irving, Widdowson & Dixon, 2010). The parent's engagement influences the teacher's success in regard to achieving his/her academic goals for the students. Teachers' beliefs regarding parents' involvement and engagement are key but poorly documented (Rubie-Davies, et al, 2010). It is vital therefore to have an understanding of how teachers' perceive parental engagement in children's writing.

In this study, *parent involvement* refers to parents participating in activities by invitation overt or implied, for example, making photocopies or other "office" related tasks, providing, preparing and serving food at a school's spaghetti dinner, acting as a chaperone on a field trip. This is different from *parent engagement*, which refers to a parent's role as a power-sharing citizen of their child's education community (Price-Mitchell, 2009) actively participating in activities which directly lead to academic advancement, particularly related to writing.

Writing, refers to a written sample produced by a student following appropriate syntax, vocabulary, genre, and content relevant to an intermediate level elementary student. The purpose of this descriptive study is to explore how teachers perceive parental engagement in children's school-based writing. From the teachers' points of view:

- What do parents do to facilitate their children's writing development?
- What would teachers like parents to do to facilitate their children's writing development?
- What should teachers do to help parents to facilitate their children's writing development?

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

- What should the school be doing to assist parents to become more engaged with their children's writing development?

Following the theory of self-fulfilling prophecy (Watzlawick, 2011), positive perceptions frequently lead to positive outcomes. It is therefore important for teachers to believe that the students' parents are supportive of their work. If they perceive themselves as supported by the parents and families they will be motivated to provide the students with a rigorous program of writing instruction to the benefit of their students.

Method

Participants

This study was conducted with ten teachers who were teaching in a variety of schools - public, private and charter all located in South Florida. The participants were a combined convenience and purposive sample. The majority of the participants (60%) were candidates engaged in two different graduate programs offered by a local university. The other participants (40%) were all employees of a local charter school. Each participant was selected based on her status as a qualified teacher with classroom experience. Most of the participants had experience of teaching students at critical grades for writing assessment in Florida (4th, 8th or 10th grade). One was teaching at the primary level and one was teaching at 7th grade otherwise they were, or had been, intermediate teachers.

Recruitment

The teachers were recruited by means of an introductory letter explaining the study. Letters were hand delivered to a total of approximately 30 teachers and the ten who volunteered were included in the study. The graduate candidates' professor acted as a gatekeeper, extending an invitation for me to solicit the participation of her students. One of the teachers at the charter school was known to me. She acted as my gatekeeper in that setting, introducing me to her colleagues. In order that our prior knowledge of one another would not contaminate the data collected she was eliminated from the potential pool of participants. None of the other participants was known on a personal level. Each participant volunteered freely after reading the introductory letter. Interview appointments were made in person.

Data Collection

Each participant was interviewed at a time of her choosing, in a location conducive to privacy; a classroom, a school media center or an office. Each participant had a pseudonym, generated using the participant's initials. Pseudonyms were used to maintain the confidentiality of the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interviews were conducted following a semi-structured, guided conversation format and included relevant questions, together with potential follow up questions and probes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) all developed prior to the meeting. The questions underwent some modification as data were collected and pertinent areas for deeper research were uncovered. The order of questions was largely in line with the research questions. However the order was not adhered to rigidly; the lead of the interviewee was followed.

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

Each interview was digitally recorded. The interviewee's permission to record was sought and obtained prior to the interview (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). The recordings were downloaded to a computer and transcribed by the researcher, shortly after the interview. In addition to the transcriptions of the interviews, field notes were taken either in the form of reflective journal entries (Orlipp, 2008) or as interview notes developed shortly after the interview and prior to the transcription. The reflective journal entries were made in the spirit of examining any biases which might be brought to the situation as the researcher was the principal research instrument (Merriam, 2002). At one point, the researcher became conscious of her "Pedagogical I" (Peshkin, 1988) when she realized that she was responding to what the participant was saying by offering suggestions for resolution based on experience. This generated careful monitoring of responses. The interview notes included descriptions of the setting and the individual participants. Minimal additional data was collected from each participant as regards race, educational level achieved at the time of the study, years of teaching experience and age in order to create rich descriptions of the participants.

Once transcribed, the interviews were coded and an overview of what was said was developed for review by the participant to enhance the accuracy of the interpretation. There were four quasi-a priori codes resulting from the research questions, other codes surfaced as the data were analyzed.

The interviewer, the first author, has spent 18 years as a classroom teacher. She worked in small private Montessori schools where formal, FCAT style testing was not administered. She has been out of the classroom for a period of four years, so whilst she has some insights into the methods of instruction and to how the parents in her own teaching situation were involved, she is researching a different setting and, with the fast pace of change, a different time than that of her experience. The interest in teachers' perceptions of parental engagement in children's writing is in light of the changes in assessment to CCSS. The new standards will provide challenges children will have to meet using all the resources at their disposal, not just classroom instruction but everything they can bring to the task. It is therefore critical for teachers to have an understanding of what students bring from home in the way of support and back ground for the writing process.

The study is being conducted from a socio-cultural, constructionist perspective, viewing "literacy as situated, mediated sociocultural practices, as motivated and socially organized activity" (Prior, 2008). Writing is situated in specific circumstances of time and place (Smith, 1994). It is influenced by social interaction of all the participants: teacher, parents (and family), and the student (Quintanar, 2011). It relies on the cultural experience of all and builds on the background and experiences they hold, their schema. Teachers' perceptions of parental engagement are influenced by their experiences and by their own background both in regard to their expectations of parents and expectations of what children's school-based writing should look like. Lareau (2003) said that parental engagement varies by expectation and experience. She identified that some parents believe that engagement requires concerted cultivation involving significant parental intervention whilst others subscribe to the accomplishment of natural growth, where parents attend school functions but do not proactively interfere in school trusting to the expertise of the teacher as professional. In North America, parent engagement is more a White middle-class value (Guo, 2010). These positions form major socio-cultural

differences in what parents regard as engagement. This is a basic interpretive study designed to develop an understanding of how teachers' perceive parental engagement through the detailed reports of ten individuals (Bogden & Biklen 2005).

Review of the Literature

Writing is a recursive process (Meltzer, 2007; Reif, 2007) where the writer shifts back and forth between writing, revising and editing, finding, developing and clarifying ideas, searching for the clearest meaning (Reif, 2007), though it is often taught in a linear fashion – developing an outline, writing a rough draft, revising and editing a number of times and finally producing a final copy. According to Donald Murray (2007) writing is not thinking first and then writing down what was thought, writing is thinking. Writing helps us to come to terms with our experience so even when teachers can't relate to the experience of the students it is critical to develop authentic relationships with them (Shagoury,2007). Linda Reif (2006) puts it succinctly when she says,

There has been so much focus on literacy *as reading* over the last ten years that we have forgotten, even abandoned, writing. At an irreplaceable loss. At the expense of thinking. At the expense of reading. We have forgotten that a person can read without writing, but cannot write without reading. If we neglect writing, while focusing our attention almost exclusively on reading, it is also *at the expense of reading*. If we really want to teach kids to be strong readers, we need to teach them to be strong writers. (p34, emphasis in original)

“Teachers, administrators, parents and communities acknowledge the critical role that families play ... and often join together to create ... partnerships to improve children's literacy learning” (Edwards, 2004). Parents and the family (as well as other caregivers) are the child's first teachers (Edwards, 2004, Morrow, Mendelsohn, & Kuhn, 2010). This applies to literacy (Au, 1993, Zygouris-Coe, 2007) as well as practical developmental learning. There are many at home literacy activities which support children's literacy development (Anderson, Lenters, & McTavish, 2008). There are challenges in regard to poor and culturally diverse parents' involvement in their children's literacy growth, both related to involvement and engagement (Edwards & Turner, 2009). Lack of time is a critical hindrance to both parental involvement and parental engagement; however parents perceive other deterrents, including lack of communication from the school, their own lack of knowledge regarding what the school is teaching and resistance from the school (Bridgeland, Dilulio, Streeter, & Mason, 2008). Furthermore teachers have insufficient knowledge of what language and literacies students engage in when they are at home. This is an escalating problem, with the increase in African American and Hispanic student percentages in schools the likelihood of teachers sharing the same cultural background as their students diminishes (May, 2011).

Setting of the Interviews

The interviews were conducted in one of three types of setting. The majority of the participants, teachers who were enrolled in graduate classes at a local university were

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

interviewed in the media center of a large high school. The media center was in a large modern High School. It was a spacious room with many tables which were set out ready for the following class session. There were book shelves set up according the Dewey-decimal system occupying approximately one third of the space of the room. The remaining space housed many desks with computers which were available for student use. There was an office at one end. The interviews were conducted in the late afternoon immediately prior to the start of the participant's class session. At the start of the interviews there were very few people in the media center but as the interviews progressed classmates and other students entered the media center. The researcher and participant were seated in a secluded spot where confidentiality of what was being said could be maintained. One of this cohort of teachers was interviewed in a university campus office. The office was furnished with two desks and chairs. There were filing cabinets along one wall. At the time of the interview the office was otherwise unoccupied. Each interview lasted for between 30 minutes and an hour.

The other interviews were conducted in the individual charter school teachers' classrooms once school was over for the day. Three of the interviews were conducted on an early release day at approximately 2:15 p.m. the other interview was conducted in the early evening of a Friday afternoon. The classroom was otherwise unoccupied at the time of the interview. These interviews lasted for approximately 1 hour, one of the interviews lasted for 1 hour 30 minutes.

The teachers were asked prior to the interview if the location of the interview was a comfortable space for them and all responded that it was.

Descriptions of the Participants

The descriptions of the participants as shown in Table 1 below are taken from both the additional data collected from each and from the interview notes and journal entries. All of the participants were female; one male's participation was sought. He was an eligible participant teaching at the charter school but he did not request inclusion.

Table 1
Demographic Data for Participants

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Teaching Experience (years)	Race/Ethnicity	Level of Education	Location of Interview
1	F	20-29	1-3	White	Bachelors	Media Center
2	F	40-49	4-6	White	Masters	Classroom
3	F	30-39	7-12	Hispanic	Masters	Classroom
4	F	30-39	7-12	Hispanic	Doctorate	Media Center
5	F	20-29	1-3	Hispanic	Bachelors	Media Center
6	F	20-29	4-6	Hispanic	Bachelors	Media Center
7	F	50-59	13-20	Hispanic	Masters	Classroom
8	F	30-39	7-12	Hispanic	Masters	Office
9	F	30-39	4-6	Mixed	Specialist	Classroom
10	F	30-39	4-6	Black	Bachelors	Media Center

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

The participant's ages ranged from the 20's to the 50's; 30% of the sample was 20–29, 50% was 30-39, 10% was 40-49 and 10% was 50-59. The range of experience also varied 20% had 1-3 years of experience, 40% had 4-6 years of experience, 30% had 7-12 years experience and 10% had 13-20 years of experience. The participants were 20% White, 60% Hispanic, 10% Black and 10% Mixed race. The level of education of the participants ranged from Bachelor's level to Doctoral: 40% held a Bachelor's degree, 40% held a Master's degree, 10% held a Specialist degree and 10% held a Doctoral degree. All of the participants were currently active teachers but not all were currently teaching critical grades, 4th, 8th or 10th.

Results

The following definitions of otherwise indistinct terms refer to quantities. Enumeration data were used in the results section as follows:

- the word “overall” indicates that 90% or more of the participants gave a particular type of response,
- the word “many” indicates that between 60% and 90% of the participants gave a particular type of response,
- the word “some” indicates that between 30% and 50% of the participants gave a particular type of response and
- the word “few” indicates that 20% or less give a particular type of response (Galvan, 2009).

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Quasi-a priori codes – those which are a direct result of the interview questions

What parents do at home which facilitates children's school-based writing

Overall the teachers perceive that the parents are not engaged their children's school-based writing development. However, many of the teachers believe the parents engage in writing activities which could promote school-based writing. Their first thoughts focused on whether the parents engage with their children's homework activities. Few of the teachers thought that parents helped with homework. Ms. Vincent believes parents don't work “with them [children] when they have homework” and Ms. Collins said “it seems like parents are not very engaged in terms of doing homework with them [children] or even checking it over”. Ms. Weinstein offered suggestions as to why parents might not be engaged saying, “parents that I work with in my school have one, two or three jobs and don't have time.”

When asked to re-direct their thoughts to at-home activities which parents might engage in which involved writing many of the teachers were able to offer suggestions as to what they thought parents might be doing. A few believed no writing was done at home. Ms. Edwards stated quite categorically that there is no parental engagement and that there is no family-based

writing. Overall, the teachers thought that parents used the texting facility on their mobile phones and many believed they used email. Other activities which were suggested included writing various types of lists, engaging in social networking (blogging and Facebook were mentioned specifically), writing a resume or cover letter, and if they were attending any type of schooling their own school-related writing. Some of the teachers believed that parents might be engaging in writing activities, but that children might not be aware of it. Perhaps the children had gone to bed or multiple computers were available in the house so there was a lack of awareness of what others were doing. Those teachers who believed that parents used email and texting did not necessarily think that these helped children's writing. Ms. Collins, along with others, particularly noted the use of abbreviations, e.g. idk for I don't know, as problematic. Some of the teachers observed that these abbreviations impacted the mechanics of school-based writing negatively.

What teachers would like parents to do.

Overall, the teachers would like parents to become engaged in their children's school-based writing or homework, even if this is done indirectly, for instance, going through the book bag or just asking if the child has homework. Basic, at-home writing activities demonstrating the utility of writing that teachers would like parents to engage in included writing various types of lists – shopping, chores, activities, creating a calendar or agenda to record events or activities, writing notes or letters, creating cards for holidays, and keeping recipes. Ms. Perez had a list which included helping with homework, “writing down a shopping list, maybe names and phone numbers of relatives, helping parents write down chores... a weekly schedule”. Some teachers would like to see more pen and paper use, modeling hand-written examples of writing as opposed to using technology. Many of the teachers stressed the importance of dialogue, interaction or conversation and some suggested withdrawing activities which they perceived as detrimental – turn off the TV, video games, DVD player. Ms. Mendez was particularly concerned regarding the dearth of interaction between parents and children, saying it limited oral language development which had detrimental effects to the students in higher grade levels and particularly impacted writing.

A few teachers recommended exposure to real life experiences in contrast to those featured on TV and video games. Ms. Mendez asked, “How can you expect children to write about a visit to the park, or the beach if they have never been?” A recurring suggestion was to take children to the library, check out books, obtain a library card, and share books once they were read. Fifty percent of the participants recommended reading as a way to improve writing. Another often repeated issue was the “value of writing.” Many of the teachers thought that parents did not value or believe that writing was important. Some of them specifically identified this as a result of a lack of testing or intermittent testing with no consequences, as contrasted to retention for poor reading scores in 3rd grade. Ms. Rodriguez was most specific in this respect.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: There are no repercussions whether or not you fail the writing exam so I guess the parents aren't really as worried.

INTERVIEWER: What do you mean repercussions?

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

MS. RODRIGUEZ: They are not retained.
INTERVIEWER: OK

MS. RODRIGUEZ: They are not retained and there are no consequences for getting a level 1, 2 or 3 on the FCAT Writes. However, in 3rd grade on the reading, if you score a level 1, you are automatically retained.

What teachers can do to encourage parental engagement.

As one of the teachers so rightly pointed out, parents “would have to want to first of all”, however, overall the teachers believed they could reach out to parents and encourage them to become more engaged with their children’s academics and writing, in particular. Many suggestions were offered including making recommendations of what parents could do along the lines identified in the previous section, send home more assignments focused on writing, and ask parents to help, provide examples, show rubrics to parents or provide them to be kept at home, provide opportunities for the parents to visit the classroom to see what the students are doing, open writing hour to the parents, and ask parents to participate. Ms. Edwards, who thought that there was no engagement on the part of the parents of her students and no writing in the home, advised she is attempting to engage parents by linking to parents’ interest in sports by selling raffle tickets to games and offering sports personality shirts. She identified that she has to help parents before she can help her students since a proportion of them are illiterate. She also stated that she had already begun holding workshops to facilitate improving computer literacy for her parents. Other teachers also suggest classroom workshops.

What the school can do to encourage parent engagement in children’s writing.

Overall the teachers recommend that schools hold workshops which focus on writing. These should include examples of FCAT responses, appropriate spelling and grammar and Ms. Vincent suggested having parents respond to an FCAT prompt in order that they experience what the children are required to accomplish. The teachers reported that many schools already hold workshops on a number of topics including FCAT reading and FCAT mathematics. Some of the teachers reported that parents participate willingly and a few say parents really enjoy workshops. Other suggestions include creating a web site for writing, providing professional development for teachers, offering tutoring in writing, and disseminating literature regarding both the importance of writing and the impact of the Common Core State Standards.

Codes that emerged from the data

Opportunities for teacher/parent interaction.

Overall the teachers identified the major opportunity for interaction as being the parent conference. They also indicated that informal interaction occurred on a varying scale. Many of the teachers reported that parents were able to interact casually at “drop off” or “pick up” (before or after school), or an open door policy existed where parents could make arrangements to meet with teachers at the school almost at their convenience. However, many of them reported that exchanges in this daily setting were largely casual, “How’s my child doing?” rather than

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

academic in nature. Overall the teachers reported that phone and/or email contact was readily available. However, overall they also reported that some parents took advantage of the opportunities to interact and some did not. Other means of communication included web sites, the district web site portal, through grading systems and by written note.

Parent knowledge and background.

Overall the teachers believed that the parents lacked knowledge either of writing and/or of the requirements of the test or of the language. Some of the teachers identified that the parents had not experienced FCAT tests themselves so did not appreciate the importance of school-based writing, nor did they understand the scoring, as previously indicated. Some of the teachers thought that SES played a part in parent's lack of knowledge but a few believed this was not an excuse for not being involved, even if engagement was problematic. Ms. Vincent believed that there was a correlation between low SES and oral English language facility.

Another issue was lack of proficiency in English. Some of the teachers reported that parents speak another language other than English and this impedes their ability to become engaged with homework. A few of the teachers believe this is not an excuse for lack of involvement. Parents can read and write in their home language. Additionally, many of the skills employed in writing are the same in all languages – planning, editing, revising etc. Ms. Miller identified that culturally, some parents do not engage because they believe that education is the provenance of the teacher. She said, “that is more like a teacher thing that they [children] need to do more in school and not with the parent” she also said, “parents want to help [but] they feel like they can't because they don't know English” in addition she said, “parents don't know how to write” but she concludes with “I think parents want to help, but they don't know how to but I don't think teachers are helping parents. For the writing I don't think we are helping parents help,” indicating that she perceives that she could facilitate parental engagement.

What children are writing already.

Some of the teachers perceived that children do not write recreationally or at home. Others acknowledge that children like using the computer but the teachers do not perceive this as writing. One of the teachers acknowledged that some children are writing at home, that some of this writing is personal and the children do not want help or interference from adults. She said the children are willing to share if the material is not too personal and some children indicate that they are prepared to engage in peer review. Most of the teachers indicate that children email and engage in texting but they do not perceive this as writing. In fact some of the teachers directly attribute poor spelling and grammar to the influence of technology, particularly texting.

The influence of the teacher's own background on her perceptions of parental engagement.

This code did not develop until the project was well underway, but when it was included, it elicited a variety of pertinent responses. It was addressed by only half the participants. All those asked indicated that their childhood years influenced their expectations of parental engagement. Having engaged parents themselves, gave them an example of not only what they

should be doing with their own children (for those who have them) but, also, set a standard for their expectations of the parents of their students.

Both Ms. Frank and Ms. Mendez believe that low SES and/or lack of proficiency in English are not excuses for lack of engagement in children's schooling and writing in particular. Ms. Frank is aware of this as a bias, which comes directly from her own background, and whilst she is "sympathetic", she perceived her students' parents as not valuing education, not knowing the importance of education and parental involvement. Ms. Collins said her parents were engaged but admitted that changes in society in regards to families with 2 working parents and single parent families may be contributory factors to lack of parental engagement. Ms. Rodriguez also acknowledged these factors and shared that she was educated in a different country with a different culture. She noted that her extended family was engaged in her education and perceived that these factors influence her perceptions. She believed that writing is fun and that children enjoy it. Ms. Vincent observed that a parent was always around and that the family ate dinner together she also acknowledged that families have changed. She identified her influencing factor as being what she does with her own children,

"I keep going back to my own children, I'm sorry but I know that the more involved I am with my children, the more I look at their stuff the more likely they are to [the school bell interrupted her] ... want me to be proud of them"

She went on to say,

"I monitor my children every day..., I look at their phone, I look at their Facebook, I ask them questions about their day, I look at their homework; I try to be as involved as possible with my children... How could I get another parent to be like that, I don't know."

Discussion

Overall the teachers perceive that parents are not engaged with their children's writing. In fact, they believe that parents engage in minimal writing of any sort in the home. The exception is that the teachers perceive that parents (and children) engage in technology-based writing, primarily texting and writing emails. However, they perceive this form of writing as a hindrance to good school-based writing skills. This would appear to come from a deficit perspective. They particularly focus on the negative impact on both spelling and grammar. Despite their perceived lack of support from the parents, particularly as it relates to school-based writing, there appears to be some sympathy. A number of reasons why parents might not be involved were suggested, including time constraints as a result of employment obligations and responsibility for multiple children. The teachers also perceive that parental engagement generally is largely test driven and, when specifically related to writing, the lack of consequences, infrequency of testing and minimal promotion of writing by schools means that writing is regarded as less important. The teachers also think that parents lack knowledge about the requirements of the FCAT Writes. They believe it is important for parents to be educated regarding writing standards.

The teachers' perception of children's engagement with writing is that it is largely technology-based, though one of the teachers was aware of some of her students engaging in

journaling outside of school. The personal nature of children's writing, at this intermediate age, was also noted and this limited children's receptivity to parental engagement.

The teachers have a range of suggestions as to what they would like parents to do to facilitate their children's school-based writing development. The ways in which they would like parents to be engaged focused on personal interaction – talking, and reading, which they believe are fundamental foundations for writing, though they offered a variety of other activities which would support student writing growth, both from a practical application stance and from a value of the utility of writing stance.

The teachers believe that they could facilitate parental engagement by increasing the level of communication between themselves and the parents. They also believed that schools could be instrumental in encouraging parent's engagement. The most frequent suggestion was for schools to hold workshops or Parent Academies specifically oriented toward writing. The other suggestion was that schools should be disseminating more information, prioritizing writing and explaining the changes in the standards which are forthcoming. They believed that parents would be receptive and would take to heart the importance of writing if schools made it a priority.

Conclusions

Communication would seem to be the key. Whilst many of the teachers noted many opportunities for teachers and parents to interact, it is critical for there to be a wide range of means of communication offered – workshops would appear to be important but communication via one-to-one meetings are a preferred means, Others include email, phone calls, web sites, county portals, and literature. Ideally, every parent should be reached by one means or another. Teachers can instruct to the highest standards but parent engagement and commitment to what they are doing is critical to student success (Paratore, 2010). This is a reciprocal arrangement. It is important for teachers to view the skills that the children bring from home as a support to literacy (Edwards, 2004), specifically writing, development. Parents will moderate their behaviors based on their observations of what is needed. They will also respond to teacher requests (Rodriguez-Brown, 2011).

Workshops are needed not only for the parents but, also for the teachers. Most of the teachers in this study fall into the digital immigrant category, born before 1982, whereas their students fall into the digital native category, exposed to technology all their lives. Technology is here to stay and innovation in this field will continue. Students need to be totally literate in this area to be successful in a 21st century world. As Prensky (2001) says possibly “the single biggest problem facing education today is that *our Digital Immigrant instructors, who speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language.*” (p. 2). Therefore, workshops related to “writing in the digital age” for the teachers in order to moderate their perceptions in regard to technology-based writing, and its value, are essential. Writing using “text speak”, incorporating commonly understood abbreviations and syntax which deviates from that of school-based writing, is merely writing in a different register. This indicates that an elemental component in writing instruction in today's classroom is what style of writing is appropriate where/when. This issue will moderate as more digital natives enter the teaching profession. Never-the-less with 40%+ of the current teaching population being over 50 (National Center for Education Information [NCEI], 2005), the

problem will persist and escalate as technology gains in importance, for some time. Workshops to facilitate teachers' receptivity to technology-based writing should take place. These ought to be prior to workshops for parents in order to enhance the teachers' perspectives of technology-based writing. Teacher preparation programs would be well advised to incorporate instruction regarding technology-based writing and how this can be incorporated into the curriculum of the classroom to enrich children's writing experience.

The repeated suggestion for schools to institute workshops would fall under the umbrella of family literacy development. There have been many studies supporting such programs particularly in relation to either low SES or diverse populations (Rodriguez-Brown, 2011). This study did not differentiate based on either of these variables. However, there is no reason to believe that, by extension, school-based programs specifically directed to engaging parents in their children's writing success would not be equally successful, since the goals are similar. These workshops would promote an understanding for parents not only of the requirements of the testing but also of the importance of writing for their children in everyday life and their future success.

This study indicates that further research into teachers' perceptions of parents engagement with their children's writing is needed with a broader sample of participants. Other areas for research include teachers' perceptions of themselves as both writers and teachers of writing. Another is broadening the area of research to include parents' perceptions of their understanding of themselves as participants in their children's education. Research into children's writing habits, in general, as well as research into the impact of digital immigrant versus digital native on children's writing development is also indicated. Ways to share the work involved in the teaching of writing in school with parents is also an area of needed research. With the closer examination of writing, the third 'r' will regain its rightful place with reading and 'rithmetic.

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