

A decade later . . .

Literacy Instructional Practices In Maine's Elementary Schools

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**A Cooperative Research Project of the
Graduate Literacy Education Program**

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Maine's Elementary Schools

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May 12, 2005

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I. INTRODUCTION

A statewide survey of teachers in grades 1, 3 and 5 was undertaken during the 2004-2005 academic year to determine trends in literacy teaching practices in Maine's elementary schools. The study was a modified replication of the 1992-93 survey of teachers in grades 1, 3, and 5. The earlier survey was conducted by the Graduate Literacy Education Program at the University of Southern Maine and focused primarily on reading. In replicating the study, it was felt that by using teachers at the same grade levels it would be possible to obtain a better reflection of literacy practices as well as compare changes that had occurred over the last decade. The current survey was broadened to acknowledge current trends, especially emphasis on more specific instructional approaches for teaching reading and writing, classroom organization, technology, assessment protocols, high-stakes testing and the Maine Learning Results.

The results of the survey were based on the responses from a limited number of Maine elementary school teachers. A random sampling procedure was utilized to obtain a representative participation of teachers at each of the three grade levels. Three samples of 125 teachers at each grade level were randomly drawn from the State Department of Education School Statistics Data for inclusion in the study. Two hundred and sixty teachers participated in the study, resulting in an average response rate of 69%. The limitations of the study are discussed at the conclusion of the report.

II. ORGANIZATION AND USE OF THE REPORT

Three Ad Hoc Advisory Committees, representing teachers at each of the three grade levels helped to orchestrate the design of the study. Their contributions included writing questions and the procedures for gathering and analyzing the data. In addition, the committees were consulted about the results of the surveys and asked to review the implications of the data. The principal investigators are particularly indebted to the committee members for laboring over the questions to assure content relevancy at each grade level. They are outstanding educators that have been widely recognized for their work with children. They provided a sound perspective of what represents exemplary instructional practices at their grade levels.

The results of the study should be used by teachers and administrators to examine their literacy programs. For example, what kinds of literacy experiences would be most appropriate for children who have had only limited exposure to print? What balance should be reflected in programs for teaching word identification strategies to initial readers? Are students receiving ample opportunities (and time) for sustained silent reading practice? What instructional strategies would be most effective for promoting conceptual vocabulary development in the intermediate grades? These and other questions would provide a rich and relevant agenda for inservice programs as well as in professional education university courses. The recommendations of the ad hoc advisory committees could also be used for a self-evaluation of school literacy programs.

The data from the surveys were analyzed and classified according to several major categories including background information, organizing for instruction, instructional programs, summary and conclusions and finally a look back – what has changed in literacy instruction over the decade. Within these categories are many sub-topics including classroom libraries, descriptions of reading approaches in grades 1, 3 and 5 (literature-based instruction, basal readers and guided reading), assessment practices, writing process, spelling instruction, conceptual vocabulary, comprehension instruction, study strategies, assisting struggling readers, and applications of technology in support of literacy. Summaries of the data are followed by recommendations by the principal investigators and the ad hoc grade level advisory committees.

III. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Years of teaching experience

The data showed that Maine teachers had considerable teaching experience, over 80% exceeded 6 years. Grade 1 teachers have more years of experience than grade 3 and 5 teachers. Nearly 76% reported that they had 10 or more years of experience. Approximately 65% of the teachers in grades 3 and 5 had more than 10 years teaching experience. In the 1993-94 study, first grade teachers were the less senior group.

Academic preparation

The academic preparation of the three groups of teachers tended to be consistent across the grade levels. Slightly more of the first and fifth grade teachers reported only bachelor's degrees, but only by a very small margin of 7%. Approximately 30% of the teachers had master's degrees. Interestingly, 5 to 10% had masters' in literacy education. Fewer of the first grade teachers (5%) did graduate work in literacy. The number of first grade and third teachers who had master's degrees was up from the 1993-94 survey by approximately 10%. The results for fifth grade teachers were the same during both periods (30%).

IV. ORGANIZING FOR INSTRUCTION

This section describes some of the essential components of school-wide literacy programs including the characteristics of classroom libraries, time assigned for reading and writing instruction, assessment and standardized testing and support for struggling readers and writers.

Classroom libraries

Teachers were asked several questions about their classroom libraries both in terms of the number of books available and how they were organized. Most teachers had well stocked classroom libraries. Ninety percent of first and third grade teachers had libraries of at least 300 books, with 45% reporting over 500 books. Slightly fewer of the fifth grade teachers (75%) had library collections of at least 300 books. However, 35% reported over 500 books. No significant differences have occurred in the size of classroom libraries since the 1993-94 study.

Classroom libraries were not consistently organized in any one way. Across the grade levels near equal numbers of teachers organized their libraries by book level, by author or by category/subject. However, there was a trend that the higher the grade level, fewer classroom libraries were organized by book levels. Fifty percent of first grade teachers organized their libraries by book level, in contrast to 30% of third grade, and 20% of fifth grade teachers. Third and fifth grade teachers organized their books predominantly by category/subject.

Recommendations and analysis:

- *Teachers should be commended for their efforts in building their classroom libraries. With the majority of teachers having a classroom library of over 300 books, students have a wealth of literature at their fingertips. While it can be helpful to organize a classroom library by the level of the text, focusing on text reading levels for book selection can have a negative impact on the perception and attitude students have about the purpose for reading. If classroom libraries are organized by author or subject, students are more likely to self-select books based on their individual interests and personal motivations (Routman, 2000).*

Time spent on reading and writing

Consistent with the results of the 1993-94 study, close to 95% of all the teachers were providing at least 20 minutes of daily silent reading. Over 30% of the third and fifth grade students were reading silently at least 30 minutes a day. About half of the third and fifth grade teachers read with their students during independent, silent reading time. Maine schools have consistently ranked high on national reading assessments. This may be due in no small part to the amount of time teachers make available for independent reading practice.

Many teachers were taking time to read aloud to their students. Ninety percent of first grade teachers, 80% of third grade teachers, and 60% of fifth grade teachers read aloud to their students every day. In addition, 75% of first grade teachers were reading aloud more than once a day. The results were very similar to the 1993-94 study.

Surprising results came from the question concerning how often students write. The older the students, the less time they were given time to write. While 80% of first grade teachers reported that their students write daily, that percentage dropped to 45% for third grade students, and down to 27% for fifth grade students. In addition, almost 10% of fifth grade teachers reported that their students wrote "infrequently." This data is in contrast to the 1993-94 study when all students spent between 15 and 30 minutes a day writing independently.

When asked about the amount of time students were actually reading during a reading lesson, between 40 and 50% of all the teachers reported that students were reading less than 50% of the time. About half of the third and fifth grade teachers reported that their students spent an equal amount of time reading orally and silently. There was a small increase from third to fifth grade in the emphasis given to silent reading during the reading lesson. It is interesting that approximately 49% of all the teachers stressed "round robin" reading. However, this practice diminished significantly in grade 5. Another popular technique in grade three was the use of "paired reading," students taking turns reading to one another.

The amount of time assigned to workbook activities varied among the three grade levels. Almost all third grade teachers using basal readers spend at least 50% of the reading lesson on workbooks. This is quite surprising since only a quarter of first grade teachers devoted 50% of the time to workbooks, and almost all of the fifth grade teachers using basal readers spent less than 25% of their reading time on workbooks. In the 1993-1994 study, teachers using basal readers devoted much time to workbook activities.

Recommendations and analysis:

- *Many students were given time to read silently every day and an opportunity to listen to their teachers read aloud. This time is well spent since research has shown that there exists a potent relationship between volume of reading and (and writing) and actual achievement. Reading aloud helps children discover the intrinsic pleasures of reading, fosters motivation and nurtures reading growth (Allington, 2001).*
- *The data suggests that more opportunities could profitably be provided for students to write every day, particularly in grades three and five. Like reading, becoming a skilled writer happens with sustained practice (Calkins, 2001).*
- *The survey suggests that much time during reading instruction was being used for activities other than authentic reading, including oral reading and completing workbooks. Workbook pages do not provide authentic reading experiences. The*

most important element of the reading lesson is the time spent actually reading. If workbooks are used, they should consume less than 15 percent of the time allotted for reading instruction (Anderson, et. al, 1986). While practiced more extensively in grade 1, oral reading should be done sparingly in grades three and five. Silent reading should always receive the primary emphasis.

- *While “round robin” reading is useful for managing a larger group of students during reading instruction, it inhibits fluency and comprehension. It is time-consuming because students are not engaging in their own reading while they wait their turn. In addition, this form of instruction is often stressful for children who anxiously wait their turn to read aloud an unfamiliar passage in front of their peers. If children read aloud they should always practice reading the passage silently. Also, oral reading should be done to communicate with others in legitimate audience situations (O’Donnell & Wood, 2004).*

Assessment, testing and use of standardized tests

Teachers were asked about the kinds of assessments they utilize to establish the literacy levels of their students. Predictably, running records were used frequently by first grade teachers (95%) and much less by third grade teachers (68%). Less than half of the fifth grade teachers reported using running records. Most teachers augment their assessments with observation and anecdotal records. Interestingly, informal observations of children ranked very high only for third and fifth grade teachers (nearly 90%) but only for 12% of first grade teachers. However, grade one teachers made greater use of informal interest inventories (90%). The DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) was widely used in Maine elementary schools (however, less frequently in grade 5).

The traditional mainstay of reading assessment, the informal reading inventory, continued to be used by many teachers. Certain trends were observed, however. It was used much less by first grade teachers (30%), more by third grade teachers (nearly 50%) but utilization of the IRI fell off in grade five. Information from previous teachers was used by all the teachers to plan instruction. The “end of unit” basal reader tests increased in use from 9% in the first grade to 39% in the fifth grade. Another assessment tool that was not included in the 1993-94 survey was the (CBM) *curriculum based measures*. The use of the (CBM) increased through the grades, which undoubtedly reflects the use of more content material.

Several questions sought to determine the impact of the Maine Learning Results (MLR), the Comprehensive Local Assessment System (CLAS), and standardized tests on the teaching of reading and writing. The influence of the Maine Learning Results (MLR) on literacy instruction appeared to increase by grade level. For example, it had much influence on only 35% of the grade one teachers, 55% on the grade three teachers and 70% on the grade five teachers. Teachers appeared to have very strong opinions about how much influence the (MLR) had on their literacy instruction. A significant shift in degree of influence from “very much” to “little impact” that was registered by teachers suggested that the value of these measures may not have been completely resolved.

When asked to what extent the comprehensive local assessment system (CLAS) impacted their teaching of literacy, an upward trend of use was observed among the teachers. About 25% of the first grade teachers indicated much and slightly over 50% reported some. Slightly less than half of the third grade teachers reported much and 45% little. The fifth grade teachers showed a stronger relationship between the CLAS and their teaching of literacy but by only a few percentage points (52%). Interestingly, over 40% of the third and fifth grade teachers said that CLAS had very little impact on their teaching of reading and writing.

In the 1993-94 survey, 50% of the teachers used standardized tests to plan literacy instruction. Since most schools mandate the use of standardized tests, teachers were asked how they affected their literacy instruction. Only 15% of the grade one teachers, 20% of the grade three teachers and 28% of the grade five teachers said that standardized tests affected their literacy instruction positively. Over 40% of the teachers reported that standardized tests didn't have any affect on their reading and writing programs. A smaller number of teachers, ranging between 13 and 24% indicated that these tests had a negative impact on their instruction. The wide use of the Maine Learning Results and the passage of the "No Child Left Behind" legislation may have resulted in a decline in the influence of standardized tests.

Recommendations and analysis:

- *Literacy instruction should be authentically assessed. The best way to assess and evaluate reading and writing progress is to use a combination of alternative assessment tools such as anecdotal records, book logs, artifacts of reading and writing, portfolios, and rubrics (Farris, Fuhler, & Walther, 2004). These tools are available both informally and formally.*
- *Informal assessments such as running records and the informal reading inventory require a real understanding of the reading/language learning process and can provide teachers with important instructional information. Teachers need to be aware of these various tools for assessing students' literacy development.*
- *The strong opinions expressed about the Maine Learning Results raise several interesting questions. Obviously, many teachers felt that they have an important influence on their instructional programs, particularly as the grade levels increase. On the other hand, many teachers felt they have little impact on their teaching. Could this be a reflection of teacher disapproval or a lack of understanding about the relevance and use of the learning results? These questions could profitably be explored in school staff development programs.*
- *The public demand for school accountability has reached a fever pitch. With the "No Child Left Behind Legislation," it is assumed that all students will be performing in literacy at least at grade level, otherwise their schools may be designated as "failing." This is in direct disregard of the developmental nature of literacy as well as the special populations of students that many schools endeavor to serve. There are two different*

orientations of assessment; one focuses on 'something you do to students', and the other focuses on 'something you do with them, to help them do for themselves'" (Tierney, 1998). The International Reading Association has an excellent web site to help teachers and administrators articulate the goals of assessment to parents (IRA. org).

Support for struggling readers

Third and fifth grade teachers were asked what best describes their approach for assisting struggling readers. Some student needs were met largely in the classroom, others received additional help from specialists outside of the classroom, and some students were assisted through a collaborative effort between classroom teachers and reading specialists. These three approaches were used equally by teachers. However, 55% of the fifth grade teachers took advantage of the home-school connection, compared to 30% of the third grade teachers. While the research shows that a reading workshop model is an effective instructional approach for struggling readers (Allington, 2001), phonics-based approaches were used by most teachers. In the 1993-1994 study, many teachers felt they needed more support for accommodating troubled readers.

Recommendations and analysis:

- *Effective intervention in the classroom, along with focused instruction by a literacy expert, are important elements of a support system for struggling readers (Allington, 2001). In both settings, small-group instruction (1-3 students) best fosters progress and success (Wasik & Slavin, 1993). In addition, it is important that instruction within and outside the classroom complement and expand upon each other. Classroom teachers and literacy specialists are encouraged to work closely together to provide the most intensive, effective, cohesive intervention possible for struggling readers (Allington, 2001).*
- *Although struggling readers may profit from instruction in phonics, this should not be the primary instructional program. They should be provided with many opportunities to read authentic texts. Some researchers have recommended that struggling readers should be reading self-selected texts 90 minutes a day to acquire the fluency necessary for skilled reading (Allington, 2001).*

V. INSTRUCTION

This section covers the primary instructional concerns for teaching reading and writing and represents the major work of the grade level advisory committees. The discussion begins with an attempt to determine teacher philosophies of literacy instruction. This is followed by an analysis of specific features of literacy programs in grades one, three and five. A description of writing process begins with a discussion of composition teaching practices and then explores how teachers make reading/writing connections to facilitate learning in content classes. Spelling practices were treated as a separate topic. Content literacy was examined as part of vocabulary and concept attainment and the teaching of comprehension. A deliberate attempt was made to sample instructional strategies that are the hallmark of effective programs for fostering metacognition. The final topic asked teachers how they are using technology to promote literacy.

Teacher beliefs about literacy instruction

With the current controversy over the teaching of reading and writing, the investigators sought to identify two distinct philosophical positions that Maine teachers held about orchestrating literacy instruction (*cognitive*, literature -based instruction or *behavioral*, mastery of linear skills). The cognitive, whole language position statement read: *The process of reading depends heavily on the reader's use of prior knowledge. Learning to read involves making and confirming predictions about print.* Teachers who subscribe to this conceptual framework believe that reading for meaning is an essential component of all reading situations. Students should engage in meaningful activities when they read and write. The behavioral, skills based-position read: *The process of reading begins with understanding the characteristics of print. Learning to read requires mastering and integrating a sequence of word identification skills. Comprehension then follows.* This position is often referred to in the literature as a bottom-up framework: students must decode letters and words before they are able to derive meaning from sentences, paragraphs and larger units of texts (Vacca, Vacca, and Gove 2002). Obviously, the interpretation of these statements depends heavily on the teacher's theoretical knowledge of literacy. Therefore, it is possible that some teachers may argue that they are more eclectic and embrace both positions. Given these possibilities, slightly over 50% of the teachers implicated a cognitive view of literacy instruction (top-down framework). These teachers would most likely be advocates of literature-based reading programs.

Approximately 40% of the teachers subscribed to a skills-based orientation (bottom-up framework) for teaching literacy. These teachers would most likely believe that becoming an accomplished reader involves the mastery of specific word recognition skills. A decade ago, the number of teachers who approached reading as the acquisition of skills was less than 15%. Obviously there has been a significant shift over the decade away from cognitive (process) to more linear orientations (product) for teaching word identification strategies.

Recommendations and analysis:

- *The beliefs that teachers have about the reading process have a direct bearing on the kinds of instructional decisions they make in the classroom. This not only relates to the teaching of word identification techniques including phonics, but comprehension and vocabulary instruction for more accomplished readers and writers as well. The data reveals a split in teacher philosophical orientations of the different models of the reading process. The research has shown that even very novice readers construct meanings from very predictable texts to solve the word identification puzzle. Helping students acquire problem-solving strategies (metacognition) is deeply rooted in an understanding of top-down (cognitive) frameworks (Heilman, Blair, & Rupley, 2002). Understanding how these models differ is critical for improving the quality of classroom literacy instruction. Teachers should not only be asked what they do but why they do it (Vacca, Vacca, and Gove 2002).*

First grade reading approaches

Eighty percent of the first grade teachers were using guided reading with leveled texts as their primary instructional approach for teaching reading. Shared reading followed; however, it was only considered a “primary approach” for 20% of the teachers. These numbers were surprising since the use of enlarged texts has been widely recommended as a primary instructional strategy for emergent and initial readers (O’Donnell & Wood, 2004). These disparities may be due to a misconception regarding the terms “guided reading” and “shared reading.” The authors of the survey were clearly referring to “guided reading” as an instructional approach described by Fountas and Pinnell (1996). “Shared reading” as explained by Holdaway (1979) involves modeling the reading of well crafted, enlarged, predictable texts to children.

The data showed a significant decline of the use of big books and shared reading by first grade teachers since the 1993-94 report. Ten years ago, 65% of first grade teachers used shared reading “frequently” and over 50% devoted more than 20% of their instructional time to shared reading. While the use of big books was greater then, the report did show that the shared reading was not being used as frequently as research recommends for initial readers. Half of the teachers in 1993-94 reported that they were not very familiar with the shared reading approach, and 25% said that they had no enlarged texts in their classrooms. Although the use of shared reading as a primary approach has declined over the decade, it was underused even then.

The survey inquired about other reading instructional approaches for first graders. Almost 20% of first grade teachers used the reading workshop as their primary approach, 15% used skill management programs (phonics based programs), and 10% used basal programs. Very few first grade teachers reported using core books or literature circles. It is significant that the number of first grade teachers using basal reader programs has declined since 1993-94, when half of the teachers were using basals.

First grade teachers were asked how they incorporated other instructional strategies, resources, and materials into their reading programs. Between 70% and 90% used the following components in their reading instruction: modeling the cueing systems, the language experience approach, paired reading, response/follow-up to silent reading, accessing prior knowledge, leveled texts, flexible grouping, trade books, non-fiction books, reading manipulatives and games, and books on tape. Approximately 50% percent used round robin reading, modeling book selection strategies magazines and newspapers, and computers.

Recommendations and analysis:

- *Since guided reading was the instructional approach of choice for first grade teachers, care should be taken that management strategies are developmentally appropriate for initial readers. For example, they will need many readings of individual stories. They cannot be expected to read leveled texts independently without extensive modeling of the texts and demonstration of word identification strategies.*
- *It is surprising that even fewer first grade teachers were using shared reading as a primary approach for literacy instruction. Shared reading has proven to be a highly effective approach for teaching emergent readers about story patterns, story language, concepts of print, phonemic awareness and phonics skills, and reading strategies. In addition, this approach serves the needs of a wide range of children. Shared reading with big books, charts, poems, and songs is an effective, central part of a first grade reading program (Allington, 2001; Eldredge, Reutzell, and Hollingsworth, 1996; Parks, 2000; Routman, 2003]).*
- *Literacy instruction would be more productive if children were engaged in authentic reading activities such as shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading. For oral reading practice, rather than “round robin reading,” students would be more invested in such activities as paired reading, repeated reading, echo reading and readers’ theatre (Opitz and Rasinski, 1998).*

Third grade reading approaches

Although not by the same significant margin as first grade teachers, a majority (55%) of third grade teachers used guided reading with leveled texts as their primary instructional approach for reading. This distinction was significant since guided reading is more developmentally appropriate for third grade students than first grade students. Third grade students have acquired a large sight vocabulary and are well on their way to developing fluency. The reading workshop was used by 23% of the teachers. This represents a significant increase from the earlier survey, up from 10%. The reading workshop was followed in frequency by literacy circles, core books and basal readers (15%). The use of skill management programs (phonics approaches) received only a 5% response.

Basal readers were used by approximately 24% of the third grade teachers. The number has dropped significantly since the 1993-94 report when 40% of the teachers were using basal programs. Approximately 90% of the teachers who do use basals did not use the teacher's manual explicitly to guide their instruction. This response is in sharp contrast to the earlier study when most third grade teachers said that they adhered closely to the prescribed lessons in the teacher's manuals. In addition, all of the teachers supplemented basal readers with other literature. In the 1993-1994 study, only 37 to 50% of the teachers reported enriching their basal lessons with literature.

Third grade teachers were asked about other instructional components that they use for reading instruction. Over 90% indicated that they used leveled texts. The following components were used in order of emphasis: mini-lessons, literature response journals, flexible grouping, teacher created worksheets, book talks, and free response journals.

Recommendations and analysis:

- *Guided reading and the use of leveled texts was the primary instructional approach for third graders. Problems associated with the use of leveled texts have already been discussed. While they are helpful for establishing general reading boundaries, leveled texts should be supplemented with a wide variety of high-quality children's literature that students can be invited to self-select based upon many personal criteria. As they have always done, teachers should modify the rigid recommendations in teacher's manuals to allow more flexibility in generating their own comprehension questions, omitting certain activities and allowing students to read stories without interruption.*
- *Teachers who use basal readers should be commended for not relinquishing their role as instructional decision makers by using their teacher's manuals selectively. Supplementing basal stories with children's literature is a very positive and effective practice (Vacca, Vacca, Gove,2003).*
- *Less than half of third grade teachers modeled book selection strategies for their students. It is important for students to be able to self-select reading material that is appropriate for their reading stage, as well as for their own interests and growth as a reader. In order to do this successfully, they need very specific, explicit guidance (Miller, 2002; Routman, 2003).*

Fifth grade reading approaches

The primary instructional approaches for teaching reading in fifth grade were evenly divided between the reading workshop and literature circles. The data also showed a "runner-up" split between guided reading and core books. Since all of these approaches place heavy emphasis on children's literature, we can infer that fifth grade students were being immersed in a rich literature environment with many opportunities to interact with books. A much smaller group of teachers (10%), used basal readers. Most literacy

specialists will be pleased that a precipitous drop has occurred in the use of basals by fifth grade teachers since 1993-94 (down 30%).

Fifth grade teachers were asked about other instructional components that they used for reading instruction. Approximately 50% used leveled texts. The following were used in order of emphasis: mini-lessons, literature response journals, teacher created worksheets, flexible grouping, book talks, and free response journals. Comparing these results to the third grade teachers, mini lessons and literature response journals were used frequently at both grade levels, and about half of the teachers at both levels included worksheets and book talks in their reading instruction. The major difference between the third and fifth grade teachers was the greater use of leveled texts in the third grade.

Recommendations and analysis:

- *Less than half of the fifth grade teachers read with their students during SSR time. It is highly recommended that teachers read along silently with their students. The rules for SSR should be clearly established and discussed (everyone reads, everyone is quiet, and everyone stays seated). Demonstrating appropriate book selection techniques is also an integral feature of SSR (O'Donnell & Wood, 2004).*
- *Fifth grade teachers are to be commended for using reading approaches that literally surround their students with literature. Surely these teachers are fully invested in reading and make a point of talking about their favorite books or stories. No matter how teachers express their enthusiasm for reading, students know that the attention they are getting from the world of books is authentic and desirable (Vacca, Vacca, and Gove, 2003).*

Writing Practices

Teachers were using writing process across all the grades surveyed. Sixty-eight percent of the first grade teachers reported using the following components of the writing process extensively: prewriting/rehearsing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing/sharing. Over 92% allowed their students to use invented spelling approximations to support their initial writing efforts. This practice is to be applauded for teachers were demonstrating that writing is developmental and that children need many opportunities to experiment with writing. They will master the conventions of print as a gradual process. Teachers in the earlier study also allowed generous amount of time for children to experiment with print.

The study also showed that first graders were writing daily and receiving instruction in the craft of writing through mini-lessons and interactive writing activities. Journals were used extensively and 44% of the teachers were having students use graphic organizers for facilitating writing. It was also interesting to note that first grade teachers were not relying on commercial programs for writing instruction and that 82% said that they frequently model the writing process.

Similar results were found in the third and fifth grades with 84 and 87% of teachers respectively reporting that students used writing process. These numbers were higher than the 1993-1994 study. These results strongly suggest that Maine teachers understand the importance of valuing all aspects of writing and not just the finished product. The study also revealed that students in the third grade appeared to be writing more frequently than fifth grade students, with 45% of the teachers reporting that their students write daily. Only 27% of the fifth grade teachers reported that their students write every day. It should be noted, however, that 45% of the fifth grade students were writing at least three times per week. All the teachers were modeling writing strategies for their students and not using commercial writing programs (this finding remains consistent with the 1993-1994 study).

Approximately 65% of third grade teachers and 47% of the fifth grade teachers were using their own writing to demonstrate writing process. It can be surmised that teachers are bringing completed examples of their writing to share with students, for the majority of teachers said they infrequently write *with* their students. Therefore, it is very likely that many students are not observing their teachers produce actual text.

Recommendations and analysis:

- *While a high percentage of all grade level teachers are using writing process, only first grade teachers reported students writing on a daily basis. Because teachers are faced with an ever-demanding curriculum, they may find it difficult to provide daily writing opportunities for their students. Even so, writing experts continue to report that frequency to explore and practice the craft of writing is essential for writing development. Teachers should encourage students to write in a variety of genres and across disciplines preferably four to five times per week (Graves, 2004; Atwell, 1998).*
- *The practice of modeling writing strategies should continue and include more teachers. Staff development is recommended to ensure that more teachers are aware of good writing practices and are modeling them in the classroom. Students need to see how writing unfolds. Many demonstrations and chances for students to try out various writing strategies will allow them to produce writing that is coherent and well developed (Graves, 2004; Lane, 1993; Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 1986).*
- *In addition to showing students techniques for writing, teachers should also be writing with their students. Researchers have observed that students who are competent writers have teachers who are writers. Students need to see their teachers engaged in writing and showing the thinking process that materializes with the craft. Then students will begin to internalize the questions, comments and suggestions that accompany an emerging text (Routman, 2004; Graves, 2004; Atwell, 1998).*

Reading/Writing Connections

Questions about genre writing were included only on the third and fifth grade surveys. Well over half of the teachers reported that their students were composing creative/descriptive pieces, exposition, narratives and responding to writing prompts. In addition, persuasive writing was occurring at both grade levels with more emphasis in the fifth grade. The two categories used mostly by students were creative writing and prompt writing. The difference between these two genres was barely discernable.

In addition to the assortment of writing types, third and fifth grade teachers were encouraging their students to make the reading/writing connection in a variety of ways. Students were self-selecting topics when writing, writing after sharing literature, writing across the curriculum and responding to writing prompts. In fact, prompt writing received the most emphasis with over 90% the teachers using this teacher-directed writing. Prompt writing has been shown to be an effective strategy for learning and retaining new concepts. Relying on writing prompts for creative or personal writing is less effective. Over 60% of the students used graphic organizers. It was surprising, however, that teachers were not using dialogue journals, double entry journals or learning logs to help their students to connect to texts.

Recommendations and analysis:

- *While teachers report using several reading/writing activities to foster comprehension, research supports the use of dialogue journals, double entry journals and learning logs. These modes of discourse allow the teacher to monitor understanding of the concepts being learned and to redirect students' thinking if needed. These writing exercises help the students make connections to the text, across texts and to the world. In addition, journals and reading logs provide assessments, which can be used by the classroom teacher to inform instruction (Tovani, 2000; Piazza, 2003; Andrasick, K.D., 1990).*

Spelling

Spelling instruction was examined across the grades. None of the teachers reported using commercial spelling programs. This response shows a shift from ten years ago when slightly over half of the third and fifth grade teachers used commercial spelling programs. Also, it appears that more first grade teachers handle spelling within the editing component of writing process than do third or fifth grade teachers. In fact, over half of the third and fifth grade teachers relied on weekly word lists and quizzes. It is interesting to note that although first grade teachers manage spelling within writing process, 40% were giving weekly spelling tests. First grade teachers did not use weekly spelling tests in the 1993-1994 study, but rather individualized and integrated spelling with writing.

Recommendations and analysis:

- *Although the majority of teachers were not using commercial spelling programs, many students were being tested on spelling words weekly. This is not a recommended practice. Spelling should be integrated into the curriculum with instruction focusing on multiple spelling strategies linking word study to reading and writing. Focusing on isolated word lists and weekly spelling tests are highly questionable practices (Calkins, 2001; Laminack and Wood, 1996; Rosencrans, 1998).*

Vocabulary development and concept attainment

Teachers in grades 3 and 5 were asked how they promoted conceptual vocabulary development. Although most teachers reported that they stressed many activities for teaching new words, less than 5% of the third and fifth grade teachers characterized their classroom vocabulary instruction as “systematic and in-depth”. We might infer that teachers do more “incidental teaching” of new words as the need arises. The research supports this practice (Vacca & Vacca, 2005). Most teachers emphasized teaching new words in the context of what was being studied.

Since the current research underscores the importance of concept attainment for assisting students to build vocabulary, several questions about how teachers used “concept building strategies” were included. Activities that require students to classify and sort words and attributes include: teaching words in sets that share common meanings, brainstorming attributes for words, semantic mapping/webbing, completing semantic features charts, using concept circles and detecting analogies.

The majority of teachers cited concept building as a major goal for vocabulary development, however, concept-building strategies appeared to be given much less emphasis than more traditional exercises. Teachers in grades 3 and 5 used the following elements of vocabulary instruction most frequently: presenting new words in context, looking words up in the dictionary and working with word structure (prefixes, suffixes, etc.). With exception of brainstorming and creating analogies, concept building activities such as sorting and categorizing, concept circles, semantic mapping, semantic feature analysis charts and personal vocabulary notebooks received much less emphasis. On the bottom of the list were the use of semantic webbing and feature analysis charts (considered by most literacy specialists to be most effective strategies for concept building). These results correlated closely with the findings of the 1993-1994 study.

Perhaps the most vivid memory many adults have of learning vocabulary in school was a weekly test on a list of new words. According to the survey, however, nearly 85% of the grade level teachers said that they did not use weekly vocabulary tests (considered to be the least effective activity). The low frequency of assigning weekly word lists was consistent with the results of the 1993-1994 study.

Recommendations and analysis:

- *The relationship between knowledge of word meanings and comprehension has been well documented by researchers (O'Donnell & Wood, 2004). As children begin to acquire reading fluency, the emphasis of vocabulary instruction should be on fostering conceptual vocabulary. For concept attainment to occur, students need to learn words in relation to other words. The more direct experiences that students have with words the more likely they will internalize their meanings. Vicarious experiences, such as demonstrations, simulations, dramatizations, read alouds, and visual and audio media can provide many possibilities for enriching concept attainment. Activities that stress word structure and syllabication should hold a subsidiary position to those that stress concept building (O'Donnell, 2003; Vacca & Vacca, 2005).*
- *Although most third and fifth grade teachers appreciate the value of providing instructional activities for conceptual vocabulary development, they are not stressing complimentary strategies such as brainstorming, semantic mapping and semantic feature analysis. This is particularly evident in the content areas. The data suggests that staff development programs for designing concept building activities would be profitable. The agenda should include a review of the current research as well as the design and application of classroom effective strategies for promoting concept attainment (especially association activities, semantic mapping and semantic feature analysis). These are very important tools for helping students acquire an enduring meaning vocabulary (O'Donnell, 2003; Vacca & Vacca, 2005).*

Comprehension instruction and study strategies

The grade level advisory committees were interested in cataloguing how grade 3 and 5 teachers managed comprehension instruction. There are two distinctively different teaching paradigms for promoting comprehension. The first is the teaching and modeling of strategies, a “constructivist” or “process” approach that has been widely supported in the professional literature and research (Vacca & Vacca, 2005). The other involves isolating and teaching specific comprehension “skills,” that once mastered are presumed to result in improved comprehension. Given these possibilities, slightly over half of the teachers choose a “constructivist” view of comprehension instruction (top-down framework). Slightly less than half reported that they teach “comprehension skills” to their students systematically. This conclusion assumes that teachers understood the difference between the two paradigms and were not equating “skills instruction” with the “process” approach.

The next series of questions inquired about the use of specific practices for fostering comprehension. The analysis began with widely recommended prereading activities. Over 80% of the teachers helped their students activate their prior knowledge by previewing their texts with them before reading. This activity was followed in frequency by the use of the KWL technique (What do I already know? What do I hope to learn? and What have I learned?) Graphic organizers were widely used at both grade levels. An effective and motivating exercise for preparing students for reading is the use of anticipation guides.

These were used by less than 20% of the teachers.

An unexpected finding was the limited use of the directed reading-thinking activity (DRTA). Historically the (DRTA) has been considered the hallmark of an effective reading lesson by guiding students through all phases of the reading process. The (DRTA) was the least used comprehension activity.

The use of “think alouds,” that is, the conscious teacher-modeling of cognitive strategies before, during and after reading has gained wide acceptance during the last decade. Approximately 60% of the third grade teachers and nearly 70% of the fifth grade teachers employed this strategy to help their students acquire specific comprehension strategies to deal with challenging texts. Although these results were encouraging, a significant number of teachers still do not share their cognition with their students.

The next part of the survey examined comprehension activities that teachers used to follow up reading. Teachers were asked about their use of discussion webs (a graphic aid that presents a central issue or question about the reading in which pairs of students work together to supply supporting and opposing points of view). This activity makes it possible for all members of the class to have an opportunity to participate in class discussions. Less than 30% of the teachers use this comprehension strategy. Although every professional text importunes teachers to systematically demonstrate effective questioning strategies for their students, only 25% of the third grade teachers and 50% of the fifth grade teachers modeled questioning strategies for their students.

Recommendations and analysis:

- *The National Reading Panel's (2002) description of reading comprehension clearly underscores the constructivist nature of the process, "...comprehension is an active process that requires an intentional and thoughtful interaction between the reader and the text. The better equipped teachers are to develop and apply reading comprehension strategies to enhance understanding is intimately linked to students' achievement in this area." The teacher's role in guiding the process is critical and involves activating students' prior knowledge, helping them connect new information to the known and building a conceptual vocabulary (Anderson, Hiebert, & Wilkinson, 1985).*
- *The directed reading-thinking activity (DRTA) consists of four steps and naturally adapts to content area reading assignments (activate prior knowledge, predict what will be covered in the text, read the text and confirm, revise and elaborate predictions with information from the text (Alvermann and Phelps, 2002). It is a highly effective strategy that should be used frequently by third and fifth grade teachers for helping students comprehend their texts. It invites many creative adaptations for enabling students to generate predications and activate their prior knowledge before they engage challenging reading.*

- *The teacher's role in helping students construct meanings from text occurs through many follow-up activities. Student discussion webs and questioning techniques should be used more extensively to promote comprehension. There are many ways discussion webs can help students respond to their reading. Good questions help students trigger inquiry and elaborate understanding. Questioning strategies like the Question-answer relationship (QAR) enable students to create coherent frameworks for ideas in their texts (O'Donnell & Wood, 2004; Raphael, 1987).*

Technology

One noticeable change in literacy instruction over the decade has been the inclusion of technology. Third and fifth grade teachers were asked how they used technology in the classroom. First grade teachers were not included since their primary concern is working with emergent and initial readers.

The first question asked teachers how often students were using technology in their classrooms. Over 60% of the respondents said students used technology on a weekly basis. Two areas surfaced as being very prominent: www guided research and word processing. Fifty percent of the third grade teachers reported that students are using technology for educational games and 45% use other software programs. At the fifth grade level, 66% used technology to publish student work and 45% for power point presentations. Other questions explored the use of electronic books, e-mail/discussion boards, and electronic portfolios. These categories received only minute responses. The computer was used frequently by only 30% of the teachers in the earlier study.

Recommendations and analysis:

- *Teachers need to acquire "digital literacy" to maximize the use of computer resources in the classroom. They need training beyond word processing in order to evaluate, plan, manage, and integrate the various multimedia applications available for instruction. Because teachers are lacking this background, and there are not enough computers available in many schools, this resource is not being utilized to its full potential. (Glister, 1997)*

VI. SUMMARY AND TRENDS OVER THE DECADE

Background information

- Three samples of 125 teachers in grades 1, 3 and 5 were randomly drawn from the Maine State Department of Education School Statistics Data for inclusion in the study. Two hundred and sixty teachers participated, resulting in an average return rate of 69%.

In 1994 – The sample return rate was less, approximately a 40% return.

- The data showed that Maine teachers have considerable teaching experience, with over 80% exceeding 6 years. Nearly 76% reported that they have 10 or more years of experience.

In 1994 – The first grade teachers were the less senior group. Otherwise, no significant changes were observed between the experience of grade 3 and grade 5 teachers.

- The academic preparation of teachers tend to be consistent across the grade levels. Approximately 30% of the teachers have masters' degrees. Fewer than 10% did graduate work in literacy.

In 1994 – The number of first grade and third teachers who had masters' degrees was approximately 10% less. The percentage of graduate degrees held by fifth grade teachers has remained the same over the decade (30%).

Organizing for instruction

- Most teachers have well stocked classroom libraries. Ninety percent of first and third grade teachers have at least 300 books in their classrooms, with 45% reporting over 500 books. Fifth grade teachers have slightly smaller library collections, with 75% reporting 300 books and 35% over 500 books.

In 1994 – The size of classroom libraries was the same. Most teachers had at least 200 books, with many having collections well over 300 books. Also, many teachers supplemented their libraries with their own books.

- Classroom libraries are not consistently organized in any one way. Across the grade levels, near equal numbers of teachers organize their libraries by book level, by author or by category/subject.

In 1994 – Generally, books were simply located in a “library area.” Teachers did not report on how books were organized and classified. Children spent considerable time reading every day in the library center.

- Teachers are offering students at least 20 minutes to read silently every day. Thirty percent of the third and fifth grade teachers are allowing at least 30 minutes a day.

In 1994 – The results remained the same over the decade. Teachers were giving students at least 20 minutes a day to read silently. A significant number of teachers were allowing slightly more time for SSR.

- Many teachers are reading aloud to their students. Reading aloud time has dropped slightly as grade levels increase.

In 1994 – Most of the teachers reported that they read aloud to their students. Nearly 70% said they read every day in the presence of their students.

- The older the students, the less time they are given time to write. While 80% of first grade teachers allow their students to write daily, that percentage drops precipitously to 45% in grade three, and to 27% in grade five.

In 1994 – Students at all grade levels were spending 15 to 30 minutes a day writing independently. They allotted more time for writing than teachers in the current survey.

- When asked how much time students are actually reading during a reading lesson, between 40 and 50% of the teachers report that students spend less than 50% of their instructional time reading.

In 1994 – All the grade level teachers reported that the “mainstay” of their reading and writing instruction involved seatwork activities and instructing small groups of children. Most reported that actual reading time was evenly distributed between time spent working with reading groups, workbook (seatwork) and follow-up activities. This reflects the same balance as in the current study.

- About half of the third and fifth grade teachers report that their students spend an equal amount of time reading orally and silently.

In 1994 – Both third and fifth grade teachers emphasized oral reading over silent reading. Only 9% said that time for oral and silent reading was balanced.

- Teachers using basal readers devote considerably more time during their reading lessons assigning workbook activities. The amount of workbook time varies among the three grade levels.

In 1994 – Teachers using basal readers allotted much time to workbook activities across the grades.

- Predictably, running records are used by 95% of the first grade teachers and much less by third grade teachers.

In 1994 – Most teachers used portfolios for establishing reading needs. Over 70% of the teachers scheduled conferences to augment their informal observations.

- The *Developmental Reading Assessment* (DRA) is widely used by all teachers. However, there was a slight drop in the fifth grade.

In 1994 – Use of the (DRA) was not reported.

- The traditional mainstay of reading assessment, the informal reading inventory, continues to be used by many teachers at all grade levels.

In 1994 – There has been little change in the use of the informal reading inventory. Slightly more teachers were using the IRI, however.

- Information from “previous teachers” continues to be a basic source of data used by teachers to plan instruction.

In 1994 – Reliance on this source of assessment information remained unchanged.

- The influence of the *Maine Learning Results* (MLR) on literacy instruction appears to increase by grade level. Teacher opinions about the value of this assessment are very pronounced ranging from “very much” to “little impact.”

In 1994 – Maine Learning Results were not used.

- Since most schools mandate the use of standardized tests, teachers were asked how they affected their literacy instruction. Only 15% of the grade one teachers, 20% of the grade three teachers and 28% of the grade five teachers said that standardized tests yield positive information for planning their literacy instruction.

In 1994 – More teachers (50%) relied on standardized tests to guide their instruction.

- The needs of struggling readers are met largely in the classroom. Others receive additional help from specialists outside of the classroom, and some students are assisted through a collaborative effort between classroom teachers and reading specialists. Phonics approaches dominate the kind of instruction that most teachers use.

In 1994 – struggling readers were referred to as students in need of “corrective” reading instruction. Most teachers reported that they were involved in their assessment and continuing program development. However, approximately half felt they needed more support for assisting these students in their classrooms.

Instruction

- Two statements representing “cognitive” and “behavioral” orientations were used to assess teacher philosophies of literacy instruction. Slightly over 50% of the teachers implicate a cognitive view of literacy instruction (top-down framework). These teachers would most likely be advocates of literature-based reading programs. Approximately 40% of the teachers subscribe to a skills-based orientation (bottom-up framework) for teaching literacy.

In 1994 – Less than 15% of the teachers approached literacy instruction as the acquisition of skills. The current survey suggests that there has been a significant shift away from emphasis on cognitive (process) to more linear orientations (product) for teaching word identification strategies (phonics and word structure).

- Eighty percent of the first grade teachers are using guided reading with leveled texts as their primary instructional approach for teaching reading. This is followed by shared reading; however, it is only considered a “primary approach” for 20% of the teachers.

In 1994 – Sixty five percent of the teachers used shared reading “frequently” and 50% devoted more than 20% of their instructional time to this approach.

- It is significant that the number of first grade teachers using basal reader programs has dropped precipitously, now less than 10%. Very few first grade teachers report using core books or literature circles.

In 1994 – Approximately half of the first grade teachers were using basal reader programs.

- Although not by the same margin as first grade teachers, a majority of third grade teachers use guided reading with leveled texts as their primary instructional approach for reading. The reading workshop is used by 23% of these teachers.

In 1994 – Less than 14% of the third grade teachers were using the reading workshop.

- Less than 25% of the third grade teachers use basal readers. Approximately 90% of the teachers did not use the teacher's manual explicitly to guide their instruction. In addition, 100% of the teachers supplement their basal reader instruction with other children's literature.

In 1994 – Forty percent of the teachers reported basal readers. Nearly half of the teachers enriched their lessons with children's literature.

- The primary instructional approaches for teaching reading in fifth grade are evenly divided between the reading workshop and literature circles. The data also shows a "runner-up" split between guided reading and core books. The teachers make much use of leveled books. A much smaller group of teachers (10%), use basal readers.

In 1994 – Basal readers were used by 30% more of the fifth grade teachers.

- Most of the teachers across the grades surveyed are using writing process.

In 1994 – When teachers were asked how familiar they were with the research on the writing process, over half said they were "very familiar" and 40% said they were "somewhat familiar."

- Over 92% of the first grade teachers allow their students to use invented spelling approximations to support their initial writing efforts. This practice is to be applauded for teachers are demonstrating that writing is developmental and that children need many opportunities to experiment with writing.

In 1994 – Invented spelling was actively promoted and portfolios of students' writing were maintained. Teachers placed very little emphasis on the traditional aspects of writing instruction including practice with letter formation and penmanship.

- Most of the teachers are modeling writing strategies for their students and not using commercial writing programs.

In 1994 – Not as many teachers were modeling the writing process. They did not use commercial writing programs.

- Approximately 65% of third grade teachers and 47% of the fifth grade teachers are using their own writing to demonstrate writing process.

In 1994 – Most of teachers reported spending time writing in the presence of their students, varying from 20 minutes in grade one to 10 minutes every day in grade five.

Reading/Writing Connections

- Questions about genre writing that were included are creative writing and prompt writing. The difference between these two genres is barely discernable.

In 1994 – Several questions attempted to determine the mix of writing products such as personal narratives, informational fiction/fantasy and poetry in grades 3 and 5. The teacher responses were quite consistent and suggested a fairly good balance among these genres. Creative writing received the most emphasis. Prompt writing was not assessed.

- In addition to the assortment of writing types, third and fifth grade teachers are encouraging their students to make the reading/writing connection in a variety of ways. In fact, prompt writing receives the most emphasis with over 90% of the teachers using this teacher-directed writing. It is surprising, however, that teachers are not using dialogue journals, double entry journals or learning logs to help their students connect to texts.

In 1994 – Writing to learn and writing to demonstrate learning was not reported. Most of the teachers reported using commercial materials as a follow-up to reading in the content areas.

Spelling

- None of the teachers report using commercial spelling programs.

In 1994 – Over half of the third and fifth grade teachers were using commercial spelling programs.

- It appears that more first grade teachers handle spelling within the editing component of writing process than do third or fifth grade teachers. In fact, over half of the third and fifth grade teachers rely on weekly word lists and quizzes. It is interesting to note that although first grade teachers manage spelling within writing process, 40% are giving weekly spelling tests.

In 1994 – First grade teachers did not use weekly spelling tests, but rather individualized and integrated spelling with writing. A very small number of grade 3 and 5 teachers followed a similar approach.

Vocabulary development and concept attainment

- We might infer that teachers do more “incidental teaching” of new words as the need arises. The research supports this practice. Most teachers emphasize teaching new words in the context of what is being studied. Very few teachers used weekly vocabulary tests.

In 1994 – The majority of teachers integrated vocabulary instruction with literature and reading in the content areas. A very small number presented vocabulary through basal readers. Teachers did not use weekly vocabulary word lists.

- The majority of teachers cite concept building as their major goal with vocabulary development, however, concept-building strategies appear to be given much less emphasis than more traditional exercises.

In 1994 – Teachers acknowledged the importance of concept building but did little to systematically promote the process.

Comprehension instruction and study strategies

- Third and fifth grade teachers are divided between two schools for teaching comprehension, “process” and “product.” The former reports teaching “comprehension skills” to their students systematically.

In 1994 – Most third grade teachers (98%) equated comprehension as the ability to decode words accurately and fluently. Most fifth grade teachers said that comprehension was an active, constructive process and occurs when readers are able to combine information from the text with their prior knowledge (92%). Both of these statements implied a process orientation.

- Over 80% of the teachers help their students activate prior knowledge by previewing their texts with them. This activity is followed in frequency by the use of the KWL. Graphic organizers are widely used by teachers

In 1994 – Both third and fifth grade teachers underscored the value of building background knowledge and establishing purposes for reading. Both groups stressed teaching new words, providing questions for students to answer and modeling reading activities.

- Historically, the directed-thinking activity (DRTA) has been considered the hallmark of an effective reading lesson by guiding students through all phases of the reading process. However, the data revealed that the (DRTA) is the least used comprehension activity.
- The use of “think alouds,” the conscious teacher-modeling of cognitive strategies before, during and after reading has gained wide acceptance during the last decade. This is a popular strategy among third and fifth grade teachers to promote metacognition.

In 1994 – Although only a small number of third grade teachers gave much attention to study competencies, most opted for modeling strategies rather than teaching skills. Nearly 31% of the fifth grade teachers gave much emphasis to teaching study strategies. However, over 50% of these teachers said they emphasized teaching comprehension skills.

- Although the professional literature importunes teachers to systematically demonstrate questioning strategies for their students, only 25% of the third grade teachers and 50% of the fifth grade teachers model questioning strategies for their students.

In 1994 – Students were assigned questions as follow-up for their reading of content texts. Teachers did not model questioning strategies.

Technology

- Over 60% of the respondents said students use technology on a weekly basis. Two areas surfaced as being very prominent: www. guided research and word processing.

In 1994 – The majority of teachers reported one computer available. Approximately 30% used the computer frequently, and 20% said rarely or never.

VII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The methods used to obtain and analyze the data have a bearing on interpretations of the study.

- The areas covered were limited. Obviously, the total gamut of literacy instruction could not be assessed because of the breadth of the topic; there were no opportunities for respondents to write comments.
- The interpretation of questions probed considerable expertise in literacy. They were constructed by teachers with this background. The analysis of the data presumed that the respondents understood the questions.
- Many of the questions used in the 2004-2005 replication were taken from the 1993-94 survey; however, many alterations and additions were necessary in order to incorporate trends in literacy instruction during the past decade.
- The sum of the percentages for each item is not necessarily 100 percent. Some teachers did not respond to certain items, and in some instances their answers were not placed in the correct space.
- A total of 450 teachers were randomly selected for the study. An email letter was sent to each school principal explaining the purpose of the survey and requesting participation. Four hundred and fifty questionnaires were distributed to the three groups of teachers. The average return rate was approximately 69 percent.

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