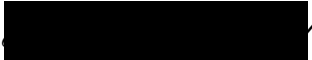



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The Impact of Transformational Leadership on Writing Across the Curriculum

by

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ABSTRACT

This research study examined the relationship between school leadership style and the use of writing across the curriculum (WAC) in secondary classrooms. Writing practices and the use of writing as a form of assessment in subject areas other than ELA is thought to be a way to better prepare students to meet the literacy expectations of the 21st century. For writing practices to be integrated across the curriculum in secondary environments, school leadership support is essential. This study aimed to answer the following questions: How can school leaders in secondary educational settings support writing across the curriculum? What are the effects of writing on content area knowledge when used as a learning strategy in content areas across the curriculum? In secondary educational settings, is there a difference in how middle and high schools use WAC?

This study used a qualitative case study analysis in the form of an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interview to gather data on school leadership style and the use of WAC. The participants are all from one district consisting of three middle schools and three high schools in a rural community in the Southeastern region of South Carolina. The data collected from this comparative-case study is comprised of data collected from administrators, instructional coaches, and teacher leaders. The data was evaluated, cataloged, and categorized to identify common terms and themes using grounded theory. Using a constant comparative method, the data was continually assessed which resulted in the identification of four clear factors in which the results are organized. Findings from this study provide information on the unique relationship between leadership and a teachers' viewpoints and use of WAC practices.

CHAPTER 1. PROBLEM AND SIGNIFICANCE

This study evaluates the impact of school leadership on writing across the curriculum (WAC) practices in the secondary classroom. There is ample research that evaluates the qualities of effective school leaders; there is also ample research evaluating the effectiveness of writing across the curriculum practices (Balgopal, et al., 2018; Bingham, et al., 2018; Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016; Burns, 2012; Corcoran, 2017; McCleod, 2023). Both research focuses have been linked either indirectly or directly to student achievement (Dutta & Sahney, 2016; Lochmiller & Cunningham, 2016).

School leaders are indirectly linked to student achievement in that leadership has a significant impact on teacher effectiveness, and teacher effectiveness greatly impacts student achievement (Boberg & Bourgeois, p. 357). Writing practices, including WAC, are directly linked to student success in both content knowledge and improved writing (Childs, 2020, p.44). Therefore, it is important to understand what school leaders can do to support WAC in all classrooms as it can positively impact student preparedness and growth.

While existing literature offers valuable insight into leadership support of instructional practices and WAC, there is a need for additional research on how school leaders can best support WAC in secondary classroom environments. School leadership often has a great influence on instructional practices within a school, so understanding leadership style is important to understanding why and how teachers use WAC within their secondary classrooms (Mallillin, et al., 2023, p. 709).

If WAC has significant benefits on student achievement and can support 21st century literacy skills that students need for success, then it is important to understand how leaders can support this instructional practice within middle and high schools. Likewise, it is equally

important to understand secondary leaders' viewpoints on writing and both the concerns and benefits of implementing WAC. In addition to understanding school leaders' viewpoints, it is important to identify the supports teachers need to fully implement WAC.

Background of Problem

The function of leadership in education has been a focal point of research in recent years due to the growing demands and expectations school leaders face (Airola, et al., 2014; Alam & Ahmad, 2017; Raza & Sikandar, 2018). Leadership, especially regarding school administrators, has become such a complex position that requires many unique qualities for schools to be successful (Huguet, 2017, p. 97). Educational leaders must approach their work using a multiframe lens, meaning, they must be able to make decisions with several frameworks in mind including structural, human resource, political, and symbolic (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Huguet, 2017; Mallillin, 2023). After all, "Leaders fail when they take too narrow a view. Unless they can think flexibly and see organizations from multiple angles, they will be unable to deal with the full range of issues they inevitably encounter" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 540). Educational administrators must be multifaceted and have strong leadership ability as there is now so much to consider when leading an educational organization (Huguet, 2017, p. 97).

Principals, in particular, are responsible for so many facets of a school including making building decisions, hiring new staff and teachers, making logistical decisions, organizing professional development opportunities, making instructional and curricular decisions, and building relationships with staff, teachers, students, parents, and the community (Alam & Ahmad, 2017, p. 384). Until recently, studies have not evaluated how principal preparatory programs have influenced the capabilities of school administrators to lead effectively (Corcoran,

2017, p. 771). This consideration is important because the leadership style of principals has significant impacts on school culture and the instructional practices used by teachers (p. 770). If schools are going to continue to improve and produce students who have the skills and knowledge to meet global standards, school leaders must support teachers and instructional practices which will foster student success.

Transformational Leadership

In addition to having the ability to view situations and make decisions using all four frameworks, literature has indicated that the most successful school administrators are described as transformational leaders (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016; Burns, 2012; Raza & Sikandar, 2018). Transformational leaders are those who are engaged in what they do and focus not only on the management of an organization but on their relationships, team building, and the desire to motivate and inspire others (p. 26). Burns (2012) states, “The result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents” (Burns, 2012, p. 26) Administrators who can identify as transformational leaders are not only improving their own leadership skills, but they are building a community of school leaders (Mallillin, 2023, p. 710).

Transformational leaders in educational settings use an integrated lens that “combines the monitoring of instructional practices with the desire to increase the capacity and commitment of teachers” (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016, p. 359 as cited in Kruger et al., 2007; Marks and Printy, 2003; Robinson et al., 2008). By providing support and increasing a teacher’s commitment, school leaders create an environment that has positive impacts on school culture, teacher morale, and student achievement.

Specifically, administrators who lean toward transformational leadership practices are getting the appropriate training that allows them to have a strong sense of self efficacy (Scheerens, 2012, p. 137). They can learn and build an understanding of curricular needs, communicate effectively, support teacher leaders and other integral systems within the school, and make changes if something is not working (p. 137). Such leaders are not passively monitoring a school and managing a building, but they are working directly with teachers and curriculum (Airola, et al., 2014, p. 757).

Research has described principals that lead using an integrated transformational approach as being able to increase teacher accountability and effectiveness “as teachers appear more likely to participate in decision making and professional development activities and try new teaching strategies” (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016, p. 361). This is necessary because oftentimes, school administrators can not accomplish on their own what may be accomplished through strong teacher leaders. This is often referred to as *distributive research* and has been found to be beneficial in creating strong teacher leaders and enhanced student achievement (Raza & Sikandar, 2018, p. 74).

Additionally, an effective school principal must be able to lead with conviction while at the same time supporting and working with others in the organization to form highly motivated teams (Burns, 2012, p. 53). Even though many studies have shown that the relationship between principal effectiveness and student achievement is indirect, being sensitive to social collaboration and teacher motivation is the important factor that links the two (Airola, et al., 2014, p. 559). Teacher motivation and effectiveness have been shown to be strongly influenced by the leadership style of the principal (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016, p. 358). Consequently, teacher

motivation and effectiveness are what often dictate student engagement and achievement (Dutta & Sahney, 2016, p. 942).

Studies have shown that “school leaders may be able to improve student engagement and thus achievement by building stronger relationships with high-efficacy teachers” (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016, p. 362). This results in improved student success and schools that can meet district and state achievement goals. Principals who motivate and support their teachers will in turn have teachers who motivate and support their students, resulting in higher achievement. This reciprocal dynamic also fosters the idea that teachers who are indeed motivated and feel supported by their school leadership will be much more willing to embrace new practices within the classroom.

Understanding school administrators as transformational leaders who must not only develop their teachers as leaders but also be skilled in understanding curriculum and best practices for students to achieve at the highest level possible is necessary if educational organizations are to thrive (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016, p. 358). A primary function of school administrators is their ability to support student success. One way to do this is to look at progressive strategies that support teachers, which in turn, fosters students’ academic progress (p. 360). This is based on prior research claims that “school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning” (Dutta & Sahney, 2016, p. 941). Student achievement is paramount to evaluating school and district success; therefore, having strong leaders is essential to ensuring that classroom teachers are using effective instructional practices that result in student learning and growth.

Collective Leadership

Transformational leadership often incorporates collective or distributive leadership in which the talents and skills of individuals help to bring about change and meet the goals that have been set forth (Alsaedi, 2022, p. 1). One of the reasons collective leadership is important in 21st century educational organizations is because like administrators, teachers have also been inundated with many tasks that make their jobs more stressful. Collective leadership offers a way to help teachers feel valued and respected, which helps to build morale and a positive school culture (p. 1).

Collective leadership is also very useful for educational leaders who are already inundated with a variety of expectations that continue to evolve and change because it allows leaders to allocate tasks and lessen their burdens. Collective leadership asserts that it “accelerates good work without using up the leader” (Eckart & Morgan, 2023, p. 1). With all the growing demands and pressure placed on school leaders, it is important that potential burnout is avoided. This is why it is important that leaders can distribute responsibility and build strong teams. Such leaders will be more likely to increase the longevity in which they hold their leadership position.

Burns (2012) describes the relationship of one in power engaging in a way with others to raise the potential of both the leader and the follower as transforming leadership (p. 57). This is an essential idea in collective leadership as it allows the one in a position of leadership to teach skills and foster growth to others who may in turn grow in their own leadership abilities (Burns, 2012, p. 58). When school leaders take this approach, they ensure that they themselves are becoming a stronger, more diverse leader, but they also empower teachers to become leaders as well. When members within an organization feel empowered, the organization is likely to be much stronger and more resilient (p. 58). This positive dynamic among school leaders and

teachers will positively influence instruction resulting in high expectations and rigorous learning environments.

Writing Initiatives

Moving into the 21st century not only brings about the need for leaders to evolve and change, but educational programs and instructional practices must also improve. Many studies have indicated that students are not adequately prepared for college and beyond, particularly when it comes to writing (Dana & Phillips, 2011, p. 16). Students must be able to have the necessary writing skills and adapt those skills to use in specific content area writing. This requires that students be exposed to different types of writing in many different subject areas as soon as possible (Bingham, et al., 2018, p. 602).

A promising initiative that is growing in popularity is Writing Across the Curriculum. WAC creates situations where students can write for a variety of purposes in many different settings. This practice initiates a unique learning experience for students where writing is used to deepen understanding of content while simultaneously offering more opportunities to practice and improve writing skills. Such practices are sure to have a positive impact on student achievement and better prepare students to meet the demands of the 21st century.

Writing Across the Curriculum

One of the best ways for students to connect with and monitor their awareness of a topic is through writing. Writing allows students to view information and connect it to their own cultural awareness or understanding, which reinforces the overall learning of a concept or content (Balgopal, et al., 2018; McCleod, 2023). WAC strategies are not only beneficial for elementary students but have been proven to help older students improve their writing skills

and build understanding in various content areas in primary, secondary, undergraduate, and higher education (Balgopal, et al., 2018, p. 445).

WAC has a range of positive outcomes to fuel student learning. Specifically, WAC “has been used to support the development of scientific argumentation, metacognition, and conceptual understanding by students” (Marks & Lu, 2022, p. 1). Students at any age or stage of development must be able to think critically, evaluate their own learning, and clarify understanding. Scaffolded writing practices have been shown to incorporate all three of these important aspects of learning (Childs, 2020; Chmarkh, 2021; Galbraith, 2015). Since the ability to write is essential for most careers, students must meet grade-level writing expectations to ensure future success.

Through writing, students build cognitive skills, synthesize information for long term memory, and make important connections (Balgopal, et al., 2018, p. 451). Additionally, writing creates opportunities for students to form a deeper connection with the content being studied and offers a means for students to evaluate their own understanding of the topics and concepts being learned (Keyaalp, et al., 2022, p. 324). Also, using appropriate writing strategies in many subject areas has been shown to be beneficial at strengthening student engagement and promoting thinking (Klein & Boscolo, 2016, p. 336).

Not only can WAC help students build content area knowledge and improve their writing skills, but studies have also shown that these practices enhance vocabulary in speaking, reading, and writing (Clark, et al., 2020; Liebenburg, 2016; Marks & Lu, 2022). The development of vocabulary is essential as students’ progress through school and into focused fields of study (Capin, et al., 2021, p. 1144). Therefore, students need to read a multitude of texts from many different genres and begin to use the content area vocabulary in their own writing (Bråten, et al.,

2013, p. 322). This will ensure that students are exposed to new words, building an understanding of content area knowledge, and using new vocabulary to make concrete learning connections and enhance their writing ability (Capin, et al., 2021, p. 1147).

To address learning deficiencies in writing, programs like WAC were instituted offering various strategies that have grown in popularity over the past few decades (Holmes, 2015, p. 80). Studies have shown that WAC is successful because its practice supports the teachings of sociocultural theorists, like Lev Vygotsky, in that students become more immersed in content and learn more when they can interact socially with the material (Salkind, 2004, p. 277). When students write, they can connect knowledge to the world around them and the world in which they understand. Making these connections encourages thinking and solidifies understanding.

Vygotsky believed that learning and social development are related and therefore take place at the same time affirming that “knowledge and learning are socially constructed within groups of individuals using cultural experiences, artifacts, and tools” (Clark, et al., 2020, p. 568). When considering writing, Vygotsky believed that “humans master themselves from the outside – through psychological tools” (Vygotskiï, & Kozulin, 1986, p. 26). This means that students do much of their learning through social means, and only after they have socially interacted with information will they begin to internalize learning.

Vygotsky (1986) also realized that thought and speech are intricately connected and that creating one’s inner dialogue is crucial to understanding ideas and concrete learning (Vygotskiï, & Kozulin, 1986, p. 35). Many students undergo this process of transforming what is learned socially to inner dialogue through writing (Marks & Lu, 2022, p. 4). Vygotsky’s (1986) theory offers another compelling reason why WAC is effective and should be practiced in more school

districts. If student achievement and higher test scores are important, then writing practices should be used frequently and in many content areas to build engagement and fuel learning.

Contemporary learning requires new strategies to ensure that students have the literacy skills needed to be successful. Studies have indicated that this requires literacy standards, especially writing, to be addressed in all content areas and not just in language arts (Bingham, et al., 2018; Newell, et al., 2011; Van Dijk, et al., 2022). Using WAC strategies allows all content area teachers, no matter the level taught, to incorporate writing into their teaching for the benefit of students (Balgopal, et al., 2018, p. 446). Although this may not be easy for all educators, having forward thinking, supportive administrators can help schools promote literacy initiatives and use writing to improve student achievement (Airola, et al., 2014, p. 559).

Integrating Leadership and Writing Initiatives

Administrators often decide what goals or areas of focus their school will prioritize, and they are also tasked with offering professional development to teachers to meet the goals they have set forth. Therefore, when considering initiatives that promote writing in all content areas, school leaders who set goals, offer training, and provide ongoing guidance will likely get more teachers to take the initiative seriously. This will lead to improvements of writing skills of their students and overall achievement (Mallillin, et al., 2023, p. 717).

Many teachers are required to use teaching practices that align with district or school norms. But when it comes to writing instruction, some do not know how to integrate writing standards and practices into their area of expertise (Lacina & Block, 2012; Lillge, 2012; Nicholson, et al., 2016). If a district or school has not made writing instruction a priority, then many teachers in subjects outside of language arts may not be using writing strategies to build content knowledge and deepen learning. If school leaders support an initiative and expect their

teachers to adopt new strategies, they must make this clear and offer the support necessary so that teachers have the skills and knowledge to carry out the initiative.

Since the Common Core initiative became widespread in the subject areas of reading and math around 2010, many states have begun to prioritize literacy and updated their state learning standards and objectives to reflect this (Greer, 2018, p. 101). Due to expanded literacy expectations in schools, modern day leaders in education must have the tools and self-efficacy to help create and support 21st century curriculum and teaching practices within their schools (Airola, et al., 2014). This is necessary to ensure that students are meeting literacy goals tied to updated state standards and to make sure that all students have the writing skills necessary to build concrete, lasting knowledge.

Oftentimes, it is assumed that the leadership of a school is responsible for students' achievement; therefore, administrators must have good working relationships with their teachers and have a strong understanding of the curriculum being taught (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016, p. 357). To improve writing skills and meet literacy requirements for all students, educational leaders must evaluate and adopt research-based literacy practices and provide training for their teachers on how to implement writing strategies (Lillge, 2012, p. 3). WAC initiatives already offer many writing strategies that can be used effectively in various content areas (Van Dijk, et al., 2022, p. 3).

Working with their teachers, school principals can evaluate these strategies and find ways to implement them into the various classroom content areas. Understanding the relationship among school leaders, teacher needs, and instructional practices provides valuable insight into how schools can improve instruction and help students succeed. To help understand these dynamics, this study will examine how 21st century school leaders support writing strategies like

WAC, teacher's understanding and use of writing practices in content areas other than language arts, and if there is a difference in how middle schools view and use writing as compared to high schools.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory supports WAC initiatives in that it is important to have a “reciprocal interaction between behavior, environment, and personal factors contribute to the sense of efficacy and/or agency that one experiences” (Airola, et al., 2014, p. 559). Through writing, students can interact with any content area or topic and solidify social learning by connecting with it on an individual level and a social level (Goldman, 2012, p. 89). Through writing activities, students can process information and organize it in a way that builds on their own connection with the topic at hand (Newell, et al., 2011, p. 279).

Social cognitive theory also supports the transformational leadership framework (Airola, et al., 2014, p. 555). Social cognitive theory for transformational leadership can be described best by Vygotsky's theory that children achieve more and progress at higher rates when adults offer logic and reasoning (Vygotskiï & Kozulin, 1986, p. 35). Leaders must have knowledge of the various curriculum taught in their school and understand the importance of writing in all content areas if students are to truly benefit from WAC. Through communication and understanding the importance of connections, not only with other people but also with the content one is learning, social cognitive theory supports the inner workings among school leadership, leader efficacy, teacher motivation, teacher efficacy, student engagement, and student achievement.

Statement of Problem

Historically, K-12 students' literacy skills are not sufficient to prepare students for college and beyond (Jani & Mellinger, 2015, p. 136). In one recent study it was determined that while students are still in elementary school, gaps in writing skills tend to increase (Kim, et al., 2021, p. 1936). Due to ongoing literacy gaps that are difficult to close "efforts to help all students meet college and career readiness standards should begin in the elementary grades" (p. 1936). School leaders and teachers need to take steps to remedy this problem by supporting and using proven literacy methods to improve students' overall writing skills for a multitude of writing genres (Jani & Mellinger, 2015, p. 137).

Due to constraints of both confidence and time, many teachers may not adopt literacy standards to support student learning on their own. Therefore, administrators and other school leaders must pursue school-wide writing initiatives and support such initiatives by working with teachers on pedagogy and instructional practices in addition to providing professional development to train teachers when necessary (Mallillin, et al., 2023, p. 709). This is especially important for teachers who teach content areas other than language arts because many teachers preparatory programs have not emphasized writing. Therefore, some teachers are not familiar with how to embed writing activities and practices into their content area (Wahleithner, 2018, p. 2).

High quality training not only shows teachers that leadership supports the use of writing to assess students, but it provides important professional development that builds teacher efficacy (Wahleithner, 2018, p. 12). By offering such training, teachers are more likely to understand the benefits of using WAC to increase students' content area knowledge and strengthen learning.

Teachers want students to learn, so being armed with new ways to make instruction more effective will have a positive impact on both teachers and students (p. 12).

This study evaluates three components of writing across the curriculum. First, it will provide information on how administrators and school leaders can support WAC practices. Second, it will determine whether writing is used and to what extent in content areas other than language arts. Third, it will analyze how WAC is used at the middle school level compared to at the high school level. This is important because of the nationwide instructional shift that promotes strategies and assessments that align with state standardized testing rather than alternatives like WAC which encourage holistic learning on a deeper, more meaningful level (Nielsen, 2021, p. 754). In fact, students who learn a variety of subject area content through writing seem to have a deeper and more authentic understanding of the material studied (p. 70).

In a study done by Cavdar & Doe (2012), evidence reveals that supporting the use of WAC practices will positively impact student achievement in a variety of content areas, which will in turn, improve students' standardized test scores because it enhances overall reading and writing performance. This is important to note when so many educational programs are focused on improving student success on standardized tests. Perhaps a shift toward programs that offer strategies that promote engagement and deeper thinking will better prepare students for their future while at the same time providing the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful on standardized tests.

Significance of Study

Research surrounding transformational leadership as well as collective leadership styles in education and their indirect impact on student achievement have become important as schools seek ways to create positive environments that improve student achievement (Burns, 2012;

Mallillin, et al., 2023; Raza & Sikandar, 2018). There is a large body of research on WAC and its direct impact on cognitive learning of specific content area (Holmes, 2015; Klein, 2015; Strohmaier, et al., 2018). However, there is a need for more studies on the relationship among leadership styles, WAC practices, and the impacts on student achievement. This research study connects these focuses by determining how leadership can support a teacher's willingness to use progressive teaching strategies, such as WAC. After all, teaching to a test may have short-term positive outcomes, but it likely will not prepare students to be college and career ready (Cavdar & Doe, 2012, p. 298).

Therefore, administrators must support teachers in using teaching strategies that build content area knowledge while at the same time creating deep understanding that remains long term. Of the practices that claim to do this and prepare students to have the 21st century literacy skills they need, WAC is regarded highly (Childs, 2020; Chmarkh, 2021; Van Dijk, et al., 2022). Implementing writing into curriculum that does not traditionally teach writing skills or use writing to assess student knowledge is a large shift in practice that requires training for teachers used to only focusing on their area of expertise (Van Dijk, et al., 2022, p. 6).

Such endeavors require the support of transformational leaders who understand the need to work with teachers to make curriculum decisions, provide necessary training and professional development opportunities to assist teachers with change, and support teacher leaders to help guide and support others in teaching practices and goals (Lochmiller & Cunningham, 2019, p. 1219). This will ensure that all stakeholders benefit from necessary change including universities and the workforce that see the need for improved literacy skills, K-12 teachers and administrators who can promote this change through collaboration and a shared vision, and the

students who will benefit and realize success when they have the skills necessary to prepare them for their future.

Overview of Research Design

This research study used a comparative case study analysis and grounded theory to explore how school leadership style supports teachers' viewpoints and willingness to use WAC practices in content areas outside of language arts. Data was collected from open-ended survey questions and semi-structured interviews of secondary school leaders. Participants in the study included school administrators, curriculum coaches or advisors, and teacher leaders working with both middle school and high school students.

This case study is a comparative case study as it collected data from multiple participants within each group (administrators, instructional coaches, and teacher leaders) but sought to make a comparison of educational leaders working with middle school students as compared to leaders working with high school students regarding their viewpoints on leadership support of instructional practices and WAC. This study was conducted in a small district located in Southeastern United States.

This district was chosen because it typically has high student achievement regarding state standardized testing and therefore, the district is very test-driven (Name omitted due to blind review, n.d.). When standardized test scores are high, it can be difficult to elicit changes in teaching pedagogy even when supported by the district. This district is taking steps to improve collaboration through ongoing efforts to create high functioning PLC and embed and improve literacy in all content areas (Name omitted due to blind review, n.d.).

Therefore, the timing of this study is ideal because it has been able to gauge where the district currently stands regarding the use of WAC and the potential impacts of literacy initiatives

throughout the district. Additionally, this study focuses on the perspectives of secondary educators because typically at the primary level, there is not as much of a focus on specific content areas. In secondary educational settings, content area is a primary focus which can make it more difficult to introduce writing practices into teacher pedagogy (Wilcox, et al., 2014, p. 168).

Potential participants were identified using staff directories, web site information, and administration recommendations. This district does not use department chairs, and instead has unofficial team leaders who are considered the teacher leaders in their content area. To identify teacher leaders, a list of potential teacher leaders and the content area areas in which each teacher taught was compiled. The first question on the Google Form survey was a multiple-choice question that determined whether the potential participant considered him or herself a leader. If the potential participant responded no, the survey was complete and no additional information was collected. If the potential participant answered yes, the survey continued with open-ended questions and a consent form. Once surveys were completed, they were analyzed for trends and themes among the responses from the participants at the middle school level and participants at the high school level.

The purpose of this study was to better understand the relationship between educational leaders and literacy practices in both middle and high school settings; therefore, when the potential respondent did not identify him or herself as a leader, the survey ended, and no further participation was necessary. The rest of the questions in the survey all focus on leadership involvement with curriculum, leadership support of modern curriculum practices like WAC, leadership's understanding of literacy and how it impacts students' achievement, and the willingness of teachers to engage in literacy practices. Some specific examples of the questions

used in the survey include: What types of writing are used in classrooms outside of ELA content area? How do school leaders support the use of writing in all content areas? The full list of questions included in this survey can be found in Appendix A. As trends and themes were revealed, they were cataloged and organized.

Likewise, the semi-structured interview questions that were used asked participants about their thoughts on leadership support of writing, current student writing, their experience using writing in the classroom, and their understanding of how to incorporate writing into more secondary classrooms. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interview, participants were able to offer insight and elaborations that provided more detailed perspectives and experiences. It also offered me the opportunity to ask clarifying questions when necessary to ensure accurate data was collected.

This study sets out to assess if school leaders who support writing across the curriculum help create classroom environments that are literacy rich and foster broader content knowledge. If teachers feel validated and supported by their school leaders when using new instructional approaches like WAC, there is an assumption that more teachers will use such pedagogical approaches more often. A widespread use of WAC could lead to more rigor in the classroom, improvement in 21st century writing skills, and increased student achievement.

The research questions being addressed focus specifically on how school leadership supports writing initiatives within the school, how content area teachers outside of language arts view and use writing to support learning in their classrooms, and how WAC is being used in the middle school setting versus the high school setting. By investigating these focus areas, it will allow for a broader understanding of what leadership support looks like and how WAC is currently being used in secondary settings. A better understanding of these elements may provide

insightful information that could be used in both leadership and teacher preparatory programs that would offer specific methods and tools to ensure WAC is being practiced in effective ways.

Clarification of Terms

Several terms within this study are primarily used in educational settings. **Efficacy** refers to confidence, comfort level, and feeling of competency one feels when actively participating in a task (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013, p. 137). For content area teachers who don't typically teach literacy standards, it is important that they are trained to feel more comfortable and build efficacy when teaching literacy standards (p. 138). **Literacy** instruction refers to any instruction that includes literacy activities such as journal writing, information logs, lab reports, and reflective, informational, expository, and argumentative essays (Childs, 2020, p. 44). To improve student's literacy skills, literacy instruction must be a part of all content area areas (p. 44).

There are several important literacy methods discussed in research and one is referred to as **low stakes writing**. This is when teachers use numerous smaller writing assignments completed over longer periods of time that do not hold significant weight value on their own but offer a way for students to receive ongoing feedback for overall writing improvement (Grimm, 2015, p. 79). Many content area areas such as science and social studies have found low stakes writing effective for improving content area knowledge and improving literacy skills (p. 79). Using such literacy practices will likely impact pedagogy which is the teaching style one adopts and uses to provide instruction to students. This is often unique to each individual teacher (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013, p. 137).

Student **motivation** is an important factor that contributes to a student's willingness to participate in educational activities and build knowledge (Amhed, et al., 2021, p. 290). This is an important factor when promoting student achievement. Student **achievement** is the accumulation

of skills and knowledge for students to successfully move onto the next level in social and cognitive development (Alam & Ahmad, 2017, p. 384). Schools today are consistently seeking ways to improve achievement levels (p. 384).

Writing to learn (WTL) is a literacy practice that promotes exploratory, retrospective, and reflective learning where students test their understanding at the same time as they are processing learned information and developing literacies relative to the language and content area areas (Chmarkh, 2021, p. 85). WTL is like **writing across the curriculum** (*WAC*) in which literacy practices focus on reflection, foster learner autonomy, and support the transfer of writing skills in areas of study that are not literacy based (Nielsen, 2021, p. 753). Both practices have gained momentum in recent years and have shown to be effective (Chmarkh, 2021, p. 85). However, implementing WTL requires some changes in the way content area is taught and without the support of school leaders, some change can be difficult (Raza & Sikandar, 2018, p. 86).

Both writing practices gained popularity shortly after the widespread adoption of **Common Core** around 2010. **Common Core State Standards (CCSS)** place a heavy emphasis on math and literacy (Greer, 2018, p. 100). Many schools realized students were lacking in the literacy skills required to meet these standards and therefore had to find programs to help students improve (p. 110). Not only did many students need to improve in literacy to meet these new standards, but not all teachers were equipped to teach content area through a literacy framework (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013; Lilge, 2012; Morabito, 2017). To train teachers, most schools provide **Professional Development** which is training organized and provided by the school district (Lilge, 2012, p. 1).

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

Both leadership and the importance of writing instruction are important to educational studies due to their impacts on student achievement. Leadership can no longer be easily defined, particularly when considering educational leadership due to the broad range of expectations and responsibilities an educational leader must embody (Airola, et al., 2014; Corcoran, 2017; Huguet, 2017). This is like writing instruction, which can no longer be an expectation only in language arts classes but must be taught in all subject areas if students are to be proficient in disciplinary writing as well as college and career literacy expectations (Goldman, 2012, p. 105). While both leadership and writing instruction are the focus of many studies, there are a limited number of studies that evaluate how leadership style impacts a teacher's willingness to use writing across the curriculum.

A goal of this literature review is to provide an overview of what is required of 21st century educational leaders, specifically what one would consider a transformative leader who maintains collective leadership practices, and how such leaders impact the use of writing in the classroom (Burns, 2012; Mallillin, 2023). In addition to providing an overview of literature on transformational leadership in education and the collective leadership framework, there is also an extensive overview of WAC practices. These two topics are closely related in that diverse and progressive teaching practices are linked to teachers' positive experiences with school leaders and school culture (Alam & Ahmad, 2017, p. 393). Since this study looked specifically at the link between school leadership and WAC practices, it also outlined the supporting theoretical framework of transformational leadership theory, the collective leadership framework, and the role of writing in both cognitive and social development. Understanding the relationship among

these educational areas provides important insight into how to improve student achievement in writing.

Content in Leadership

As requirements for 21st century students become increasingly apparent, schools are inundated with educational reforms and initiatives to improve student achievement. Many initiatives, such as WAC, will not be successful unless implemented with the support of strong leadership (Alam & Ahmad, 2017, p. 393). This requires school leaders to have the necessary skills to ensure that students are being taught effectively through best practices and provide a range of content areas necessary for future success (Raza & Sikandar, 2018, p. 86). Research has stated that one common factor in effective schools is that the principal or head of the school has knowledge and a vested interest in curriculum and instruction (Airola, et al., 2014; Dutta & Sahney, 2016; Raza & Sikandar, 2018).

Currently, leaders in education have varying abilities to effectively lead schools which has created a focus on school administration preparatory programs (Corcoran, 2017, p. 770). Evaluating such programs is important if school leaders are to have the multitude of leadership skills needed to successfully lead a school (Airola, et al., 2014, p. 554). Administrators, who are considered good school leaders, are self-efficacious in addition to using contemporary administrative approaches in their leadership roles, which produces effective schools (p. 554). In considering all the research on educational leadership, specifically transformational leadership theory, the focus of this study is to assess if school leaders who support writing across the curriculum create classroom environments that foster broader content area knowledge.

In searching for literature on educational leadership and how it impacts writing initiatives, there were very few studies that evaluated both. However, there are several studies on

transformational leadership and its indirect impact on student achievement (Alam & Ahmad, 2017; Huguet, 2017). Likewise, there is an abundance of literature on the impacts of using writing in the classroom, many centered around initiatives like WAC (Galbraith, 2015; Childs, 2020).

The goal of WAC is expanding writing practices to be used in all content areas (Childs, 2020, p. 44). The hope is that when doing this, it will improve students' overall writing while at the same time helping students process new information, analyze material for deeper understanding, and make connections between what is learned and their own prior knowledge (p. 44). Successfully implementing such writing initiatives requires time, dedication, and the support of leadership, such as a principal, who is knowledgeable of the content areas being taught, helps make curriculum decisions for the school, and understands the importance of WAC (p. 44).

Transformational and Collective Leadership

A major argument in education today is that students are not prepared and do not have all the skills needed for success in the 21st century (Nuckles, et al. 2020, p. 1089). To correct this, many look to educational leaders to find ways to improve student achievement (Alam & Ahmad, 2017, p. 383). There is a key understanding in this study that "leadership plays a vital role in crafting and designing a quality education system and thereby influencing student learning and the perceived outcomes" (Alam & Ahmad, 2017, p. 383). Effective school leadership requires dedication, efficacy, trust, and an intentional effort to foster leadership in others, but it must also include the ability to successfully implement school-wide initiatives and influence teachers to embrace and use new instructional practices to support student learning (Huguet, 2017, p. 97).

Many studies have prefaced that the leadership style used within an organization has a significant impact on the school's overall performance (Alam & Ahmad, 2017; Lochmiller &

Cunningham, 2019; Malillin, et al., 2023, p. 709). For this reason, evaluating the leadership style and effectiveness of school leaders is necessary to better understand how leadership influences positive change. One descriptive research study on educational leadership described the traits and self-efficacy characteristics of effective school administrators stating that “school principals must have a strong sense of self efficacy and a commitment to the practice of transformational leadership” (Airola, et al., 2014, p. 559). Transformational leadership is a leadership practice that has increasingly shown up in literature as a style that has proven effective in educational systems.

Boberg and Bourgeois (2016) describe the transformational leadership lens as one that “combines the monitoring of instructional practices with the desire to increase the capacity and commitment of teachers” (p. 359). The authors evaluate the research being done on understanding what is required of school administrators to create an effective learning environment and what mediators or factors need to be in place to create such an environment (p. 358). A significant role of school leaders is having knowledge of curriculum and being willing to acquire the necessary resources to aid in all student learning, including the learning of underachieving students (Huguet, 2017, p. 98). Huguet (2017) contends that school leaders must also hire the best they can find and institute a culture of trust and collaboration if changes are to occur (p. 99).

Research in the field of education often points out that there is a very strong correlation among school leadership practices, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement (Lockmiller & Cunningham, 2019, p. 1219). Dutta & Sahney’s (2016) study evaluates factors that influence student achievement. The finding of this study reveals how instructional leaders, learning communities, and extra responsibilities placed on teachers impact the achievement of students (p.

942). Understanding how such educational topics are interrelated provides valuable insight when considering how to successfully instill curricular changes.

One research article stated that “school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning” (Dutta & Sahney, 2016, p. 941). Alam and Ahmad (2017) state that, “Leadership plays a vital role in crafting and designing a quality education system and thereby influencing student learning and the perceived outcomes” (p. 383). Similarly, Boberg and Bourgeois’s (2016) article describes the actions of transformational leaders and how such actions affect teachers and other variables that in turn affect students' learning and achievement (p. 360). Clearly, if WAC is to become a widespread practice in schools, transformation leaders must be in place to instill this change.

Results of the studies referenced above contribute to the body of research on the topic of transformational leadership style on different aspects of a learning community (Dutta & Sahney; Alam & Ahmad; Boberg & Bourgeois). They reiterate the importance of school leaders having a broad spectrum of skills and talents to operate and effectively lead a school where student learning is both a priority and success (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016, p. 368). They also make it clear that to influence teaching practices, school leaders must adopt transformational leadership practices.

Developing Teachers Through Collective Leadership

School administrators must also have knowledge on how to distinguish and develop teacher leaders in the building and thereby create a culture of collaboration (Huguet, 2017, p. 99). Distributive or collective leadership and the investment in teacher leaders are a crucial component to good leadership. Both Huguet (2017) and Boberg and Bourgeois (2016) discuss in

their literature that school administrators do not impact student learning directly, but typically have an impact on students learning based on how they work with and motivate teachers.

This link between school administrators and student achievement is often indirect, as leadership has a powerful impact on school culture, teacher commitment, and overall classroom practices; but it is these factors that do have an impact on student achievement (Dutta & Sahney, 2016, p. 942). Therefore, to foster a school environment that produces high levels of academic achievement, school leaders must foster a positive school climate and create positive and impactful relationships with classroom teachers (p. 942). These positive relationships and sense of teamwork must also incorporate a focus on supporting and sustaining teacher leaders.

In evaluating specific leadership qualities to see how such qualities impact school climate, teacher satisfaction, and student achievement, Dutta and Sahney (2016) used a two-phase study which involved random sampling of teachers and principals in secondary schools (p. 946). This study found a strong correlation between teacher satisfaction with their school leaders and student achievement (p. 951). This study also noted that when leaders provide the necessary resources, focus on smaller class sizes, and provide worthwhile professional development, teachers are happier, feel appreciated, and therefore have a strong and impactful commitment to student learning (p. 952).

Ideas of what it means to be an educational leader have changed over time. Contemporary notions have transformed the definition of educational leaders from being strictly an authoritative figure to instead being a figure who mentors, develops, instructs, and influences others within an organization (Nicholson, et al., 2016, p. 30). Developing teacher leadership in schools requires “support for collaboration, partnership, and collective decision making” (p. 31 as cited in Grant, 2006). Teacher leaders are working alongside other teachers to co-create and

develop instructional methods and create both formative and summative assessments. Therefore, it is important that teacher leaders understand the benefits of literacy, in particular writing, and influence such practices within their school.

Improved Student Achievement

Studies have indicated that by supporting teacher leaders in the classroom, the quality of instruction is better resulting in higher student achievement (Huguet, 2017; Alam & Ahmad, 2017; Lochmiller & Cunningham, 2019, p. 1219). Even regarding specific content areas, research such as Lochmiller and Cunningham's (2019) study on the impacts of leadership on math and science instruction reveal that leadership support is necessary to instill change. When leaders support strong curricular programs, the teaching practices within their schools are positively impacted, and this leads to effective instructional practices and more student learning (p. 1223).

Many strategies and an understanding of how writing can be utilized in all content areas is required to be a leader who can effectively promote writing initiatives. It is believed that "leaders' contribution to school success deals with proper utilization of strategies to analyze the challenges and mindset of the framework pedagogy in the approach of school educational leadership and management practices" (Mallillin, et al., 2023, p. 709). Leadership and school success is a process, so educational leaders need to be proactive and intentional in their efforts to consistently improve the educational programs within their schools (p. 709).

School leaders must use a framework that incorporates transformational leadership theory in an intentional effort to develop teacher leaders, thus supporting the impact teacher leaders have on teaching pedagogy, student achievement, and adopting newer approaches to teaching.

The use of progressive pedagogical approaches such as WAC, meets the needs of 21st century learning and improves students' writing skills, better preparing students for college and beyond.

Considerations When Adopting Writing Across the Curriculum

One of the biggest challenges schools face when embedding writing into all content areas, particularly for secondary level teachers, is ensuring that all teachers have the tools necessary to provide writing instruction along with their content area focus. Teaching writing can be a daunting task. Many educators who are not trained in teaching literacy struggle with self-efficacy when teaching and using writing as either formative or summative assessments in their classrooms (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013, p. 137). This is when it becomes necessary for impactful school leaders to develop and support teacher leaders who can provide encouragement and support for other teachers. This is especially important when influencing teachers to step outside of their comfort zone and learn new content area or try new pedagogical approaches.

With the turn of the 21st century and later with Common Core Curriculum, writing proficiency became a widespread focus for many educators (Lacina & Block, 2012, p. 10). Still today, students entering colleges and universities with the inability to write well is an ongoing problem both in the United States and abroad (p. 10). To address this issue, the way writing in primary and secondary education is taught has continued to evolve so that students are better prepared for college and beyond. One major barrier in effective writing instruction is teacher efficacy regarding non-literacy teachers' comfort level with teaching and incorporating writing instruction.

Implementing Writing Across the Curriculum

Literature reveals that there are several reasons for the hesitation of non-literacy teachers incorporating writing into instruction (Lilge, 2012; Morabito, 2017). One is that teacher

preparatory programs often fail to prepare new teachers to develop their own writing skills let alone teach students writing. Even teachers planning to teach literacy courses receive very little instruction on how to teach writing (Wahleitherner, 2018, p. 3). Wahleitherner's (2018) study addresses the lack of instruction and knowledge provided to teachers to teach literacy standards.

Findings from this study further indicate the need to improve teacher preparatory programs in this regard (Wahleitherner, 2018, p. 3). If teachers are going to gain the complex knowledge necessary to teach writing and be able to balance that with the primary content they teach, instructional policies must be adapted to include instruction on how to teach students writing at various stages of development. This should include how to teach writing mechanics as well as how to choose culturally diverse and interesting topics to use with the content area being taught (p. 5).

It is necessary to look at various ways to improve the teaching of writing across the curriculum to better prepare students for the writing expectations that will be required as they progress through school and beyond (Marks, et al., 2022, p. 1). The use of technology has helped exponentially in this endeavor as technology has provided more opportunities and platforms for students to write, collaborate, and receive feedback on many diverse topics (Lacina & Block, 2012, p. 10). While this is helpful, studies have also shown that to fully embed writing instruction into all classes, schools must address the way teachers feel about writing and their confidence in the ability to teach and assess writing (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013; Lacina & Block, 2012; Wahleithner, 2018).

In educational organizations it is clear that "Professional development (PD) can foster inservice teachers' writing proficiency within a comprehensive writing program, which will in turn improve students' writing achievements across content area areas such as math, science,

social studies, and geography” (p. 138 as cited in Wood & Lieberman, 2000). As noted, PD offers an avenue for schools to increase and improve the teaching of writing in subjects outside of ELA. When teachers are trained and feel comfortable with a teaching strategy, they are more likely to use it proficiently (Lilge, 2012, p. 3).

Obstacles Associated with WAC

To meet new writing standards adopted during the adoption of Common Core in the United States, conversations about improving reading and writing became especially important (Lilge, 2012, p. 3). To make writing more widespread and used in all content areas, educators evaluated some of the obstacles they face when trying to embed writing into their curriculum (p. 1). In secondary schools, some of these obstacles included that many teachers are content area expertise but not necessarily trained in providing literacy instruction and there is limited time already and writing would take up even more time (p. 2).

In her research article, Bifuh-Ambe (2013) delves into the importance of teachers’ perceptions of themselves as writers and teachers of writers. In addition to some educators struggling with the ability to teach writing, as the research states, many do not feel they have the time to focus on writing, especially when test scores are emphasized above all else (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013, p. 138). One way to address both issues is to ensure that teachers receive ample professional development that emphasizes writing instruction.

It has also been noted that WAC can be challenging to implement correctly because it is so versatile, and the way it is used can look very different in various content areas as well as from district to district (Holmes, 2015, p. 80). In looking at WAC trends, Holmes (2015) found that even in higher education, it can be difficult to assess which WAC practices are best because the uses vary from program to program and require a lot of collaboration among departments,

which can be difficult especially in higher education (p. 82). Despite some of the difficulties and obstacles expanding the writing curriculum has faced, much research continues to be evaluated and done on WAC.

One of the problems with writing in curriculum is that it can be difficult to get students to take writing seriously, particularly if they have no or little interest in the content being studied (Childs, 2020, p. 45). Teachers must counteract this by ensuring that writing tasks are well planned and use an appropriate writing genre for a specific purpose (p. 45). Research on WAC addresses this idea and explains that while writing offers versatility, it must be used for specific purposes and students must receive feedback for writing to allow for enriched topic knowledge, make deeper connections, and enhance literacy skills (p. 44).

Why WAC is Necessary

Recent updates to state learning standards have embedded writing practices into all content areas to increase the amount of time students spend writing throughout their school day. These changes are a result of studies such as John Hattie's (2008) Barometer of Influence meta-analysis. This study reviews the impact of quality teaching and what instructional practices are most impactful on student learning (Hattie, 2008, p. 115). Based on his theory, writing as a formative assessment measure is extremely high on the impact scale and greatly influences student learning in a positive way (p. 142).

This further supports the idea that when choosing what to spend valuable class time on, writing will likely fuel student learning more than other activities (Hattie, 2008, p. 142). Since time is very valuable to most educators, understanding what will be most impactful on student achievement is highly important. American education is at a critical point where shortcomings

must be addressed, and changes must occur to prepare students to be competitive in a modern, global society.

To meet 21st century educational success, students must improve their ability to write for various purposes. Many schools across the United States and globally have begun to adopt initiatives like WAC because it “transforms instruction across subjects and grows a students’ literacy skill” (Childs, 2020, p. 44). This allows students to meet the fundamental principles of initiatives like Common Core in that “students will be career and college ready when they are able to enact core writing standards with independence across and within content area areas” (Lilge, 2012, p. 5). Developing literacy skills in students ensures that as we progress into the 21st century, students will have the foundational knowledge they need for success (Chmarkh, 2021, p. 85).

Originally, WAC focused on how the practice of writing and how it helps students master content (Galbraith, 2015, p. 216). There has since been a slight shift in that focus to how the writing process supports processing skills and what types of writing have stronger impacts on learning (p. 216). For example, some of the findings from Galbraith’s (2015) study analysis include that WAC through journal writing seems to be effective and improves reasoning skills but will not necessarily translate into better writing (p. 218). When students write argumentative pieces, the writing seems to improve thinking and can easily connect learning with their own experiences (p. 219). Another positive finding for WAC is that when students practice collaborative writing activities, they tend to transfer that experience into their individual writing (p. 219).

WAC in Elementary Curriculum

A shift in writing pedagogy and the implementation of WAC must begin early in students' learning to have the most significant impacts. Improving writing means that students must be exposed to many types of texts, including informational text, at a young age to become familiar with various text features as well as be exposed to factual, objective information (Clark, et al., 2021, p. 567). Being able to reflect and write about concepts learned from informational text, as well as fictional text, is also important (p. 568).

Even though literacy instruction remains a dominant practice in most American elementary schools, writing instruction has only recently begun to be viewed with significance (Clark, et al., 2021, p. 569). Using WAC is fitting for elementary teachers because most are trained to teach all content areas. Therefore, embedding literacy skills into content areas like social studies and science requires planning but not necessarily additional training or collaboration among colleagues.

There is ample research on the use of WAC in elementary settings, and some of this research includes studies that involve early childhood settings (Bingham, et al., 2018; Clark, 2020; Kim, et al., 2021). This is because even before students are fluent readers, writing must be introduced so that students can begin developing skills that will strengthen later reading and writing ability (Bingham, et al., 2018, p. 601). Such research highlights the importance of implementing meaningful writing opportunities into the curriculum for preschool students. This is often incorporated in play so that students can begin to develop the physical aspects of writing such as how to hold a pencil or marker correctly and mimicking the writing of letters, pictures, and even words which is believed to develop literacy skills (p. 602).

Other studies involving early literacy in kindergarten engage students in not only reading of both fiction and nonfiction works, but have students begin writing about what they have heard and experienced (Bingham, et al., 2018, p. 602). Writing with students this young typically involves practice in journal writing, responding to prompts using written expression or pictures, and creating charts and graphs while exploring a variety of concepts (Buchholz & Pyles, 2018, p. 61). Exposing students to a variety of writing at such an early stage can be extremely beneficial for future learning and builds an important foundation of writing skills.

Beyond early childhood studies, there are many studies conducted using older elementary students and looking at ways in which WAC is used. When considering specific content areas, integrating literacy instruction in science has helped students build vocabulary and subsequently become better communicators and writers (Clark, et al., 2021, p. 567). A major focus in elementary school is the building of vocabulary because it is an integral component for building on reading ability and building an understanding of the specific content areas studied (Capin, et al., 2021, p. 1143).

In finding ways to develop vocabulary for elementary students, many schools have turned to writing curriculum. Using content specific vocabulary within the broader context of writing has been shown to improve overall understanding of vocabulary and how to use it correctly in both speech and writing (Kim, et al., 2021, p. 1937). One study done with first through fourth grade students revealed that WAC not only improved vocabulary and general communication skills, but it also helped with reading comprehension and argumentative writing on topics that were focused on both science and social studies. (Kim, et al., 2021, p. 1948). In general, writing across the curriculum in elementary schools is on the rise as educational leaders and districts realize the benefits of such practices.

WAC in Secondary Curriculum

Since the onset of Common Core in 2010 when writing demands for students increased, many studies have been conducted that evaluate WAC in secondary settings (Lillge, 2012; Schmidt & Nuckles, 2012; Van Dijk, et al., 2022). Regarding writing curriculum in secondary settings, “despite an increasing awareness of the relationship between writing competence and college and career readiness, many adolescents in US schools continue to perform poorly on standardized writing evaluations” (Wilcox & Jeffery, 2014, p. 169). Therefore, many districts across the nation have sought ways to motivate and train secondary teachers to incorporate more writing practices within their content areas (Lillge, 2012, p. 3).

Research on writing in secondary instruction notes that it is not only about including more writing in diverse content areas but ensuring that there is purpose and that the writing supports goals (Waschle, et al., 2015, p. 41). However, because of the many applications that can be used when writing, there are many options for teachers when choosing what type of literacy and writing instruction will work best for their content area (Klein, 2015, p. 202). Therefore, WAC in various content areas can be used in numerous ways and in various dynamics such as individual versus collaborative, on paper versus electronic, and discipline focused or general (p. 203).

For example, in one secondary study focusing on middle school students, researchers evaluated the benefits of journal writing to help students better understand biology (Waschle, et al., 2015, p. 57). This study found that the application of journal writing, especially when prompts are used, helped students better understand complex ideas within their unit of study (p. 57). Not only has journal writing been found to be beneficial in content areas such as science, but

it can be used in mathematics as well since it helps students synthesize and better understand the processes when solving math equations (Strohmaier, et al., 2018, p. 136).

Learning journals have also been found to not only impact cognitive understanding of a topic but also help students self-regulate their learning and learn effectively and efficiently (Schmidt & Nuckles, 2012, p. 1). This is especially helpful because often “students find it difficult to see the personal utility of the content area areas discussed, especially in secondary science education” (p. 1). Within this study of secondary science, researchers found that the use of reflective writing motivation improved, which in turn, led to higher comprehension of the material (p. 8).

In addition to journal writing, other applications like argumentative writing have been evaluated for how it can be utilized both independently and collaboratively to build secondary students’ literacy skills (Strohmaier, et al., 2018, p. 138). One study that evaluated argumentative writing within a math class found that while the implementation of writing did not necessarily improve test scores, students did make significant gains in mathematical reasoning (Kiuahara, et al., 2020, p. 601). When students had to explain and justify their work, it enhanced and strengthened their reasoning skills.

Argumentative writing can also be beneficial in content areas such as social studies especially when students evaluate controversial information (Merel, et al., 2022, p. 143). Students, especially in secondary settings, must be able to evaluate real life conflicts, consider multiple perspectives, and provide possible solutions, which can all be done using argumentative essays (p. 144). In doing such writing, students often develop critical thinking skills which can be beneficial in many facets of life (p. 145).

Another study of writing in secondary settings was conducted to evaluate the impact of writing on both high achievers and low achievers. This study evaluated the effectiveness of using a variety of writing activities with students in both science and mathematics to see how it impacted overall learning (Van Dijk, et al., 2022, p. 3). This study found that regardless of the student's achievement level, process writing benefited all students in both insight and topic knowledge.

WAC in Higher Education

The use of writing in higher education has been popular for some time, but recent studies have called attention to the challenges colleges and universities are facing regarding many college freshmen having a lack of writing skills that are vital for success (Lacina, 2012; Holmes, 2015). One of the major hurdles in evaluating writing instruction in higher education is that many schools do not identify with using a particular program like WAC, and because higher education institutions have many departments, it is often difficult to collect data about the specific writing programs being used (Holmes, 2015, p. 80). However, because many fields require literacy skills, there are quite a few studies that evaluate specific content area classes in higher education and how writing is being used to prepare students for a particular career (Holmes, 2015; Graham & Harris, 2016; Nielsen, 2021).

Writing is often used as a summative assessment; however, even at the college level, students need to use writing to further their understanding of various content area studies. Several researchers have expressed that “writing has been recognized increasingly as significant and invaluable in supporting reading, subject knowledge development, and critical thinking” (Graham & Harris, 2016, p. 79). Like both elementary and secondary schools, the use of journaling or reflective writing is popular in college courses because it allows students to

synthesize and analyze what they are learning (Naber & Wyatt, 2014, p. 67). This writing strategy can be applied to all areas of study but has been found to be particularly effective in the sciences where it can sometimes be difficult for students to dive deeper into the content and form connections to what is being taught (p. 67).

In one study conducted using student participants in a science and engineering program, researchers evaluated the impact of reflective writing on understanding of content area and the ability to formulate sound arguments (Marks, et al., 2022, p. 2). Overall findings in this study reveal that when students must explain concepts in their own reflections, they do become more familiar with the content and develop fluency with content area specific vocabulary, thus helping to improve analytical and argumentative writing skills (p. 9).

In another study involving college freshmen in first-year writing courses, researchers evaluated how the use of both peer writing and self-assessment impact students' overall writing performance (Nielsen, 2021, p. 754). This study recognized that for lower achieving college students such methods seem to work better than for higher achieving students (p. 754). Results of the study showed that while students' motivation was a factor, self-assessment writing practices were favorable, and many students believed it improved their writing ability (p. 768).

Overall, programs that use disciplinary writing as a method for learning may have more success in increasing students' array of content area knowledge as well as improve authentic discourse (Balgopal, et al., 2018, p. 445). This is true for a wide range of students from elementary all the way to college students. Of the studies being conducted that evaluate WAC in educational settings, most have found that there are positive impacts on student learning.

Furthermore, specific offers of writing such as journal writing, reflective writing, and argumentative writing provide diverse ways to incorporate writing into any curriculum.

Certainly, more research is needed to pinpoint which writing practices yield the most improvement for various content areas. However, the research is clear in that using writing in the classroom creates opportunities to learn and improve regardless of the age of the students and the content area being taught (Chmarkh, et al., 2021, p. 86).

Educational Theory

One of the theories that supports WAC initiatives includes transformational leadership theory due to its focus on progressive initiatives and teamwork. Transformational leadership theory is often associated with 21st century leadership and leadership of the future. It can best be described in terms of “leadership is an influential relationship wherein leaders and followers propose real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (Rost, 1993, p. 161).

Often, transformational leaders use distributive leadership where school leaders put efforts into empowering their teachers (Lockmiller & Cunningham, 2019, p. 1219). This is important because teachers are the link between school leadership and student achievement (p. 1219). Therefore, teachers must feel supported in using 21st century teaching strategies like WAC to improve student learning and ensure that appropriate literacy standards are being met. When teachers feel supported by school leaders, they are more likely and willing to try new pedagogical approaches outside their comfort zone rather than continue using familiar teaching methods that are not meeting expectations.

Such strategies fall under the umbrella of social cognitive learning in which students learn through engaging with others and connecting their own experiences and understandings with what they are learning (Motlhaka, 2020, p. 338). Social cognitive learning lends itself to self-regulation which are vital components of increasing student engagement and achievement (Elhusseini, et al., 2022, p. 1117). Understanding how to self-regulate and cut out unnecessary

stimuli when learning is vital because such strategies can “keep students oriented toward accomplishing a set goal” (p. 1118). Self-regulation is an essential part of writing curriculum; therefore, teaching self-regulation strategies produce more learning and development.

Transformational Leadership Theory and WAC

Leadership has a powerful impact on school culture, teacher commitment, and overall classroom practices (Dutta & Sahney, 2016, p. 941). As educational reforms continue, school leaders must support teachers in using 21st century teaching practices to ensure their students have the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive in K-12 environments, college, and beyond. Studies have indicated that one way to support student learning and success is through WAC (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013; Goldman, 2012; Klein, 2015). When leaders support and empower teachers, the quality of instruction is better (Lockmiller & Cunningham, 2019, p. 1219).

Leadership Style

The style of leadership is important in any organization including education. It is important that educational leaders lead through multiple lenses, but there is growing evidence that transformational leadership is linked to school success (Mallillin, et al., 2023, p. 711). This is because transformational leaders work closely with and empower teachers to focus on instructional practices (Lochmiller & Cunningham, 2019, p. 1220). This includes offering support to teachers and encouraging instructional practices like WAC.

Leadership Skills

One important aspect of school leadership, in addition to other skills, is the ability to effectively lead in curriculum and instruction (Dutta & Sahney, 2015, p. 944). For secondary schools wanting to implement WAC to improve students’ literacy skills, having a supportive school leader who understands what it will take to implement a school-wide literacy

initiative, is vital (Alam & Ahmad, 2017, p. 383). In recent years, it has become clear in education that, “Leadership plays a vital role in crafting and designing a quality education system and thereby influencing student learning and perceived outcomes” (p. 383). Therefore, when enhancing pedagogical approaches to include a focus on writing, the support of school leaders can make or break such initiatives (Mallillin, et al., 2023, p. 709).

Supporting Writing

For those who teach English in 21st Century American schools, there is a major focus on ensuring students have 21st century writing skills as well as improving both state and national test scores in language arts (Wilcox, 2014, p. 168). To support English teachers in this endeavor, school leaders must understand the importance of writing and the time requirements necessary to provide students with appropriate feedback to improve in this area (p. 169). Leaders must also recognize that with changing instructional practices, secondary teachers may need professional development opportunities and more time to collaborate to come up with ways to address literacy issues and find practical solutions to improve writing pedagogy (BifuhAmbe, 2013, p. 137).

Supporting Change

Likewise, school leaders need to have the skills and knowledge to support school-wide writing initiatives and improve overall student achievement (Alam & Ahmad, 2017, p. 383). Even though there is not a direct relationship between instructional leadership and student achievement, school leaders greatly impact teacher commitment, and teacher commitment greatly impacts student achievement (p. 393). This indicates that when teachers’ perceptions of instructional support can directly influence student achievement (p. 394). Therefore, school leaders must have a skillset that allows them to implement steps to meet curricular goals, show

dedication efficacy in instruction, and establish a supportive culture for their teachers (Huguet, 2017, p. 97).

To improve overall literacy skills and institute WAC within a school, leaders must focus on their organization's strengths, anticipate potential problems, and work together to effectively implement something new (Lyon, et al., 2014, p. 17). School leaders must clearly define the school's goals for the new initiative, hopefully with teacher input, and then make these goals clear to all teachers within the school (Lilge, 2012, p. 1). Once goals are defined, the next step is to institute a collaborative process that includes professional development to offer clarification, garner support, and implement the new initiative (p. 2).

During this process, school leaders should identify any problems or issues and find solutions to solve these problems while still moving forward (Lilge, 2012, p. 2). Additionally, WAC does not come in the form of a specific model to follow (p. 3). Therefore, leaders must offer continuous support to teachers and keep communication open as to what is going well and what hurdles teachers are facing (p. 3). Finally, leaders need to collect data to find out if the WAC initiative is meeting the goals set forth and positively impacting students' achievement (p. 4).

Supporting Teachers

For literacy to be addressed school wide and ongoing effective writing instruction used, teachers require support from their school leaders. In addition to understanding, professional development focused on writing initiatives, and time to collaborate with peers, teachers need to be trusted to make decision and create writing curriculum that will meet the needs of their students (Siuty, et al, 2018, p. 39). Of course, this curriculum must align with state standards and

district guidelines, but even with these in mind, there are ways for teachers to add their own pedagogical approach to teaching literacy (p. 39).

Experienced teachers know and understand the scaffolding techniques necessary to help students succeed, and likewise, they understand the types of writing tasks that will promote engagement while still providing rigor (Suity, et al., p. 39). Teachers are also familiar with the skill levels of their students and know when the use of technology may assist in writing goals (p. 52).

Allowing teachers to make these important decisions is key because they know their students best and understand that students within their classroom often have varying levels of understanding and differing attitudes about writing (Suity, et al., p. 40). When working with literacy curriculum, teachers know “how to make the curriculum work best in their contexts and how to leverage it to promote individualized instruction” (p. 54). School leaders must recognize that the person who is best suited to making decisions on what and how students should learn the material is the teacher (p. 40).

Supporting Success

One of the best ways for leaders to support writing in the classroom is to put their trust and faith in the teachers they hire (Dutta & Sahney, 2015, p. 944). School leaders must also recognize that writing instruction requires community collaboration and therefore should ensure that ongoing support and monitoring of literacy practices within a school is necessary (Hinchman, 2009, p. 4). School leaders must also be willing to hire specialists, such as literacy coaches, to support teacher efforts and offer a collaboration partner when designing writing curriculum for struggling students (p. 5). If hiring is not an option, then perhaps forming literacy teams would be an alternative; a primary task of such teams may be to assess literacy resources

within the school to see if there is a need to update such resources (p. 6). Adopting and promoting a writing assessment system that will provide authentic data on students' writing performance is key when it comes to using time wisely and having authentic data to track.

Perhaps most importantly, to support teachers in increasing writing efforts, school leaders should create a culture of literacy within the school and find ways to get students excited about writing with school-wide initiatives (p. 10). Such initiatives will encourage repetition and hold students accountable for their learning. This allows teachers to focus on more growth and development in their students as writers.

Social Cognitive Theory

Another popular learning theory that is ideal in supporting WAC is cognitive theory which has long since been a consideration when conducting educational research mainly due to educational theorists like Lev Vygotsky who studied and wrote about cognitive development in the 1930s (Stoltz, 2018, p. 34). Vygotsky's theories evaluate the importance of social interactions and he stressed throughout his writing that relationships play a major role in a child's cognitive development (Clabaugh, 2010, p. 10). Vygotsky felt that for learners to find meaning in what they were learning, socialization and community connections are required (Vygotskiĭ, & Kozulin, 1986, p. 26). Vygotsky believed that "It is 'society' that allows the learner to develop cognitively through social interactions. Of course, the use of spoken and written language vastly expands the extent of that interaction" (Clabaugh, 2010, p. 10). Vygotsky's theory of social learning continues to be relevant today as educational reforms seek to move education in the direction of being student centered, collaborative, and rich in literacy.

Vygotsky is regarded as a foundational theorist in both psychology and educational research. His ideas on the relationship between social interaction and language processing are

still relevant today (Smagorinsky, 2011, p. 115). Vygotsky believed that to learn from writing, the writing must involve “a cultural understanding of the practices and routines that provide the behavioral norms, orientations to social institutions, notions of appropriate behavior in academic settings, religious beliefs, and other factors that these new demographics bring to school settings” (p. 115).

When students can place learning in a context familiar to them, they will better understand the material and be able to deepen their understanding through writing (p. 116). This explains why WAC is such a powerful tool as it helps students deepen their understanding of the content area being taught. Vygotsky’s theories regarding literacy explained that word meaning is the construct that develops one’s thinking and experience (p. 119). Therefore, for student learning to take place and writing to be effective, socialization, communication, and internalization are necessary (p. 130).

Social Cognitive Theory and WAC

The WAC movement embodies social cognitive theory as a cornerstone for literacy success. For writing to truly be effective, it must trigger cognitive processes and be assigned with a specific, intended goal for learning (Arnold, et al., 2017, p. 115). Social cognitive processes occur when students use writing to connect with the world around them and their unique experiences. Findings from this study reveal that students whose task was to write an essay response had better recall of the content area than students who simply highlighted and took notes (p. 124). Because writing an essay required students to synthesize the information, more cognitive learning transpired for the students in this group (p. 124). This idea holds true for any writing students do; deeper understanding and learning will occur when students feel connected to what they are studying.

Social cognitive theory gained momentum as writing and other literacy skills became a focus for ensuring students have the necessary tools to be successful (Hodges, 2017, p. 141). When considered under the umbrella of social cognitive theory, writing is not just something a student must learn and master but a means to develop a deeper understanding of all content (p. 141). When students are writing to learn, they are extending their understanding and connecting learning with their own experiences and their understanding of language, thus contributing to motivation and engagement (p. 141). Additionally, 21st century educators have found ways to change writing from being an independent practice to one that invites collaboration and communication (p. 141).

Foundations of Methodology

To study educational topics like leadership and WAC, collecting quantitative data is best because it provides evidence that offers an in-depth understanding of relationships and phenomena. Quantitative research has long been used as the main method for research studies; however, when considering social research, qualitative case studies have become increasingly popular (Priya, 202, p. 2). The expansion of qualitative research “has resulted in a pragmatic, flexible research approach, capable of providing comprehensive in-depth understanding of a diverse range of issues across a number of disciplines” (Harrison, et al., 2017, p. 1). Qualitative research studies are especially useful when studying education because they offer in-depth study with flexibility in data collection methods (Priya, 2021, p. 2).

History of Qualitative Case Studies

Qualitative case studies are said to date back to the beginning of the 19th century when they were used frequently to study social sciences, especially anthropology (Harrison, et al., 2017, p. 1). These early research designs allowed anthropologists and sociologists to study

human culture in an authentic setting eliciting research data that was descriptive and narrative (Harrison, et al., 2017, p. 2). Due to the nature of qualitative research data, it was heavily scrutinized throughout the early 20th century by academics who believed it was not as valid and reliable as quantitative research (Harrison, et al., 2017, p. 3). However, it gained popularity in the 1960's when theorists Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed grounded theory which offered a systematic and more reliable approach for analyzing qualitative data (Harrison, et al., 2017, p. 3). Since that time, it has become popular again due to the development and understanding of ethical practices in research (Alpi & Evans, 2019, p. 2).

Case study is not limited to ethnographic studies but includes many different types such as: intrinsic, instrumental, revelatory, theoretical, etc. (Alpi & Evans, 2019, p. 3). It is because of these many approaches to case study research that it now is a popular methodology for research studies (Yin, 2013, p. 321). Case studies allow researchers to reveal specific and complex circumstances and study it in an authentic way (Yin, 2013, p. 321). This includes relationships among different variables such as leadership style, teaching practices, and student achievement.

Over the past few decades, qualitative case studies have been used more and more in social sciences, education, and even medicine. For educational purposes, case studies are appropriate and useful because they explore many perspectives of educational teaching and learning practices (Laux, 2021, p. 3972). As educational reforms continue to impact educators and change the landscape of teaching, such studies are invaluable for figuring out what works in education and what needs to be improved upon.

Modern Approaches to Qualitative Case Studies

Due to strengthening validity measures, qualitative case studies provide a contemporary approach to research. Modern day case studies seek to examine causes and relationships while

providing unique and important information that can be interpreted and validated using various methods (Yin, 2013, p. 322). Case studies are also beneficial because they can provide multiple perspectives of a single topic, which is often insightful when studying societal systems and social interactions (Vilbas & King-Sears, 2021, p. 875). This makes case studies particularly useful in education as it allows researchers to evaluate and provide insight into many educational practices and pedagogy (Yin, 2013, p. 322). Currently, the use of qualitative case studies is found in a wide array of research studies from many fields and on various topics.

In one modern study using qualitative case study, researchers evaluated the current curriculum of public-school pre-k programs, which were new to public schools in the 1960's but have expanded dramatically in recent years (Castner, et al., 2021, p. 1050). The case study method appealed to these researchers because they could evaluate an educational process in detail, but it also allowed them to offer critiques of certain practices (p. 1050). Also, new to education are STEM programs which offer an integrated approach to study science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (Laux, 2021, p. 3972). Like many educational models, STEM models are not always carried out exactly as the creator intended and districts and schools have used the model in diverse ways (p. 3972). Therefore, case studies are necessary to evaluate the different perspectives of administrators and teachers regarding STEM education to evaluate which implementations are yielding the most success (p. 3984).

STEM, WTL, and WAC models are new to education and deserve attention and further study. When considering WAC, formulaic writing is no longer acceptable if students are to have the literacy skills needed for success (Liebenberg, 2016, p. 1). Qualitative case studies are often used to evaluate writing strategies in education, and researchers like Liebenberg (2016) use such studies to describe strategies like active reading, active writing, and WAC and offer suggestions

to teach strong literacy practices in K-12 schools (p. 4). Qualitative case study models are important to fields like education because in addition to informing on trends, such research can also provide suggestions and recommendations (p. 5).

Modern qualitative case studies have also been utilized to assess the increasing use of technology, not only in schools but in other organizations as well. In one such study, researchers evaluated online learning and how this impacts how writing is taught to students (Andriani, et al., 2022, p. 88). Findings from this qualitative study provided teachers with specific tools they could use to ensure better, higher quality writing from their students working online (p. 89). For teachers navigating this new mode of teaching, research to evaluate the best methods and practices that yield the most success is extremely valuable.

Another modern qualitative case study that successfully offers important data is a study that evaluated the ethical considerations of the use of technology in at-home medical care. This allowed researchers to work closely with families in their own homes and gather a multitude of themes that related to their study (Kennedy, et al., 2021, p. 2). Again, the use of technology to provide faster and easier medical care is new, so having methods to provide in-depth and authentic studies of technological uses and impacts of technology are necessary. As society continues to expand technological uses, understanding its impact in areas such as education and healthcare is important (p. 6).

These recent qualitative studies and many others provide evidence of why qualitative research is important and useful. For studies that examine educational practices, qualitative data can allow researchers to evaluate practices and gather information from multiple perspectives that is pertinent to understanding educational systems. Qualitative data can involve layers of

information about topics like leadership and writing and reveal important topics and themes offer valuable insight for the advancement of curriculum.

Summary

Antiquated systems of thinking existed far too long in education. Cultural and societal shifts, advancements in technology, and a new array of job opportunities have demanded educational reform. Slowly but surely changes have taken place, particularly in the way educational organizations function, the role of school leadership, the way student learning is viewed, pedagogical practices, and teacher preparatory programs.

Often, many components in education must interconnect to function efficiently; this is true of school leadership and curriculum practices (Dutta & Sahney, 2016, p. 942). Current studies have revealed the impact transformational leadership can have on school environments, and teacher effectiveness (Alam & Ahmad, 2017; Dutta & Sahney, 2016; Mallillin, et al., 2023). This is key as teacher effectiveness directly impacts student achievement, and student achievement is what is primarily used to assess and rate schools (Alam & Ahmad, 2017; Huguet, 2017; Raza & Sikandar, 2018).

As society progresses, it is important that students are prepared for the modern-day work force and therefore need to acquire 21st century skills, especially when it comes to writing as it is a key component to most fields of study (Dana & Phillips, 2011; Ivanova, 2020). As teachers have searched for new teaching practices to enhance literacy skills, WAC has become increasingly popular. However, many teachers, especially those who do not teach a literacy subject, struggle to insert writing standards into their curriculum and need the support of school leaders to ensure that literacy is being taught in all areas of study (Klein, 2015; Mallillin, et al., 2023; Newell, et al., 2011).

Having strong, impactful school leaders is key to developing and strengthening curricular programs and practices. School leaders and teachers working together effectively will ensure that students have the opportunity and instruction to improve their writing skills. Improved writing skills will better prepare students for college and the job market.

Many researchers have devoted studies to evaluate both effective leadership styles and effective literacy practices (Airola, et al., 2014; Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016; Childs, 2020; Galbraith, 2015). Theories that fall in line with much of the research being done on school leadership and literacy practices include transformational leadership theory and social cognitive learning theory (Lilge, 2012; Shah, 2019; Raza & Sikandar, 2018). Many of these research studies have used qualitative case studies as this methodology offers a way to view multiple perspectives and a deeper understanding of educational topics (Priya, 2021; Yin, 2013). As educational systems continue to evolve and look for ways to improve leadership and teaching practices, continued research is needed to fully understand the direction educational systems must move to meet the demands of the 21st century.

CHAPTER 3. METHOD AND PROCEDURE

To conduct this qualitative comparative case-study analysis, many methods and procedures were considered to determine the most appropriate way to provide authentic data that builds on understanding of educational practices and contributes to existing educational research. This study focuses on the viewpoints of secondary educational leaders, so careful thought was put into potential participants that serve in leadership roles. It was also important that the data collected from this study consisted of diverse perspectives to fully understand all facets of the topics. To ensure that the study resulted in phenomena that was relevant and authentic, a constant comparative approach was used to establish the themes and factors that were presented from that data. This resulted in four unique case factors that contribute to the use of WAC and additionally compares these factors based on educational leaders working within a middle school setting to those working in a high school setting.

Study Overview

School leaders, particularly those in administrative roles, who support reading and writing across the curriculum empower teachers to integrate writing into their content areas and create classroom environments that foster broader content area knowledge. This is essential if students are to meet 21st century literacy demands. The purpose of this study was to evaluate how school leaders can support instructional practices and the use writing across the curriculum (WAC) strategies to support student learning.

Furthermore, it looked at whether there was a relationship between school leaders who use transformational leadership style and his/her support of teachers implementing WAC in their classrooms. Additionally, because this study has collected data from leaders at both the middle school level and high school level, there is potential for understanding how WAC may be viewed

and used differently in these two settings. The research questions that were used in this study are as follows:

1. How can transformational leaders support writing across the curriculum in secondary educational settings?
2. What are the effects of writing on content knowledge when used as a learning strategy in content areas outside of language arts?
3. In secondary educational settings, is there a difference in how middle and high schools use WAC?

Research Design

This study evaluated how transformational school leaders can support the use of writing practices and how WAC is currently used and viewed within secondary educational settings. First, it determined if school leaderships' support of WAC practices influence the teachers' use of this strategy. This study also determined how writing is used, viewed, and assessed in content areas outside of language arts. Third, this study evaluated middle schools may use WAC differently than high schools. The methodology used in this qualitative study consisted of a case study in which open-ended survey questions were used along with semi-structured interviews.

Using a qualitative case study approach allowed both leadership style and WAC to be studied within a school setting. Furthermore, the causal relationship between these two focuses was assessed to determine how leadership style impacts the use of writing in content areas outside of language arts. The cases that made up this study are the four factors that were identified as contributing factors to using WAC in the classroom. These factors are as follows: Leadership must support teachers' instructional practices. Writing offers many benefits. Improving student writing is a struggle. There are differing views on how to assess writing.

These cases were further investigated to compare the experiences between leaders working in middle school settings versus high school settings.

Why the Study of WAC is Important

WAC is successful because its practice supports the teachings of sociocultural theorists, like Lev Vygotsky (1982, 1984), in that students become more immersed in content and learn more when they can interact socially with the material (Salkind, 2004, p. 54). Writing allows students to view information and connect it to their own cultural awareness or understanding, which reinforces the overall learning of a concept or content area (McCleod, 2023, p. 1).

This is important because many school districts are data or test driven, so they encourage assessment methods that align with state standardized testing practices rather than alternatives like WAC which encourage holistic learning on a deeper, more meaningful level (Holmes, 2015, p. 80). Studies that provide evidence supporting using WAC practices to improve student achievement not only in specific content area, but also to improve students' standardized test scores because it improves overall reading and writing performance (Çavdar, & Doe, 2012; Klein, 2015; Strohmaier, 2018). Such research is important because it reveals that there are 21st century curriculum practices that can benefit both students' individual learning while at the same time increase students' achievement scores on state standardized tests.

Why the Study of Transformational Leadership Style is Important

There is existing research surrounding transformational leadership style in education and its indirect impact on student achievement (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016; Burns, 2012; Dutta & Sahney, 2016). Writing has been shown to have a direct impact on cognitive learning of specific content (Childs, 2020; Goldman, 2012; Holmes, 2015). This research study connects these two foci by determining how leadership impacts a teacher's willingness to use both formative and

summative writing practices in lieu of other types of assessments such as multiple-choice questions or fill in the blank. After all, teaching to a test may have short term positive outcomes, but it likely will not prepare students to be college and career ready (Galbraith, 2015, p. 219). Therefore, administrators must support teachers in using teaching strategies that build content area knowledge while at the same time creating deep understanding that remains long term (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016, p. 357).

A case study design method is best because it allows for the evaluation of the function of leadership in education, which has been a focal point of research in recent years. This is because leadership, especially regarding school administrators, has become such a complex position that requires many unique qualities for schools to be successful (Corcoran, 2017, p. 770).

Administrative school leaders must approach their work using a multi-frame lens, meaning, they must be able to make decisions with all four frameworks in mind including: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 540). After all, “Leaders fail when they take too narrow of a view. Unless they can think flexibly and see organizations from multiple angles, they will be unable to deal with the full range of issues they inevitably encounter” (p. 540).

Leading a school requires many talents, one of which must be an understanding of curriculum and how to help teachers meet the needs of students and foster student achievement. Curriculum and instructional practices are often a result of administrative leadership support, so it is imperative that teachers have school leaders who are knowledgeable and supportive of modern instructional practices. Understanding how these reciprocal relationships improve student achievement is important to ensuring that students are successful and prepared for their future.

Why the Study of How School Leaders Can Support Their Teachers is Important

For modern day educational leaders, particularly administrators, this notion is key as there is now so much to consider when leading an educational organization. Until recently, few studies have evaluated how principal preparatory programs have influenced the capabilities of school administrators to lead effectively (Corcoran, 2017, p. 770). This consideration is important because the leadership style of principals has significant impacts on school culture and the instructional practices used by teachers (p. 769).

As societal norms shift resulting in the transformation of educational expectations, those in leadership roles must demonstrate diverse abilities to effectively supervise, cultivate, coach, and motivate teachers and staff within a school (Brown, 2019, p. 8). To accomplish the monumental task of positively influencing educators and being a pillar in one's organization, school leaders must establish caring and trust, be willing to have tough conversations, strive to continue learning themselves, and be an innovative thinker (Brown, 2019, p. 9). In an educational setting, school leaders can build strong working relationships with teachers that foster growth. Such relationships are the foundation for teachers to feel supported which in turn may make them more apt to try new curricular practices such as WAC. Such practices are necessary to bridge the gap in student ability and expectation, especially when it comes to writing.

Qualitative Comparative-Case Study Method

Using a qualitative comparative-case study analysis, the present study explored the use of transformational leadership style in administrative leaders and how such leaders can support writing in content areas outside of language arts. It also allowed for a study of how middle

school teachers view or use writing in various content areas as compared to how high school teachers view or use writing.

As emphasis on writing continues to grow, it is important that studies evaluate how expanded writing practices in secondary education can be supported. Leadership and literacy practices are both important topics in 21st century teaching. Additional research studies on the relationship between transformational theory approach and WAC practices are needed.

Qualitative Study

A qualitative method was chosen because it offers ways to collect data specifically relating to the unique topic of the study (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019, p. 1). Qualitative studies have been shown to be favorable in studies evaluating a social condition because it allows researchers to “explore a social phenomenon, reveal feelings associated with the problem and understand the subjective experiences of people associated with a research problem” (Mwita, 2022, p. 619). In this case, it will provide insight into how school leaders, including administrators, instructional coaches, and teacher leaders, in secondary educational settings think about writing, what supports are necessary to encourage more writing, and what they believe are possible ways to improve students’ writing skills.

Qualitative studies are said to include three paradigms which include positivist, interpretive, and critical (Punch, 2013 as cited in Mwita, 2022). These three paradigms are described as relying on evidence and information when approaching a research study, the researcher interprets each participant's explanations and experiences, and findings from the study can sometimes address or shed light on societal issues (Mwita, 2022, p. 618). The education of students is certainly an important societal issue that requires continuous study to evolve and improve. This study seeks to make connections and build understanding of how writing is

viewed and used in secondary classrooms; thus, a qualitative study is best suited to obtain such data.

Case Study

The method of qualitative research this study uses is a case study. Case study research is defined as “an empirical inquiry which investigates a phenomenon in its real-life context” (Yin, 2009, p. 322). Qualitative case studies gained in popularity in the late 1950s after a sociologist named C. Wright Mills (1959) coined a study type called sociological imagination. This allows for a researcher to analyze individuals and their practices within a larger context of social expectation or reality, which in the case of this study, is the social context of the school environment and assumptions about the leadership style of the principal (Priya, 2021, p. 96).

Using a case study approach, I have used two methods for collecting data which include an open-ended questionnaire and a semi-structured interview (Priya, 2021, p. 98). Using an open-ended questionnaire allowed me to collect important demographic information and get a basic understanding of participants’ knowledge on WAC and school leadership. Following this with a semi-structured interview allowed me to tailor questions to fit each participant’s background, which provided more in-depth information and unique insight. The data collected from these two collection methods resulted in four factors which provide insight into the use of WAC in secondary settings.

Comparative Case-Study

A comparative case study model worked best for this study because it explored the varying experiences of middle school leaders and high school leaders. The questions in the survey and interview allow each participant to explain their experiences and philosophy regarding leadership support of curriculum, specifically writing initiatives. The data collected

identifies trends and revelations which help build an understanding of the factors being studied (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). Collective-case studies are useful because they allow for multiple perspectives on an issue (Vilbas & King-Sears, 2021, p. 874). This study collected data from participants who are all considered leaders in secondary education, but each participant has a different background, experience, and viewpoint on leadership and writing.

Benefits to Case Study Research

There are many benefits to case study research including that it allows a researcher to study the function of something and how multiple systems work together, which is sometimes referred to as sensemaking (Brown, et al., 2022, p. 545). Additionally, a collective-case study that uses relevant sampling from a representative population allows for the data findings to be applied to a larger frame (Priya, 2021, p. 97). Because I was able to obtain a variety of perspectives on my topic and create factors relating to the study topics, the data is much more reliable. Additionally, due to the range of participant's backgrounds, the data can justifiably represent a larger population, making it more authentic and an accurate depiction of the school district.

Understanding the various perspectives of educational leaders (secondary administrators, instructional coaches, and teachers) is important because it reveals diverse viewpoints on leadership and WAC. Those who are teaching students in the classroom and potentially using WAC practices have different experiences and perspectives than those in positions outside the classroom. The data collected also informs on the variations in data collected from participants at the middle school level and at the high school level. Comparative case studies use a design that “has a greater chance of weeding out data collection errors and prejudices and produces a more acceptable end result” (Priya, 2021, p. 99). For this reason, a comparative-case study design is

appropriate for this study to fully understand the varying perspectives and experiences a variety of school leaders have on administrative support and WAC practices. The combined experiences collected created four factors that come into play when considering the implementation of WAC. These four factors were then compared based on data from participants working with middle school students and those working with high school students. This comparison highlighted some of the differences in perspectives and practices between these two groups.

Collecting Data

The case study method of qualitative research was appropriate because it allowed me to collect and study data within real-world context, specifically, in the field of education (Yin, 2013). Important to the validity of case study research is the research design and questions used (Alpi & Evans, 2019, p. 2). This qualitative case study used two design forms to acquire data. The first form was an open-ended survey or questionnaire. The survey questions included one multiple choice question followed by several open-ended questions on demographics and the topic at hand. This format ensured that all participants identified themselves as school leaders and provided an opportunity for participants to elaborate on their answers if they chose to do so.

Questionnaires

The information collected presents information from multiple sources with different positions and perspectives, thus supplying a multitude of information relating to school leadership and WAC and how it relates to different content areas. Since these surveys were created using a Google Form, I was able to tailor the questions based on the participants' responses. If a potential participant answered "no" to the first question about being a school leader, the survey ended. If the potential participant answered "yes" to this question, the survey

continued. This ensured that my participants all had the necessary background that was needed for this study.

The remainder of the questions all related to how writing is used in the classroom and how the individual views the support of administrative leadership regarding the curriculum he/she teaches. Framework questions for the semi-structured interview also focus on how writing is used and administrator support. I have slightly different questions for those in teacher positions than those in other secondary education roles. This was to ensure that all questions would be applicable to the individual being interviewed. As questionnaires were completed, I had participants sign-up for an interview slot that fit their schedule. These interviews were all scheduled approximately one week after receiving the completed questionnaire and signed consent form.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The next phase of data collection consisted of a semi-structured interview. The use of semi-structured interviews in this study allowed me to “corroborate and enhance the findings” from the questionnaire. But more importantly, I was able to collect more data and build a detailed portrayal of each participants’ experiences and viewpoints. (Alpi & Evans, 2019, p. 3).

To prepare, several base questions were created to ensure that the information collected during the interviews was relevant. Before interviewing each participant, I went over their answers from the questionnaire and modified the interview questions to ensure that there was no unnecessary repetition. If an answer from the questionnaire could be supported with elaboration, I added additional questions to direct the conversation and cover those topics. This provided me with much deeper and more detailed data that could be used to help answer the three questions presented in the study.

A Variety of Perspectives

This comparative-case study analysis is comprised of participants who are considered secondary educational leaders in the district and includes school administrators, instructional coaches, and teachers who are chairs or heads of their departments. These participants represent expertise in various content areas, have varying years of experiences in education, and provide a range of perspectives important to understanding the variety and hierarchical perspectives on leadership and WAC. Due to the variety of roles in education each participant has, I was able to secure data that developed into four unique case factors that help create a better understanding of leadership support and WAC in secondary schools.

Participants' experiences and opinions established the following factors: leadership is essential when implementing new educational practices like WAC, writing is beneficial to student learning in any content area, students' current writing abilities and time constraints make the adoption of WAC difficult, and educators have diverse and strong opinions on how writing should be assessed in contents outside of language arts. These four factors offered a framework for understanding the beliefs and practices of WAC in a middle school setting as compared to a high school setting. This has enabled me to make comparisons between how leadership and WAC are viewed by middle school leaders versus high school leaders. Understanding how different settings impact WAC provides important educational research that can be used to better understand and improve the ways in which writing can lead to higher student achievement.

Setting

This study was conducted in a small district located in the Southeastern United States. This district was chosen because it typically has high student achievement regarding state standardized testing and therefore, the district is very test-driven. However, the district is

interested in improving WAC across the district, so a committee has been formed to evaluate current practices and provide professional development on literacy instruction. This study may indicate if their efforts so far have resulted in an increase in the use of WAC in their secondary schools.

Demographics

This school district is relatively small and is located between two much larger cities. The population of people living within this school district is 57,330, and the average income is \$68,837 (Census profile: Name omitted due to blind review, n.d.). About 12.4% of this population are considered at or below poverty (Census profile: Name omitted due to blind review, n.d.). Demographics of students at this school show a high population of white/Caucasian students which when compared to other public education organizations may be unique. These demographics are shown in the table below.

This district is situated in a rural area and consists of three high schools, three middle schools, and eight elementary schools; seven of the eight elementary schools do offer preschool programs (Name omitted due to blind review - U.S. News Education, n.d.). This district has approximately 10,116 students enrolled in which 20% are minority and 29% are of low socioeconomic status (Name omitted due to blind review - U.S. News Education, n.d.). The gender of students in this district is 49% female and 51% male (Name omitted due to blind review - U.S. News Education, n.d.). Students who fall under the category of ELL (English Language Learners) is 4.9% of the student population (Name omitted due to blind review - U.S. News Education, n.d.). The number of students who receive special services is 16% (Lena Groeger, 2018) The graduation rate is 91.6% (Name omitted due to blind review - U.S. News Education, n.d.). A breakdown of student demographics are as follows:

Table 3.1

Demographics of Students

Group	Percentage
White	78.3
Hispanic/Latino	8.7
Black or African American	6.8
Two or More Races	4.5
Asian or Asian Pacific Islander	1.4
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.2

There are 657 teachers working within this school district and 64.4% of these teachers have advanced degrees (Name omitted due to blind review, n.d.). Teacher turnover is currently low and 89.3% of teachers are returning (Name omitted due to blind review - U.S. News Education, n.d.). However, the teacher to student ratio in core content areas is currently very high due to teacher shortages and is 38.9 to 1 (Name omitted due to blind review - U.S. News Education, n.d.). Teachers considered experienced makeup 75.3 % of the teaching population while inexperienced teachers account for 24.7 % (Name omitted due to blind review - U.S. News Education, n.d.).

In this district 60% of elementary students tested at or above proficient in reading, and 67% tested at or above in math (Academic Achievement - School Report Card, n.d.). Also, 56% of middle school students tested at or above proficient in reading, and 59% tested at or above in math (Academic Achievement - School Report Card, n.d.). And 81% of high school students tested at or above proficient in reading, and 72% tested at or above in math (Academic Achievement - School Report Card, n.d.). The graduation rate for this district is 91.6% which accounts for students from the three high schools within the district (Academic Achievement - School Report Card, n.d.).

Setting: Secondary Information

Students in this school district have access to technology in the form of both iPads and Chromebook (Name omitted due to blind review, n.d.). All students in grades 3-12 are provided with a personal iPad or Chromebook while class sets are available for grades kindergarten through second. Classrooms are equipped with technology including a Smart Board or Mimeo Board. The use of technology is an integral part of the classroom experience within this district (Name omitted due to blind review, n.d.).

This district offers several K3 and K4 programs at their elementary schools (Name omitted due to blind review, n.d.). Additionally, all schools have special education services as well as Gifted and Talented programs (Name omitted due to blind review, n.d.). There is assistance for English language learners and their families. Mental health counselors are available to students, and this is a focus area for the district as they seek additional mental health services and counselors for their students (Name omitted due to blind review, n.d.).

There are many special programs offered at the secondary levels including ROTC, foreign language classes, and other fine arts programs (Name omitted due to blind review, n.d.). Students in middle school also receive additional math and reading instruction from a program called iReady. This program serves as a tool to improve state standardized test scores. For students in high school, there is a career center where students can take courses and acquire certifications for various career fields such as welding, firefighting, etc.

Most teachers in this district have met the state Read to Succeed (R2S) requirements outlined by the Department of Education (Name omitted due to blind review, n.d.). To further this initiative, a committee has been formed to evaluate the use of reading and writing used throughout the district in curriculums other than ELA or other literacy studies. These efforts are

in response to the need to improve writing scores throughout the district as well as ensure students graduating from this district have the literacy skills necessary to succeed in college and beyond.

Participants

Participants for this study were chosen using stratified purposive sampling based on criteria needed for the study (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). The target population were leaders within the district who work in secondary education settings. The participants all identified themselves as school leaders and have leadership roles of varying degrees which include administration, instructional leadership, and content area leadership. This is important for this study because it focuses on how leaders influence the use of WAC; therefore, a leader's perspective provides data that is relevant to the goals of this study. The participants also have varying years of experience in education.

Participants consist of four middle school leaders and five high school leaders. The participants were all identified as school leaders by outside sources, but also identified themselves as leaders within their school on the initial questionnaire. The participants further explained their leadership experience, knowledge, and insight on the open-ended questionnaire during phase one of the study and provided more detailed information in a semi-structured interview during phase two of the study.

A Collection of Participants' Perspectives and Experiences

This study provided information on how leadership can support WAC, the perspectives and practices of writing in subject areas outside of language arts classes, and how WAC is viewed and used differently at the middle school level versus the high school level. The data presented incorporates a variety of perspectives from educational leaders which is important

because many instructional and curriculum decisions are decided by school administrators and then carried out and implemented by teachers. This supports the importance of teacher leaders since they are often the first to be trained on new initiatives and expected to provide leadership and support to the other teachers in their departments.

The district used in this study focuses heavily on PLC, so teachers are expected to collaborate and use common formative and summative assessments. Therefore, teacher leaders tend to have sway when it comes to the types of curriculums used. Since this study evaluates how administrative school leaders within the district view and support the use of writing as an instructional practice in content areas such as social studies and science, the relationships among teachers and other school leaders are relevant.

Perception of Writing

The data collected from this study also provided insight into what obstacles teachers face when considering the use of widespread writing within their classrooms. Exploring current writing practices and how writing instruction can be improved, offers valuable information to add to the growing body of research practices to improve students' writing. This information offers understanding that may lead to further research and future guidelines on the practices that need to occur for students to fully benefit from WAC.

This district was also chosen due to its instructional success and generally high state standardized test scores. The district puts a lot of emphasis on test scores and tends to support curricular practices that directly impact such scores. Understanding how writing is supported and used is important because such practices have been shown to better prepare students and ensure students have the 21st century skills necessary for future success. Writing practices like WAC are not always used in districts that emphasize and make instructional decisions based on state

standardized test scores, so understanding how writing impacts achievement is essential to improving instructional methods and ensuring students success.

Type of Study

In addition to being a purposive study, this study is also a convenient study because I work within the district being used in the study (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). Due to integral knowledge of the district and close working relationships with many people working within the district, I anticipated more participation as well as honest and insightful responses.

However, there are not any participants in the study from the school in which I currently work. This did not completely rule out potential bias since I have worked within the district for over seventeen years and am well known by many. Therefore, I did my best to provide authentic data that is free of bias.

The advantages of stratified, purposive sampling are that the study included participants who have knowledge of a variety of content areas and experience in diverse roles within the school district. This provided unique perspectives on the topics of both leadership support and WAC practices (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). Additionally, the varying perspectives evaluated in this study provided insight into the perception of how writing is currently used in the classroom as well as how it is being supported by the district. The disadvantages of this sampling method are that it is limited to one school district; therefore, the experiences of the participants may be very similar and there may not be as many varieties in responses. This district also lacks racial and socioeconomic diversity as compared to other school districts which further limits the parameters of the findings.

Diversity of Participants

To ensure that I got participants who fit my target audience, I only reached out to those who fit the criteria of being identified as a leader within the school. Creating a list of potential participants did initially require some investigating and speaking to administrators and other staff to find out who is considered a leader within their content area or team. This district does not have department heads, so figuring out who is a teacher leader within each department was a bit challenging. I also created a questionnaire that confirmed each participant's status as a school leader. If the potential participant did not identify him or herself as a leader when answering the first question, their survey ended, and no additional data was collected.

Demographics

The demographics of this study include a mixture of participants from secondary schools within the district. This is shown in the chart below. By looking at staff directories on school websites and asking administrators to identify department heads/content area leaders, I was able to reach out to all potential participants through email. After offering surveys to all individuals who fit the criteria of being leaders in a secondary school setting, nine participants agreed to take part in this case study as noted in the table below. My aim was that half of the participants would provide a middle school perspective and half would provide a high school perspective. Of the nine participants, two are in administrative roles, one is in an instructional coach role, and six participants are teacher leaders in science, social studies, and math.

Table 3.2

Study Participants

Middle School (four participants)	High School (five participants)
Administrator (Bobby)	Instructional Coach (Dan)
Administrator (Neil)	Social Studies (Anna)
Science (Ted)	Science (Edward)
Social Studies (Brenda)	Math (Allen)
	Math (Lisa)

Procedure: Data Collection and Analysis

The first step before collecting any data for this study was to obtain IRB approval from the university. I filled out the appropriate forms, which are included under Appendix C and submitted my research proposal. Once IRB approved the study, I contacted the appropriate representative at the district office for the school district and requested permission to conduct my study. I made this request in an email which included a formal request explaining the purpose of the study, how the study would be conducted, and the questions I intended to ask. I also ensured that the name of the district, schools, and participants would be confidential. I was granted permission with no further correspondence necessary.

After obtaining permission from both IRB and the school district, I began compiling a list of potential participants using the district website's staff directory. The initial list included names of administrators, instructional coaches, and teacher leaders in the content areas of social studies, science, and math from the three high schools and two middle schools within the district. Through conversations with multiple people throughout the district, I was able to identify those on the list who are considered leaders of their departments.

I reached out to potential participants through email, providing an explanation of the

study that included a link to the questionnaire, so that those willing to participate could go ahead and complete the questionnaire and digitally sign the consent letter that was included. The questionnaire questions are attached under Appendix A and the consent form is attached under Appendix C. I sent these emails to a few potential participants in stages every few days over a two-week period. As participants agreed to serve in the study, I sent additional emails out to potential participants who held other positions within the district. This ensured that the study would be comprised of a diverse representation of administrators, instructional coaches, and teachers of varying content areas from both middle schools and high schools within the district.

Open-Ended Questionnaires

As questionnaires were returned, analysis filters in Google Forms were used to evaluate the data. The first analysis was on responses to the first question about being an educational leader. Any responses that had an answer of “no” for this question were eliminated from the study. This was the only question those respondents had; all other questions on the questionnaire could only be viewed if the respondent answered “yes” to the first question.

The next set of questions on the questionnaire related to demographics. I used a graph to log each participant’s position as an administrator, instructional coach, or teacher leader, what subject each taught, if applicable, and whether the participant worked in a middle school or a high school. I ended up with four participants representing the middle schools and five participants representing the high schools for a total of two administrators, one instructional coach, and six teacher leaders.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Once participants submitted the questionnaires, which included the consent form at the end, I sent out follow-up emails with days and time slots available for interviews through Zoom.

This proved difficult since many were limited in when they could be interviewed. Once a time slot was confirmed, I sent the meeting link. Most of the interviews were conducted after school hours and lasted about 15 minutes. I purposely limited interview time slots to fifteen minutes because I needed participants and didn't want to take up too much of their time.

Using the recording feature on Zoom, I recorded the conversations that took place during the interview. I also took extensive notes while conducting each interview. While I was able to collect some important and beneficial information from the questionnaires, the bulk of my data used in this study came from the interviews.

Security

Data security and anonymity was clearly explained on all communication as well as in the consent form. All information is being stored in an encrypted file and on a secure computer system. Additionally, Google is password protected and once all forms and graphs were downloaded and saved, the information on the Google platform was deleted. This data will be stored for a period of three years or longer per Anderson University requirements. During that time, all electronic data will be stored digitally in a secure file and all paper data will be stored in a file placed in a secure location. After the required amount of time has been met, digital data will be deleted, and paper data will be shredded and disposed of.

The Constant Comparative Method

Using the constant comparative method, data from the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews about writing and leadership support were analyzed and coded based on common

words and themes that were presented (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Because case study analysis relies heavily on explanatory objectives, it is important to consider validity (Yin, 2013). Therefore, using the comparative method allowed me to locate patterns and themes and draw more valid conclusions (Yin, 2013). This resulted in four case study factors which helped to answer the three research questions posed in this study.

I followed Strauss and Corbin's (1990) guidelines for coding case study data using open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) which is simply finding patterns or themes, grouping such themes, and creating core categories or findings. As I read and interpreted each participant's responses to the questionnaire and notes from each interview, I identified themes that could be further analyzed into case study factors. The four factors that resulted focused on what teachers need from school leaders, benefits of writing in all content areas, the obstacles teachers face when using writing in the classroom, and perspectives on how writing should be assessed outside of language arts. The insights gathered from these four factors were used to understand the differences in how WAC is used in middle school settings versus high school settings.

Conducting this research study and collecting and analyzing this data took several months. I began by obtaining the appropriate permission from both the university and the school district I wanted to use in the study. Once permission was obtained, I set out to find willing participants that met the criteria set forth in the study. The following table shows the timeline and what was accomplished as the study progressed.

Table 3.3*Timeline for Data Collection*

Task	Time Frame
Obtain permission from IRB and potential school district to conduct a study.	January
Create a list of potential participants (target population) and email information letters and open-ended questionnaires.	February
Determine sample population, send out, and collect consent forms.	February
As consent forms are returned, begin constant comparative analysis by reading and transcribing data. Set up interview times and conduct interviews with all participants.	February - March
Use open coding to determine themes, use axial coding to organize and categorize, and use selective coding to identify findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).	March - May

Instrumentation

This was a qualitative case study analysis that used the constant comparative method to analyze data, categorize information, determine factors, and answer the three research questions. Data collection for this case study involved a list of names and email addresses, questionnaires, interview notes, interview audio recordings, graphs, and charts identifying themes. The survey was a Google form that included multiple choice and open-ended questions which was sent out through email. The questions on the survey provided important demographic information that allowed me to choose participants from a variety of positions within each school. The questions for this questionnaire can be found under Appendix A. The interview questions provided me with elaborations and more details which supported the data necessary to answer my three research

questions. Although the interviews were semi-structured and did elicit some new insight, framework questions were created and can be found under Appendix B.

Ethical Considerations

An important element of this study was ethical considerations. Trustworthiness and anonymity are always important when conducting a study. In both the introduction email and on the consent form, I clearly stated that identity will be protected and that the district, schools, and individual participants will not be named. Even though this study is not necessarily on a sensitive subject, any time individuals share their opinions on leadership or instructional practices it is important that the information be used in a constructive way that protects one's privacy. Security measures, including having all data under password protected files and stored in locked file cabinets, are in place to ensure that all data is secure and will remain so until it is destroyed.

Summary

This qualitative case study involving educational leaders took place over the course of five months. It began by acquiring approvals from the university's IRB committee as well as the district being used in the study. Some research was done to create a target population to identify secondary administrators, instructional coaches, and department leaders in content areas other than ELA. Open ended questionnaires were in the form of a Google Form and were sent to the target population. The first question on this questionnaire was to confirm that the participants were all educational leaders. Consent forms were added to the bottom of the questionnaire and consent was provided by each participant before any interviews were conducted. In addition to the first question about educational leadership, all remaining questions covered demographic information, how the participant views and uses writing in the classroom, and how leadership support impacts curriculum decisions. The interview questions

were used as a framework to create dialogue during the semi-structured interview phase of the study which were all through a Zoom conference.

Much of the communication was through email. The semi-structured interviews were through a recorded Zoom meeting. Using the constant comparative method along with grounded theory, the data was read, transcribed, and organized. Some of the data from the questionnaire was useful and coded, but I relied heavily on the information collected during the interview phase of the study. This information was coded by common words and themes that formed four case study factors that align with the study questions. I was then able to compare data from these four factors based on whether the information represented experiences from a middle school setting or a high school setting.

Limitations of the Study

This study represents the perceptions of those considered school leaders in one school district located in the Southeastern United States. The study's limitations include the case study size and specific location of the participants and study. Schools in the United States are known for their diversity and unique culture. However, the demographics of each school vary depending on the location of the school district. The school district used in this study has a lack of diversity as compared to other school districts which may influence the generalizations being made in the study.

The district used in this study is a relatively small district comprised of only eleven schools district which includes only six secondary level schools, so the pool of potential participants is small as compared to other larger districts in the state and across the United States (Name omitted due to the blind review, n.d.). Additionally, this district is currently working on improving WAC in all their schools (Name omitted due to blind review, n.d.). They have formed

a committee of teachers who currently use writing in their content area areas and have offered professional development to all non-ELA teachers in the district (Name omitted due to blind review, n.d.). For this reason, responses to the open-ended survey questions may not necessarily be authentic as some may assume they should answer based on what the district would likely want to hear.

A further limitation was the potential for bias due to the researcher being an employee in the district in which the study took place. To prevent such bias from interfering in the study, none of the participants in the study were employed at the specific school in which the researcher works. The researcher acknowledged the potential for bias and did her best to ensure that all data was authentic to the experiences and opinions of the participants. This was accomplished during the data collection phase by posing the same questions in the same order to each participant and limiting unnecessary conversation during the interviews that may have allowed for dialogue that included the researcher's opinions on the research topics.

As with any study using abstract language, perspectives on words and phrases like leader, literacy practices, and student achievement may be viewed differently. These diverse views may have impacted the way some questions on the survey were answered. Because no two educators are the same and all educators have unique perspectives on important aspects of philosophy and curriculum, studies involving multiple educators' beliefs can be considered a limitation.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Using a constant comparative method along with grounded theory methodology, this study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. How can transformational leaders support writing across the curriculum in secondary educational settings?
2. What are the effects of writing on content knowledge when used as a learning strategy in content areas outside of language arts?
3. In secondary educational settings, is there a difference in how middle and high schools use WAC?

This chapter includes a discussion of how data was analyzed which resulted in four significant factors that relate to the research questions. The information from these four factors was then compared based on whether it represented experiences in a middle school setting or a high school setting. The comparison of the four factors provides valuable insights to better understand current educators' mindsets, experiences, expectations, and conflicts when considering administrative support and using WAC within their schools and classrooms. The case factors outlined throughout chapter four are important to broaden an understanding and build on current research regarding what school leadership must do to support writing in all classrooms. It also provided insights on the struggles secondary educators face when considering writing instruction and how educators can use WAC to improve student achievement.

Sample

Nine participants completed questionnaires and participated in a semi-structured interview for this study. All participants work in secondary education and consist of two middle school administrators, two middle school teacher leaders, a high school instructional coach, and

four high school teacher leaders. The six teacher leaders involved in the study represent a variety of content area expertise. Experience in education ranged from eight to thirty-six years. Two of the participants have educational experience of 8-10 years, two have educational experience of 16-17 years, and the other five participants have been in education for 24 years or more.

Table 4.1

Background of Participants

Participant	Role	Years in Education
Participant 1 (Brenda)	8 th Grade Social Studies	10
Participant 2 (Neil)	Administrator (middle school assistant principal)	25
Participant 3 (Anna)	High School Social Studies	8
Participant 4 (Allen)	High School Math Teacher	17
Participant 5 (Edward)	High School Science Teacher	26
Participant 6 (Lisa)	High School Math Teacher	30
Participant 7 (Ted)	6 th Grade Science	24
Participant 8 (Dan)	High School Instructional Coach	36
Participant 9 (Bobby)	Administrator (middle school principal)	27

Data Collection

The first source of information collected was a questionnaire that consisted of four questions relating to the demographics of the participants, one question about leadership support of instruction, and four questions relating to writing in the classroom. This data was analyzed for demographics and coded with several emerging themes that were assessed to ensure that the interview questions would produce different and more detailed information. The questionnaire

data also indicated a need for some of the interview questions to be adapted to better assess the two distinct experiences of leaders in secondary educational settings: those working directly with students in the classroom and those working in positions outside the classroom.

This adaptation was very minor and included changing several phrases. Most of the questions were the same for all participants. However, the questions relating to the role of writing in the classroom and regarding district leadership and support changed slightly. The purpose for changing some of the phrasing in the questions was to ensure that the questions could be answered by each participant regardless of the position of the participant.

Participants who were teacher leaders were asked about their comfort level when teaching and assessing writing while participants who were administrative leaders were asked if they believed content area teachers outside of language arts had the skills and knowledge to teach and use writing as an assessment. The change in the district leadership support section added the questions: Do you believe the school district is taking adequate steps to improve writing/literacy? What specific initiatives has the district taken that you believe are working? Other than these two modifications to ensure the participant could answer all questions, the remaining questions for all participants were the same. Semi-structured interview questions for both teacher leaders and administrators or other staff are included in Appendix B.

The second source of data collection involved semi-structured interviews on Zoom. The interviews were conducted over the span of three weeks based solely on the availability of each participant. The data from both the interview notes and printed transcripts were continually analyzed during this time using open coding to build on keywords and topics that emerged from the analysis of the data gathered. Manual coding was used throughout the entire analysis process to identify key words. Once lists of these keywords were created, axial coding was used to

organize the lists into tables that connected the keywords and phrases to the main topics covered in the research questions. From these lists and tables, themes as well as four case study factors emerged that help to explain and answer the research questions within this study.

Data Analysis

Using selective coding, these topics, themes, and factors were evaluated and categorized based on how they fit with the three research questions. This information was organized into two tables, one representing leaders working in a middle school setting and the other representing leaders working in a high school setting. Additionally, this information was color coded to represent each participant to better understand how administrators and specific content area teacher leaders feel about particular topics.

As expected with a constant comparative analysis using grounded theory, all data collected was continuously coded and organized as questionnaires were submitted and interviews conducted. Once all nine interviews were completed, the interview data, which included both handwritten notes and printed transcripts, were coded again to ensure consistency in recognizing the key points, related themes, and case study factors. For each factor that emerged, a summary was written to clarify and better understand the relevance and how it connected to and answered the research questions.

The researcher used highlighting to identify key words and phrases from both the questionnaires and interview transcripts. If the same word was identified by four or more participants, it was considered a keyword or key phrase. For the questionnaire, these key words and phrases were cataloged within a table with four main topics: leadership, writing, classroom, and assessment. The table that details the findings during each part of coding is provided below in Table 4.2.

Likewise, interview transcript data was assessed, and key ideas and themes were categorized. Once all data was placed in tables by topics, the researcher highlighted and wrote notes indicating the potential meaning and the factors that each key idea or theme represented. The four selective codes or categories that emerged in which all data was categorized include: leadership, writing, classroom, and assessment. These selective codes were used to formulate four unique factors that make up this case study. These key factors describe the unique phenomena discovered in the study and provide insight that is useful to educators and contributes to current educational research. The table below represents the findings during each phase of the constant-comparative methodology.

Table 4.2

Data Revealed During Coding

Coding	Findings
Open Coding	provide, work alongside, time, training, thinking, analysis, connections, recognize, patterns, process, short answer, essay, research, content, standards, consistent, and rubric
Axial Coding	Leadership - provide time and or training, work alongside teachers Benefits of WAC - promotes student thinking, allows students to deepen understanding through analysis, students can connect what they are learning with past learning or their experiences, students can recognize patterns, and students can process what they have learned Types of writing students should be able to do - short answer, essay, research How WAC should be assessed - on content, on writing standards embedded in the specific content area being taught, consistent with how the language arts department assesses writing, and based on the rubric created
Selective Coding	Leadership - Many educational leaders believe that school leadership plays an important role in supporting WAC. Writing - Writing within all content areas does have benefits for student learning and achievement. Classroom - Many students are not currently writing at the level expected which creates obstacles when implementing WAC. Assessment - There are inconsistencies in how to assess writing.

During this process and to align with grounded theory methodology, the researcher continually re-read the questions each participant had answered and referenced notes many times to ensure that all of data supported the findings in the study. This ensured reliability and that the data truly led to the factors being presented. The factors are as follows: Many educational leaders believe that school leadership plays an important role in supporting WAC. Writing within all classroom contents does have benefits for student learning and achievement. Many students are not currently writing at the level expected which creates several obstacles when implementing WAC. There are inconsistencies in how to assess writing and what students should be held accountable for in their writing.

The four key factors served as the cases which created the framework to further analyze and organize data based on whether the participant worked in a middle school setting or a high school setting to see if there were differentiations that emerged. Several interesting findings resulted from this analysis that led to some unique assertions about how administrative leadership support and how WAC is viewed and used differently in middle school settings versus high school settings. This information provides insight into what steps need to be taken to promote the widespread use of WAC. It also offers the opportunity to assess grade-level writing practices to ensure that students have the writing foundation necessary to be successful as they move through secondary education.

Comparing middle school to high school provides valuable information about what writing practices are working well and what may be lacking in one setting versus the other. By the time students enter secondary school, the foundations and building of skills becomes increasingly important. This is as true for writing as it is for other skills. With constraints on

time and the pressure to accelerate student learning, it is important for educators to understand inconsistencies and learning gaps especially when considering the transition from middle school to high school. It is important that educators find ways to bridge these gaps if students are to have the necessary skills for future success.

Participants

This study is composed of nine participants in which educational leaders working in secondary settings provided insight into their perception of leadership, WAC, how writing can be used in the classroom, and how writing should be assessed. The participants represent a variety of roles and experiences. Separately they create vivid, detailed representations of educators' diverse experiences and thoughts. It is also important to note that all the participants identified him/herself as an educational leader within his/her school.

The following provides details of each participants' experiences and viewpoints. This information is ordered based on the dates interviewed. Those participants who quickly filled out questionnaires and set up interview dates were passionate about writing and eager to participate in the study. Therefore, their answers are more positive and closely align with the focus of the study. This is likely why the results may seem skewed, but this is simply a result of the order I chose to use when providing this information. Also, to maintain the integrity of the study, pseudonyms are being used to protect privacy, but each participants' roles, beliefs, and experiences are authentic.

Although I have provided detailed information about each participants' viewpoints and feelings on administrative leadership practices and WAC, the primary purpose of this data was to create the case factors. The participants' responses represent authentic and unique insight, but this information also explains why some secondary educators use writing more often and some

of the issues that prevent educators from the widespread use of WAC. Therefore, following these nine summaries of participants' viewpoints and experiences, I have provided how this information creates the case factors, how those factors can be compared between middle school and high school, and how this information answers the three research questions for this study.

Brenda

Brenda is an eighth-grade social studies teacher who has been working in education for ten years and has been in her current role for the past seven years. Writing is important to this participant because it “requires students to dig deeper into content and form individual connections with a subject or event when they analyze it in their writing.” Teaching the content area of social studies provides many opportunities to have students write.

When discussing leadership support, this participant explained that teachers who want to incorporate writing within their curriculum, will do it with or without leadership support. However, she highlighted that there are some things that leadership could do to encourage WAC, and the attitude school administrators take when undergoing initiatives like WAC did concern her. Brenda believes that school administrators must not take a hierarchical approach where they simply tell teachers what to do without contributing but rather offer help in the form of rubrics, activity ideas, and other tools that can be used easily by teachers who teach any content area. Her perception is that if using WAC is mandated, some teachers would not be open to using more writing within their classroom because they are already inundated with mandates. Rather, administrators should suggest the use of WAC, provide training for those who need it, and offer ongoing support to encourage more writing in all classrooms.

Brenda acknowledged that writing should be used in non-ELA classrooms frequently and at a minimum of once per unit of study. In her middle school social studies class, she has

used writing that includes historical analysis, text dependent analysis, data base questions , and editorials and stated that some of these could easily be used in other content areas. Also, her main teaching method is project-based learning, in which writing is a large part.

When discussing the level at which most students write, Brenda did not believe that students were writing at the level expected and were lacking grammar, formatting, and the ability to use, cite, and connect relevant evidence. Students often cannot connect their ideas or explain their reasoning. The way she currently uses writing in her classroom requires students to be able to explain and support their reasoning with facts. She often must work with students on how to do this and uses formulaic approaches like TDAs and DBQs to assist in this. Even though she would like students to be able to use basic grammar and formatting, content is her primary focus. She explained her experience stating,

I feel comfortable teaching writing, but I do not have time to teach all the aspects of writing I would like to see students use. I typically cannot get through all the 8th grade social studies standards, and often have to consolidate and omit some standards. The project-based learning units that I currently use are long and complex, so there is no time left to address writing mechanics or add more elaborate writing activities to what I am currently doing.

While discussing the project-based learning Brenda uses in her classroom, she expressed that she considers her units to align with WAC. She explained that the eighth-grade social studies department works closely with the eighth-grade language arts department. Together, they offer many writing opportunities, most of which are done using paper and pencil. Brenda believes that this collaboration and the emphasis on using paper pencil writing rather than typing has positively impacted students' content knowledge for both social studies and language and has

helped to raise students' reading and writing scores on the state standardized test. She believes this is true because when students actively write on paper, they are spending more time considering their answers. This method also does not allow for students to simply cut and paste information.

Brenda feels like she practices WAC, but she believes that other middle school educators may not be due to the emphasis on test scores. She reiterated that if her schools' departments did not work so closely together and consistently collaborate, that many teachers would not adopt project-based learning and/or incorporate writing as it is much easier and faster to use more traditional forms of learning such as fill-in-the-blank notes and multiple choice. In her experience, even though social studies are not currently a tested subject, many teachers are still teaching the same way as when it was tested due to time constraints and comfort. She herself expressed that she likely would not add more writing instruction or activities to what she was already using for the same reason, although she feels she currently does more writing in her experience and observations than most other middle school social studies teachers.

While she mainly grades student's work on content area, Brenda does believe that grading should be aligned and consistent with how the language arts teachers grade writing. "For instance, the same criteria of a language arts rubric are used but components are worth less and there is an added criteria of historical accuracy that is worth the majority of the points." Brenda explained that consistency in expectations when it comes to literacy, especially writing, is important to ensure student success. As in her case, the added support and collaboration makes it easy to use consistent grading practices when it comes to evaluating student writing.

Overall, Brenda is an advocate for writing and uses it regardless of what her administration expects or supports. She works closely with other grade-level teachers to create

cross-curricular units that include many literacy skills, including writing. While many of Brenda's students do not write on-grade-level at the beginning of the year, she finds that their writing does improve through the activities in her project-based teaching units. She does believe that student writing should be assessed with rubrics and include writing mechanics, but most of the writing students complete should be mainly assessed on their understanding of the content.

Neil

Neil is an assistant principal at a middle school and has served in this role for seven years. He believes that writing is essential to learning because it forces students to think rather than just memorize or regurgitate information. He believes that school leadership must support teachers in using more writing within their classrooms and that students should be writing in all content areas at least once per week.

When discussing leadership support of WAC, Neil indicated that one of the main things school leaders can do is "hire instruction and learning focused teachers." Neil believes that the best new hires are teachers who continue to learn themselves and who value improvement. Another way school leadership can support teachers and their use of writing in the classroom is to use textbooks sparingly and focus lessons on "getting students to make connections among many ideas rather than just building understanding of concepts." Leadership must insist that teachers use practices that require depth of knowledge and rigor, both of which can be displayed through student writing.

To support the use of writing in all content areas, Neil believes that school leaders should focus on content area literacy and provide PD time and opportunities as support. However, he explained that it is up to administrators to check for and continue encouraging WAC. Just providing training is not enough to shift instruction and make writing a main

assessment tool. Most content areas have indicators within the standards that can be evaluated best through writing; therefore, teachers should be held accountable for using it as part of their pedagogical practices.

As an administrator, it is Neil's experience that very few students have the capacity to write at grade level. Many can communicate verbally but lack the ability to effectively communicate their ideas through writing. Some of the main issues are that students are not able to use appropriate vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure in their writing. Because of this, Neil expressed that students cannot effectively analyze or interpret complex ideas, both of which are necessary to maintain rigor and strengthen students' thinking and engagement.

Neil believes that all teachers have the classroom time and ability to incorporate more writing into their instructional practices. He does not believe that the pressure of standardized testing influences a teacher's use of writing. Rather, he believes that some teachers do not use writing as an assessment because it takes more time to evaluate and grade. Neil believes that "teachers who are consistently using multiple choice type questions do so to save time, not to align with state testing." He acknowledges that this is problematic and needs to be addressed. However, neither Neil nor the other administrator interviewed mentioned how to increase the use of writing or how they can follow-up with teachers after PD sessions encouraging WAC.

In his observations, some teachers are using writing routinely for common formative assessment, but very few teachers outside of language arts evaluate students' writing for summative assessments. He would like to see all teachers use writing more often that requires students to write more sentences and use subject area vocabulary to build writing stamina as well as understanding of subject matter. While Neil would like to see students improve in the

mechanics of writing, he believes that assessing writing in content areas outside of language arts should only be evaluated on the communication of content.

Neil is an advocate for WAC. He recognizes the importance of writing in all classrooms and expressed the need for student writing to improve, especially in the areas of grammar and sentence structure. Neil expressed that administrative leadership support is necessary to increase the use of WAC, but he believes that many teachers do not use writing because they do not want to take the time to do so when there are much faster ways to assess students. While Neil is disappointed with the writing mechanics of many students, he does not believe teachers outside of language arts should assess writing for mechanics unless it is a part of their content area standards.

Anna

Anna has been a high school educator for eight years and has been in her current role as an AP History teacher for five years. She believes writing broadens knowledge and “allows students to try to communicate or teach their position to the reader which often reinforces content or shows gaps in learning.” While Anna values writing and uses it often to assess her students, she does confirm that district and school leadership play an important role in encouraging teachers and supporting instruction.

Anna contends that administrators should “help establish and maintain rigor and standards across curriculums.” When it comes to increasing efforts to reinforce and improve students’ writing ability, school leaders must affirm their support and commitment so that teachers feel justified in using diverse instructional strategies like writing. Anna believes that due to the pressure to improve test scores, some teachers may not be as willing to use writing if they do not feel like their administrators believe it is important. While she did not elaborate on other

measures school leaders can take to support WAC, she did indicate that recognition and support of instructional practices that incorporate writing was essential if more teachers are to use writing in their classrooms.

Many of Anna's students do not start out writing at the level necessary for an AP class, but by the end of her class, their writing is much improved. Some of the elements of writing that Anna mentioned her students struggling with are providing appropriate evidence to support their ideas and providing background, contextualization, and evidence for an argument. To support students learning within her classroom, Anna often uses quick-writes, database questions, and long essay questions in which students can make comparisons, evaluate cause and effect relationships, or discuss impacts and changes of various topics. Anna believes that these types of writing should be used often and assessed weekly to ensure students understand and master the topics being taught in class.

Anna is comfortable teaching and evaluating writing and has enough class time to incorporate writing because AP classes are provided a double block of time. Also, because writing is cross-curricular, using it in the classroom "offers opportunities to collaborate with other departments and helps to bridge the gap to eliminate teaching in isolation." It also offers consistency for students when teachers share rubrics and hold students accountable for the same things. Anna's practices and viewpoints on writing are likely different since she teaches a class where students can earn college credits.

When assessing student's writing in her classroom, Anna believes writing should make up both major and minor grades and that rubrics should be provided and explained in detail prior to the writing assignment. Many of her rubrics do hold students accountable for grammar and

sentence structure as well as content, and she believes this is necessary if students are going to be well-rounded and write well enough to be college and career ready.

Anna uses writing often in her class, and even though her students do not typically enter her class with the writing skills necessary for success, she works very hard to improve students' writing and get them where they need to be by the end of their class. She believes that administrator support is necessary to increase WAC because many teachers need to feel validated and supported in the practices they are choosing to use in their classroom. While she is very interested in having her students deepen their understanding of content and improve analytical skills, she does hold students accountable for basic writing mechanics.

Allen

Allen has been teaching high school math for 17 years and has been with his current district for the past four years. He believes writing helps students organize their thinking and does occasionally require students to provide written responses in his math classes. He believes that district and school leaders should encourage WAC and explained that in his experience, other districts he has worked in focus more on increasing literacy and WAC than the district he currently works in. He believes that the way school leaders can best support such endeavors is by "keeping administrative tasks out of teacher's hands so that teachers can focus on their students and their teaching practices." He also indicated that "teachers do not need additional training to encourage writing and that teachers will incorporate writing in the way that best serves their subject area" if school leaders continually regard the use of WAC as an expectation.

When Allen requires students to provide short answers in complete sentences to justify a solution, he noted that his students often fail to follow basic rules such as capitalization and punctuation. He noted that students can often verbally explain their rationale but often struggle to

explain their thoughts or process in writing clearly. One of the main struggles Allen experiences when evaluating student work is that students do not use context or key words from the problem in their answers.

Allen is comfortable teaching and assessing writing and feels he has enough class time but finds it difficult to incorporate in math. In the past when he has tried to use more writing such as requiring students to write paragraphs and complete a yearly research project, he became extremely frustrated with so many students plagiarizing or just turning in work that was so poorly written that it took too long to grade. Rather than investigate ways to prevent cheating and improve basic writing, Allen has chosen to simply focus on his students writing complete sentences that provide context related to the problem being solved. When he does assess student writing, he mainly grades on content but does require students to correct their answers if they have failed to provide context or use capital letters and punctuation.

Many of Allen's students do not use basic writing skills and will plagiarize and cheat if given the opportunity. This has deterred Allen from using writing in his math class other than requiring some answers to be in sentence form and use context from the problem. However, Allen does see the positive impact of administrative support in encouraging WAC, but he was clear that this should involve encouragement through providing time for teachers to collaborate and brainstorm ways to increase writing in their classrooms.

Edward

Edward has been in education for 16 years and has been teaching high school science for seven. He recognizes that writing is essential for students to fully analyze and process course content. He believes students should write frequently, at least three to five times per week and believes that school administrators should and can support WAC in various ways but that

oftentimes, literacy and writing is only a focus or an initiative for a short span of time when it should be continuous if student writing is to improve.

Edward contends that leaders need to encourage teachers to use all forms of literacy on a regular basis because reading positively impacts student writing. He believes that in addition to encouragement, school leaders should provide necessary materials and offer more planning time for teachers to plan new curriculum or adjust current curriculum to incorporate WAC. In the content area of science, there are many opportunities for students to use writing including experiments logs, research papers, and presentations. With a greater emphasis on writing in the classroom and additional administrative and district support, Edward believes more teachers would use writing as an assessment tool.

In Edward's experience, honor's students will engage in writing and attempt to write at the appropriate level. They often have a better grasp on very basic writing mechanics but often struggle with the depth of writing. Often, such students will summarize or simply transfer information rather than truly analyze or synthesize the material. However, on-grade-level students cannot or will not engage in writing. The amount of writing provided for a task is often very little and therefore does not provide enough information or meet the requirements of the assignment. Furthermore, spelling and grammar are often problematic to the point that the writing cannot be deciphered for assessment. This information about the aptitude for student writing presents an interesting notion as to whether students in honors programs get more opportunities to write as compared to students in grade-level courses.

Another hurdle Edward mentioned when it comes to student writing is AI. Edward has a growing concern when using writing to assess students because he cannot always tell when a student's writing is their own or if it has been AI generated. This is concerning to Edward

because he wants to ensure that his grading practices are fair. The grading of writing is already subjective, but students turning in AI generated work would inflate grades and not provide an authentic understanding of what the student truly knows. Interestingly, Edward was the only participant to mention AI specifically, but another participant did discuss concerns with overall cheating.

While Edward contends that WAC is important and necessary to prepare students for their futures, he believes “if students had better writing skills coming into high school, more teachers would use writing more often.” Even though Edward does have the patience to make students write and rewrite, he does feel pressure to cover the material required for students to do well on the end of course test. Over the years, writing assignments that he intended to only take one day have ended up taking two or three days due to students requiring so much help with their writing. This has caused Edward to decrease the length of some writing assignments.

Even though some writing assignments have been shortened or condensed, Edward continues to use writing to assess student knowledge. He is comfortable requiring his students to write and teaching them both content area and writing mechanics. When used as a summative assessment, Edward grades students’ work with similar rigor and expectations as in literacy classes.

Edward is an advocate for WAC, and while he appreciates the encouragement and support of administrative and district leadership on writing initiatives, he believes that such initiatives are often short-lived. If WAC is to become more widespread, school and district leadership must maintain a focus on writing long term. In Edward’s experience, some of his higher-level students attempt to use correct writing mechanics while other students have no interest in writing or improving their communication skills. Regardless of this challenge, Edward uses writing often in

his classroom and does hold students accountable for not only the content of their writing but the grammar and sentence structure as well

Lisa

Lisa has worked in education for thirty years and has been in her role as a high school math teacher for sixteen years. Lisa believes, “Writing and practicing verbal communication is essential for students to communicate understanding of concepts, connections with other areas of study, and recognition of how similar big ideas and patterns appear in multiple contexts.” Lisa believes that leadership support is beneficial in supporting instruction, but that school leaders must allow autonomy and recognize teachers as subject area experts.

Lisa believes that many teachers teaching in content areas outside of ELA do need encouragement from school leaders, and administrators within the school should be willing to provide needed supplies and equipment to make WAC easier to implement. She explained that currently there is an initiative to increase WAC and one of the suggestions by school leaders was that every classroom teacher should have a word wall to encourage vocabulary development. While she appreciated this idea, she said that many of her colleagues felt that it was very elementary. Even though all participants work in a district that currently has a WAC initiative, Lisa was the only one to directly provide a literacy strategy while other participants only mentioned that there was a writing initiative in place.

Lisa believes that school leaders need to tie WAC to increasing rigor, and that true rigor occurs when students can explain and communicate at high levels. She also pointed out that many school leaders promote remediation. She feels the best way to remediate student learning is through writing and explaining, even in math courses.

Lisa stated that “writing should be part of every assessment to explain reasoning and key concepts.” In her own teaching, she has students explain concepts that support numeric examples and graphs. Using appropriate vocabulary is important for students when speaking and writing since it reinforces contextual meaning. Currently, some of her students can write at the level necessary for success, but she finds that there is a portion of students who have low writing skills, are extremely lazy and refuse to write, or struggle with writing due to ESOL. This goes back to the idea that writing takes time and can often be frustrating when students lack basic writing skills.

Lisa’s approach to maintaining a focus on writing activities and helping students improve their written skills set Lisa apart from other participants. Even though she is a math teacher, she maintains that students learn more and connect important ideas when they use writing. This introduces an interesting idea as to whether this philosophy can be taught and adopted by other educators. Likely, changing mindsets is the biggest hurdle when convincing educators to adopt new teaching practices.

Lisa believes that using WAC in math classes requires students to explain relationships, diagram and solve problems, memorize, and explain formulas, use content area specific vocabulary in different situations, and create word problems to represent numeric equations. Lisa is comfortable teaching writing, and she does use writing as part of her formative and summative assessments but does feel she would do more writing, like projects and research papers, if she had more classroom time with students. Lisa stated that she does believe a focus on standardized testing creates a major hurdle regarding increasing WAC. She believes this is especially true for math teachers since many do not want to or do not know how to incorporate more writing into their instructional practices.

Ted

Ted has been a middle school science teacher for 24 years. He believes that school leaders can and should provide encouragement, guidance, and opportunities to use WAC in all classrooms. He believes that writing works well when assessing social studies and science standards but admits that he does not use writing in his instructional practices very much due to his comfort level with teaching writing and time constraints.

If school leadership truly wants WAC to be adopted school wide, he believes teachers need time to observe other teachers use writing in the classroom. To ensure that school-wide writing initiatives are being met, Ted believes that the observation tool used for teacher observations should include a writing expectation. Ted acknowledged that the more students write, the better they will be at writing overall.

Ideally, Ted would like students to use writing to showcase content knowledge about once a week. He stated that he believes most students do write at the level expected, but this is limited to very short writing activities which are typically graded for completion. If Ted were to incorporate more writing in his classroom, he would need training and guidance. The type of writing he would like to incorporate would include in-depth explanations that focus on “the whys instead of what.” He would also be interested in having students write cause and effect analysis papers as this works well with science standards.

Aside from his discomfort with using and assessing writing, Ted does not feel like he has enough time to cover the standards he is expected to cover. He feels he can more efficiently cover the content he needs to cover using fill-in-the blank notes, labs, and multiple-choice assessments. As far as assessing the mechanics of writing, such as spelling and grammar, he

believes that this should only be done in language arts classes. If he is going to use writing activities to assess student knowledge, he believes it should be graded on content only.

Dan

Dan has been in education for 36 years and has served in his role as a high school instructional coach for the past three years. Dan believes that writing is very beneficial for student learning as it “causes students to think at higher levels creating situations where students must synthesize and analyze information.” He believes that school leadership is necessary to build WAC within a school and that many school districts have scratched the surface but can and should do more to improve student writing. Even though the district, and as a result administrators, have established a writing initiative, created a committee, and provided a PD session, more must be done. Dan would like to see specific writing goals being set and a way to hold teachers accountable for meeting these goals.

Dan believes that WAC can be encouraged by “working alongside teams in their PLCs, working with individual teachers, and providing coaching teams and high-quality professional development.” The district has provided some PD to encourage wide-spread WAC, but Dan would like to see administrators working specifically with individual teachers who currently only use fill-in-the-blank type notes and multiple-choice activities. He explained that there seems to be a divide in that some teachers are open, willing, and understand the benefits of getting students to write, while other teachers seem to be stuck in older ways of pedagogical practices. He believes that the latter needs to not only be encouraged to use WAC but should be held accountable for doing so. In Ted’s experience, most students are not writing at the level they should prepare for college. There is more writing being done in honors and AP classes, but

students still struggle to explain evidence and elaborate on big ideas. Students are not able to connect ideas, many lack writing stamina, and plagiarism is a big issue. Another issue that is a concern is that many students are not writing enough to fully explain a concept and connect those ideas to the supporting evidence.

In his observations of teachers, he feels that many teachers understand the importance of writing and try to use it when they can. Most of the teachers in his building have the skills to teach and assess writing but get frustrated when students do not have the basic writing concepts down. He believes that the block schedule the school utilizes offers plenty of time for teachers in all content areas to utilize more writing within their classrooms. When it comes to assessing students' writing, he explained that conventions should be considered and reflected in the student's grade to a degree but that much of the grade should be largely based on content.

Bobby

Bobby has been in education for 27 years and has served as a middle school principal for the past 14 years. Bobby explained that writing “helps students process, clarify, make connections, and demonstrate understanding.” He considers leadership support of WAC as essential. He believes school administrators should lead by example and work alongside teachers, set vision, and create a master schedule that allows for the success of initiatives like WAC. When working alongside teachers, administrators can participate in meetings, listen to teachers' ideas on writing activities, observe, and offer feedback.

Bobby contends that setting literacy goals for the school and specific grade levels or groups of students is an important way for school leadership to support WAC. He values the impact of PD and believes that such training is an essential tool for ensuring that more teachers use writing as a part of their instructional practices. He is a firm believer in administrators

attending and participating in PD and working alongside teachers to build instructional activities and practices.

Bobby would like to see his teachers using a variety of writing activities in their classrooms including reflective, argumentative, narrative, and persuasive writing. These types of writing can be used in any content area and require students to think deeply about a topic. Bobby believes that teachers should use writing as often as possible. Many of the teachers in his building use writing in their bell ringers, reflections, and short answers, but he would like to see more in-depth writing being practiced.

In general, many of the students at his school do not write at an appropriate level. Many don't use context and don't know how to articulate their thoughts. He stated that "they [students] do not always use correct sentence structure due to lack of care and not necessarily lack of knowhow." A complaint he has heard teachers make about student writing is that they use evidence but often-times, their evidence does not relate well to the topic and is not explained. He would also like to see students using key words and content-specific vocabulary correctly in writing. Bobby is knowledgeable about the need for students to use content-specific vocabulary due to his background in science. However, he also mentioned that vocabulary is typically the weakest area for middle school students on both state standardized tests and benchmark tests.

Most of the teachers at his school have the skill to teach writing as it pertains to their specific content area and standards. He feels that most content area teachers have enough class time to incorporate more writing, especially science and social studies since these subjects are not currently tested. However, class time may be an issue in math and the pressure to improve math scores may prevent this subject area from adopting WAC.

As far as how writing is assessed, Bobby explained that it should be used often for formative assessment. If writing is used for summative assessment, he believes that if it not part of the standards for the course, it should not be graded. Grading on student understanding of content is appropriate, but grading grammar and sentence structure should be left up to the ELA teachers.

Case Study Factors

All leaders in education, whether an administrator or teacher leader, have various, and often strong, opinions on instructional initiatives such as WAC. For many, their experience in the classroom has provided them an acute awareness of both the instructional needs students require and the obstacles faced when trying to provide the necessary instruction, ensure mastery of content area standards, and fulfill the expectations of district and state initiatives. Managing all these expectations can make teachers hesitate when it comes to integrating writing into their curriculum. Even when the benefits of writing are clear, adopting new practices and changing pedagogical practices is daunting.

The factors that emerged from the data collected in this case study provide important phenomena that enhance an understanding of how school leadership can support WAC. The first is that many secondary educators teaching in content areas outside of language arts believe that school leadership plays an integral role in supporting the use of WAC throughout their schools. The second factor is that there are clear benefits when students write. Many teachers understand that writing promotes learning and have considered the types of writing they find beneficial. The third factor is that many students are not currently writing at the level expected when entering a new school year; therefore, incorporating writing into curriculum has proved challenging due to time constraints and covering all necessary content area standards. Finally, the fourth factor is the

inconsistency and diverse philosophies on how to assess and hold students accountable for grade-level writing expectations. This has created another challenge in the widespread use of WAC in secondary classrooms.

Factor 1: Leadership Must Support Teachers' Instructional Practices

A major factor for many secondary educators when considering adopting WAC to use as part of their instructional practices is how school leadership is going to support their efforts. Eight out of the nine participants strongly agree that district and school leadership play an important role in encouraging teachers outside of language arts to use more writing in the classroom. One participant explained that there is currently an initiative within the district to increase WAC, but school leaders need to “do more to encourage all teachers to approach using writing often” (Dan). The one participant who did not answer this question with a yes, stated, “Teachers who know the value of writing will use it regardless of leadership preference” (Brenda). Interestingly, this is a teacher who values writing and uses it often in her classroom.

What Leadership Should Provide

Regarding how school leadership can better support WAC, six out of the nine participants used the term “provide” to express the needs non-language arts teachers would like to incorporate more writing in the classroom. These participants expressed the need for school leaders to provide time, training, and materials to better support teachers. When elaborating on time, several participants noted that they simply needed time to discuss writing expectations with the language arts department in their school and time to meet with their content area teams to discuss how and when to use writing. One participant stated that it would be beneficial to have time to observe other teachers to better understand how to use and teach writing in the classroom. Concerning training and materials, some participants did see a

need for PD on writing, if it was high quality and worthwhile, meaning they could walk away with practices they could use in the classroom immediately. A few of the participants did mention materials; these were things like classroom sets of literature and access to writing programs that offered an abundance of digital ways to have students write and assess their writing, but the costs of having these programs was often high.

Another participant, who expressed that writing would have major benefits to student learning, stated that school leaders can support WAC if they “keep administrative tasks out of the teachers’ hands, so teachers can focus on adding writing instruction and the needs of their students” (Allen). This fits with the focus on “time” as being an essential element to increasing and improving WAC. This also insinuates that at some schools, teachers have duties and requirements beyond a focus on teaching and improving student achievement.

School Leaders Need to Work Alongside Teachers

Another common phrase brought up in both the questionnaires and interviews was “work alongside” whether it be in the classroom or in PLC training. Several participants expressed that if they were doing something new that could potentially create more challenges, they wanted their school administrators working closely with them and their content area department to help plan writing activities and determine how such writing would be assessed. This would make the teachers feel validated and supported in trying something that they may not be completely comfortable teaching. Having that extra support can help to ease stress and increase teacher willingness.

Establishing a Vision and Holding Teachers Accountable

Additionally, eight of the participants emphasized that in addition to establishing a vision or goal for using WAC, it is also the school leader’s responsibility to ensure that teachers are

incorporating writing in the way that best serves the subject area. All content areas have some sort of writing expectation within the state standards; therefore, using writing should not just be encouraged, but leadership needs to check to make sure that it is being used when appropriate.

One participant expressed that leaders should ensure that writing is being used in correlation with the standards, but if the district is truly emphasizing rigor in the classroom, then writing should be used much more often. This participant explained that “rigor is in the process of students explaining and creating” (Lisa). It was mentioned by another participant that “administrators can foster the use and expectation of writing in all classrooms by creating a master schedule that allows for specific times in the day where students use test practice programs” (Bobby). This would ensure that students are practicing with standardized test type questions to prepare for state exams but also allows more classroom time to be spent on writing initiatives. This practice is in place at the middle school level. All middle schools in the district have approximately a forty-minute period built into the day where students can receive extra help and work on iReady, a software designed to improve students’ ability in the areas of math and reading. What is not currently made clear is the emphasis on writing and how teachers have more opportunities to have students do writing activities in the classroom because students can have standardized test practice during iReady time.

Environments That Foster Collaboration and Team Teaching

Another important idea that emerged was that of collaboration in the form of cross curricular planning and the belief that it is the district and school leaders’ responsibility to create opportunities for such teamwork. All nine participants stressed the importance of sharing ideas to use writing within content area units as well as working with the English department to align writing assessment strategies. One participant stated that “teaching content literacy would be

enhanced through multi-department meetings, especially those that include language arts and special education teachers” (Neil). With different planning periods throughout the day and negative feelings about after-school meetings, this type of collaboration must be provided through PLC meetings which typically take place on teacher workdays. This requires that the district have a goal of increasing WAC and that the district fund materials and work out logistical issues to support teachers in working together and supporting one another.

Factor 2: Writing Offers Many Benefits

The activity of writing is used in this dissertation in association with how educational leaders view students’ ability and skill level in writing, what specific writing skills students need to demonstrate success, the benefits of using writing for both formative and summative assessment, and the overall understanding and use of WAC. Around eight major topics and themes resulted from questions relating to writing. One hundred percent of the participants mentioned at least six of the key words recognized during axial coding. This resulted in the second case factor which is that there are clear benefits when students use writing in the classroom.

Even though they have various experiences using and assessing writing, all participants agreed that there are benefits to using writing in the classroom. All nine participants mentioned that writing offers a way to make connections and build understanding. One participant stated, “Students can make connections among many ideas rather than just build understanding on one concept” (Neil). This becomes increasingly important for secondary students as content area knowledge begins to connect and overlap.

As students progress in school, it is also important that they can monitor their own understanding and learning. Another participant explained that a benefit of writing allows

students to “monitor understanding and reveal in-depth learning” (Bobby). Similarly, another participant discussed that writing “forced students to think at higher levels which leads to the ability to synthesize and analyze information” (Dan). These participants believe that writing not only creates student ownership of learning, but also promotes analytical thinking.

One of the main goals in secondary education is to prepare students for what comes after high school. When discussing the benefits of WAC, one participant said, “It helps students become well-rounded and feel comfortable with writing, making them more successful in college and beyond” (Anna). Similarly, several participants believe that the more often students write, the better they will become at writing. So not only does writing reinforce learning, but it also expands and strengthens a student’s writing ability.

Writing Promotes Thinking

Three main topics emerged from participants’ responses outlining the benefits of writing in the classroom. The first and most prevalent was that writing promotes thinking. Seven out of the nine participants expressed that because writing requires students to think about content as well as their own understanding of subject matter, that writing is an important task in aiding the learning process.

Another benefit of writing that several participants mentioned was that writing helps students process and analyze information. When processing and analyzing information, students are not only thinking about what they know, but they are organizing information and connecting it with other ideas and past learning. This promotes high level thinking that allows students to solidify knowledge. This is also why “Students should use context within their writing because it reinforces and makes connections among important concepts and topics (Anna).

The third benefit that was emphasized was that of improved communication skills. Communication is typically an area of weakness for many students, whether it be verbal or written. The more students write, the better they become at structuring information to communicate their ideas and feelings about content. Four of the participants expressed that having students complete a variety of writing tasks helped students communicate their understanding in different ways. Once students can communicate their understanding through writing, they are typically better at verbalizing it as well.

However, two of the participants mentioned that students are often better at verbalizing their thinking but struggle to explain it in writing. “Students can verbally explain but can’t write out answers to math problems in a way that is clear” (Allen). It is unclear if this is due to the student’s inability to articulate their ideas or due to laziness. Perhaps, if students are in the habit of writing every day for different purposes, they will become better at explaining their thoughts and ideas. Also, if the expectation to write in all classes is maintained, students will eventually realize that they must complete the writing activities which may curb student laziness and increase writing stamina.

Building Students’ Comfort with Writing

While not a specific topic that emerged from axial coding, several participants mentioned that writing in various content areas helps to make students more comfortable with writing and build writing stamina. One participant stated that “Students need to be forced to write and rewrite to build comfort with writing and get them used to presenting their ideas in this mode of communication” (Edward). This can help curb some of the reluctance students have when being asked to write, which would likely make the task of writing more beneficial overall.

Types of Writing That Enhance Student Learning

All nine participants outlined some of the writing skills and types of writing that they believe would help students be more successful in various content area classes as well as in their educational future. Six of the participants expressed the need for students to be able to correctly answer short answer questions by using complete sentences and including contextual language. When considering this issue, a participant stated, “Many of my students fail to use capital letters and punctuation even when writing a sentence or two” (Allen). Several participants also emphasized how the use of content area specific vocabulary should be used correctly when students are responding to short answer questions. The correct use of content specific vocabulary is what really solidifies learning and reveals whether a student truly understands the material.

Another type of writing that was mentioned by five of the participants was that of essays or research papers. When students can write extended responses, they can explain important concepts to reveal understanding of the material. Extended writing also provides opportunities for students to not only communicate important information, but to organize information in a way that reveals a clear understanding or hierarchal importance, cause and effect, and other important relationships.

When discussing how often students should be writing, four participants stated that students should be writing at least once a week in all content areas. Four participants expressed that students should be writing as often as possible and even daily. Only one participant felt that occasionally using writing was sufficient. How often WAC should be used is another area that needs more study and clearer guidelines. A reason that WAC guidelines may not be clear on this is due to the obstacles that many educators face when considering how to implement more

writing while still covering all the necessary standards for their content area. As schools consider writing initiatives, this may be a point that needs to be addressed sooner rather than later.

By coming up with a specific timeline of when or how often students should be writing in all classes, goals will be easier to measure and data can be better analyzed to see what is working and what is not. For example, if the district goal is to have all content area teachers use one writing activity per week with students, data can start to be collected on the type of activity, how it was assessed, and if it impacted student knowledge. Also, if once a week is the goal, but one department decides to use a writing activity three times a week instead, data can be assessed as to the impact of how often students write and how this influences achievement.

Factor 3: Improving Student Writing is a Struggle

One major factor in introducing more writing in the classroom is that many students are not currently writing at grade level, making it very difficult to incorporate the types of writing that would be most beneficial to content areas outside of language arts. Eight out of nine participants stated that in their experience, students do not write at the level expected. However, even the one participant who felt that many of her students did write at the level she expected, she, along with the other eight participants, mentioned several writing areas in which students show weakness or have little to no experience using. None of the participants placed blame on prior grades or the language arts department for this, but several participants did bring up the need for more vertical alignment and collaboration. Communicating and working vertically within a school district would shed light on issues, like students' weaknesses in writing, and offer the opportunity to work on fixing such issues.

One area mentioned among most of the participants was that of grammar and sentence structure. Many students fail to use a variety of sentence structures and do not know and/or apply

grammatical rules. It was noted by three participants that sentence structure and grammar are not necessarily important for content, but often students are unable to provide in-depth explanations of their understanding and knowledge due to their lack of how to correctly articulate their ideas in writing. On the other hand, six participants determined that the lack of writing background and adherence to grammatical and structural rules was problematic. In their experience, the writing is convoluted with errors and students could not convey the information necessary to reveal understanding.

Student Writing Lacks Depth

Another common problem with student writing that emerged from the data was that students lack in-depth explanations. One participant explained that many students “can explain the what but not the why” (Ted). Related to this, many students lack the ability to explain and relate how evidence fits. Five participants stressed that the lack of forming strong explanations in students’ writing stems from students’ inability to connect ideas and elaborate on their thoughts.

In addition to students struggling with explaining their ideas in writing, a lack of analytical skills was also mentioned by several of the participants as being another obstacle when using writing within their classrooms. For example, one participant stated that “students generally have a hard time articulating cause and effect relationships in writing even though they seem to understand the general concept or relationship” (Brenda).

Challenges with Enough Class Time

In addition to students’ writing below grade level, another challenge when considering the use of writing is that teachers already struggle to find time to teach all content area standards. Many content areas have numerous standards that they are expected to cover; this can make it

difficult for teachers to feel validated using WAC. Even though not all content areas have standardized tests each year, there is often a school-wide focus on improving test scores.

One participant expressed his concern with the poor quality of the writing produced by students; he and other teachers have discontinued some of the assignments and projects that involve writing. He stated that “if students had better writing skills coming into high school, more teachers would use writing more often” (Edward). Aligning with this idea was also the concern that when using writing in the classroom, it often takes the teacher more time than expected due to it requiring more prompting on the part of teachers and instructors.

Students take longer because it is not a task they like or are always familiar with, and often the finished product is not correct and requires students to revise their work. One participant stated, “While I currently use quite a bit of writing in my class, I would certainly do larger writing projects and research papers if I had more time” (Lisa). Since most teachers are already stretched for time, anything that takes more time than expected is likely to be taken out of the curriculum.

Of the nine participants, two stated that class time was an issue and factor in using WAC, three stated that they could possibly add some writing but not as much as they wished, while four stated that the class time was available. Those that indicated that class time was too limited to include WAC both blamed the number of standards as a major hurdle. One participant explained “There is not enough time to get through all the standards required for the school year. We currently use long and complex problem-based learning, so there is just no time left” (Brenda). The other participant who was also concerned about a lack of class time believed that he would do more writing, which would include projects and research papers, if he had more time. The participants who stated that class time was limited but that there were ways to incorporate WAC

had varying explanations. One participant explained that for most of the year, class time could be available. However, when it got closer to state testing, it was more important to use multiple choice and other similar standardized testing strategies rather than those that involve writing. Another participant believed that there was enough time to include writing if it only included short writing activities. The third participant who was uncertain about time claimed that if content was cut, which she believed was necessary, then WAC strategies and activities could be embedded throughout the school year.

Those participants who agreed that there was enough class time to fully incorporate WAC also had varying reasons for this. Two participants had very similar explanations for this stating that there was plenty of class time in any content area, but many teachers avoid using writing because it requires more patience and takes too long to assess. The other two participants, who also agreed that class time was not a limitation, had similar reasons as well. They both explained that the block scheduling that their schools used allotted for 90-minute class periods and created ample time to use WAC practices.

An Emphasis on Standardized Testing

Whether teaching middle school or high school, views on standardized testing vary greatly since not all subjects and grades are tested. Therefore, when discussing views on how standardized testing may influence a teacher's willingness to use WAC and embed more writing in the classroom, those that teach tested subjects will likely have a different answer than those who do not. Out of the nine participants in this study, four identified that standardized testing influences a teacher's willingness to use WAC, while five did not believe testing was a factor.

Those who believe that standardized testing creates a deterrent for using more writing in the classroom discussed the pressure to reinforce test-type questions and strategies, the amount

of time required for writing takes away from a focus on the content that is tested. Because teachers are judged on their state test scores, they feel it is more important to teach to the test. The participants who stated that standardized testing was not a critical concern explained that learning the content area can be done through writing just as well as other practices, their content area is not tested or writing is not an expectation in all content areas, and many schools have programs that students are working on throughout the day that fulfills the need for test-prep.

Factor 4: There are Differing Views on How to Assess Writing

While all participants in this study agreed that there are benefits to writing in the classroom, they also shared the many obstacles that teachers face when integrating more writing into the curriculum. Another challenge noted is the varying opinions and lack of guidelines on how WAC should be assessed. The fourth factor presented in this study is that there are inconsistencies in how to assess writing in content areas outside of language arts. This creates confusion about how to ensure that students are held accountable for on-grade-level writing expectations. If students do not have the foundational writing skills necessary, students cannot use WAC effectively to improve content area knowledge and enhance writing ability.

All participants agreed that using writing as a formative assessment was acceptable in any content area. However, views varied in terms of using writing as a summative assessment in classrooms outside of ELA. Four participants expressed that writing should only be assessed on content. They did not believe students should be formally assessed on grammar, spelling, and sentence structure. One participant indicated that “If it’s not a standard for the course, then it should not be graded” (Bobby). While many content areas do have standards that include words like summarize, analyze, and research which certainly imply that writing should be used, writing conventions are not included.

Three participants believe that writing conventions should be assessed to a degree; they mentioned that this is appropriate if it is consistent with how the language arts department assesses writing and should include common rubrics. They also stated that more weight should be placed on content, but that students should be held accountable for grade level writing expectations and the quality of their writing. Of these participants, one stated that in his classroom he “does include an evaluation of sentence structure and spelling when assessing students, but often he requires that students make corrections for these areas rather than penalizing by deducting points” (Allen). He explained that for him, using content specific vocabulary and spelling was very important and that he felt students learned more by making corrections.

The remaining two participants cited that grammar and sentence structure should be assessed consistently and included in students’ grades. One participant explained that writing in all content areas should be “graded with similar rigor and expectations as in literacy classes” (Edward). It was also important to these two participants that both major and minor grades be assessed for writing conventions when appropriate and periodically throughout the school year. Consistency, high expectations, and holding students accountable for all learning is important to both participants.

Conclusions

The four factors presented above relate to the three research questions this study set out to answer. The first factor asserting that leadership must support teacher’s instructional practices helps to answer research question one by providing specific ways in which school leaders can support the use of writing in all classrooms. Factor two, which outlines the struggles of immersing writing into all content areas, provides some important considerations when

considering research question two regarding the effects of WAC in secondary educational settings.

Research Question One

The first research question explored in this study relates to how leaders can support WAC. The selective coding used identified several themes relating to this question. It was consistent with eight out of the nine participants that leadership support was an integral part of using WAC. Several key ideas that emerged from that data regarding support included the need for encouragement and support, the necessity to maintain a literacy focus since it is a necessary aspect in all learning, and a few participants believed that leaders should even require and enforce writing and literacy in all classrooms. A participant working in the high school stated that, “Being college and career ready means that students must write well. If administrators do not require that all teachers use WAC, then our students will continue to be unprepared” (Anna).

To enact WAC and supports teachers’ efforts, it was cited that school leaders must provide time for departments to develop curriculum that incorporates writing. This requires working collaboratively with ELA departments to get ideas of writing activities that support learning, understanding grade level writing expectations, and aligning written assessment grading practices. Collaboration also makes the task of implementing writing curriculum less daunting because colleagues can share ideas and divide up the work.

One participant believes that school leaders should maintain literacy focuses throughout the school year and not at certain times, and that “leaders need to require all teachers to use class time to have students read and write since reading makes better writers” (Edward). This individual felt that while many school leaders encourage and support WAC within their schools, it was typically only when the state department or district office made writing an initiative and

therefore not a consistent practice. Another participant explained how administrative leaders need to not only support WAC but be knowledgeable of how writing can be used in various content areas. He explained, “Leaders need to ensure that teachers are incorporating writing in the way that serves their subject area. It can’t be a one size fits all approach” (Brenda).

Another common term that resonated among participants regarding leadership support was rigor. This is a term often used in education today, and several participants agree that the key to using more rigor in the classroom is to move away from multiple choice and worksheets using activities that engage students in writing instead. One participant stated, “if school leaders want to encourage depth of knowledge and rigor, then they needed to encourage writing to be used as part of all assessments in all content areas” (Neil). Another believes that “leaders should require that teachers use a variety of assessment types just like they require a certain number of major and minor grades. This would increase rigor and enhance learning for all students” (Lisa). Relating to the idea of rigor, a third participant mentioned that “if leaders are emphasizing college and career readiness, then they need to emphasize writing and writing well” (Edward).

Even though one participant did not believe that school leadership played a role in promoting WAC, this participant agreed that writing initiatives and a focus on increasing writing in the classroom are important. All participants recognize that teachers use writing to varying degrees and that increased writing would be beneficial for students. In most participants’ experiences, these types of initiatives are more successful with the guidance and support of school leadership.

Research Question Two

The second question posed in this study involves the effects of writing on content knowledge. The participants in this study outline some challenges with using WAC but also

identify many positive outcomes from using writing in the classroom. Most participants support the idea that WAC helps to build content area knowledge and make connections among ideas. Writing often deepens and broadens understanding while also allowing students to write routinely which builds writing stamina.

By writing more often about a variety of topics, students can explain information more clearly. Participants believe this is important because it allows educators to evaluate student understanding through more diverse ways rather than just multiple choice or other traditional assessment methods. A few of the participants alluded to the fact that writing is a more authentic measurement of student knowledge.

Many of the participants cited that students are not writing at the level they should and lack the ability to synthesize and analyze information. Consequently, these same skills were identified as positive outcomes from using WAC. While there may be outside influences dictating the frequency or overall use of writing in the classroom, the participants in this study indicate that writing has several positive and noteworthy impacts on student knowledge.

Research Question Three

The third research question investigates whether there is a difference in how middle and high schools use WAC. Based on participant responses, there are a few notable differences in how WAC is viewed and used at the middle school level versus the high school level. In terms of leadership, there were many similarities between the two groups of secondary leaders. However, when examining how leaders can support the use of WAC in the classroom, all four middle school participants expressed the need for two or more of the following: additional training, writing support systems, and a desire for administrators to work alongside teachers.

On the other hand, only one high school leader mentioned these things. The other four high school participants wanted autonomy, more material and planning time, and a focus on rigor. So, while all high school participants and three out of the four middle school participants stated that they feel comfortable or mostly comfortable teaching writing, when it comes to leadership support, only high school participants did not see a need for additional training or support in teaching and assessing student writing.

Another difference between these two groups relates to how WAC should be assessed. Three out of the four middle school participants stated that writing should be assessed for content only, and the fourth from this group stated that some writing mechanics should be assessed but that most of the grade should come from the content. Among high school participants, only one stated that writing should be graded on content only while the other four indicated that grammar and other writing mechanics should be a part of a student's grade. The weight of content over grammar and structure did vary some, but overall, high school participants are more apt to hold students accountable for grammar, spelling, and sentence structure in their writing than middle school participants.

In terms of the participants' overall viewpoints on writing in classroom, middle school participants brought up issues with time due to the extent of the content that needs to be covered. Three out of the four specifically mention this as an obstacle some teachers face when considering WAC. In contrast, high school participants cited that the main obstacle they face is student's lack of writing skills. Because students cannot write well, teachers become frustrated and lose patience with using writing. This group also brought up the additional challenge of having to deal with student cheating and using plagiarism when trying to add more writing into

their content areas. In the end, these challenges sometimes outweigh the desire to use writing as a tool to assess student learning.

In summary, both middle school and high school educators view writing as important and seem interested in the widespread use of WAC. While high school educators seem to know exactly what writing skills students need, middle school educators are not as specific. This indicates that there is a difference in how and the types of writing being used at the high school level as compared to the middle school level.

This again highlights the need for vertical alignment and vertical collaboration which can only be achieved if district and administrative leaders become involved and invested in WAC. Transformational school leaders have the skills and knowledge to establish a vision for WAC, set goals to increase and improve collaboration and communication among teachers, and provide PD that offers teachers specific ways writing can enhance their content area. In order to move in this direction, all school leaders, from teacher leaders to administrative leaders, need to promote writing initiatives and encourage district leaders to making WAC a focus.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to evaluate WAC and how school leaders can support writing in secondary content areas outside of language arts. This chapter includes the findings from this grounded theory study and how these findings relate to other studies and literature on educational leadership and WAC. The related literature focuses on information about transformational leadership style and data about WAC and how it is currently used and viewed.

In combining these two foci, I have explored the relationship between leadership and WAC to better understand what teachers need to expand writing curriculum in their classrooms. Expansion of WAC will better prepare students for the writing expectations of the 21st century. Philosophical, social, and curricular changes in education can be difficult and take time. Understanding how leaders can motivate and support such change is important for current educational organizations.

This research study and the discussion of findings presented in this chapter serve to add to current and future educational research. The three research questions that frame this research study are as follows:

1. How can transformational leaders support writing across the curriculum in secondary educational settings?
2. What are the effects of writing on content knowledge when used as a learning strategy in content areas outside of language arts?
3. In secondary educational settings, is there a difference in how middle and high schools use WAC?

The findings from this research study are organized into four case study factors discovered during selective coding. The first factor concluded that many educators believe school leadership plays an important role in supporting WAC. Findings explore offer insight into how participants view leadership support when it comes to WAC and what specific things leaders can do to support writing curriculum in all content areas.

The second factor determined that there are many benefits of writing that support learning and achievement in all content areas. Findings provides details on participants' experience with student writers and what they deem are the essential written skills students need to master content. The overall benefits of writing on learning are also explored and participants shared their views and understanding of WAC.

The third factor addressed the issue that many students are not currently writing at the level expected, and this creates obstacles when implementing WAC. Participants enumerate their concerns about the added time writing requires and the amount of content they are required to cover. An additional concern for some participants when it comes to writing is the pressure of standardized testing. Rather than spending extra time on writing, some participants felt that time needed to be spent on preparing students for success on state tests.

The fourth factor explored the viewpoints and opinions on how writing should be assessed in content areas outside of language arts. There are inconsistencies in how to assess writing and what students should be held accountable for in their writing. Findings reveal that these inconsistencies make the implementation of WAC difficult. Clearer guidelines are necessary to reap the potential benefits WAC may have on student achievement.

Interpretation of the Findings

Views on leadership and writing curriculum are often personal and unique; the

participants' viewpoints and experiences that were explored in this study created four factors that contribute to understanding various aspects of educational leadership and WAC practices. The data represents a collection of experiences and insights from secondary educational leaders working in various capacities within middle and high schools within one school district. Much of this data does overlap and reveals consistencies one can assume are representative of a much larger population.

Transformational Leadership Skills are Integral to Supporting WAC

One of the most important qualities to be considered a transformational leader is that of having contemporary approaches in which one must be a visionary, be willing to try and support new practices, and have the self-efficacy to work alongside staff on new endeavors (Airola, et al., 2014. p. 554). Embracing and instituting WAC in a secondary school certainly requires vision, continuous goals, and follow-through. The participants in this study indicated that these were important in supporting WAC in their middle and high schools. Several participants mentioned that school leaders must maintain a literacy focus for the long term. They must create and promote literacy goals in increasing writing in all content areas, and as these goals are met, new goals should be set for an ongoing curricular change.

For transformational leaders to work alongside staff, creating a positive school culture and forming good working relationships is important (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016, p. 357). Several participants also highlighted the need for their school leaders to not only encourage but work alongside teachers to help plan the types of writing and writing activities that would be most beneficial to students. School leaders can have a positive impact on student learning and achievement through the commitment to build strong relationships with teachers and foster a

school environment that adopts initiatives that will prepare students for success (Dutta & Sahney, 2016, p. 942). Because not all teachers are familiar with using and assessing writing, a collaborative dynamic is essential so that teachers can feel comfortable trying something new and have the necessary support to build their confidence when teaching writing (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013; Lilge, 2012; Morgan, 2012). If WAC is to be used on a regular basis in all content areas, then having trusting and supportive school leaders is imperative.

In this study participants also indicated the need for school leaders to provide time to allow content areas to work together, have cross-curricular meetings, and the opportunity for more training through high quality PD. The dynamic created within all three of these opportunities indicates a school administrator must be attentive and supportive of the needs of teachers and staff; it also demonstrates another facet of transformational leader theory in that it constructs collective leadership and the fostering of teacher leaders. Huguet's (2017) study on effective leadership explains that creating time for teachers to work together and investing in teacher leaders is a crucial component of good leadership.

In the case of supporting WAC, teacher leaders in this study indicate that opportunities to work with colleagues and receive additional training indicates a supportive administrator. It also creates situations that offer various content areas ways to discuss how to implement writing instruction and writing activities that would fit well with units already created. Consequently, this also supports the study district's ongoing PLC initiative.

Benefits of Writing on Learning

Most of the participants in this study acknowledged that many students do not write at the level expected or necessary for success in their class. Both the quality of the writing and the ability to write on a deeper level were cited as issues when it comes to student writing. One of

the main goals of the WAC movement is to address these two concerns because it is believed that “writing can be a subject that transforms instruction across subjects and grows students’ literacy skills” (Childs, 2020, p. 44). In writing more often and in writing about many different topics, students are likely to develop better writing skills overall (p. 47).

For the participants in this study, this notion supports the idea that through using WAC, students will begin to meet writing expectations at the beginning of each new semester. If students begin a new school year or semester with the ability to write at grade level, WAC will be more effective in getting students to think deeply and critically about the topics being learned. Students will also be able to practice writing for different purposes in a variety of content areas which will enhance their writing ability and help students meet and exceed 21st century literacy expectations.

All participants in this study agreed that when it comes to strengthening content area knowledge, students actively writing about what they have learned is significant and solidifies learning. However, many teachers seem reluctant to implement more writing because of current students’ writing deficiencies and the time required to overcome these. The most critical writing deficiencies mentioned by participants in the study were that students are not following grammatical and structural rules and are not using contextual language correctly.

The need for students to provide context was noted by not only math teachers, but science and social studies as well. Participants indicated that students must also master the habit of using the basic mechanics of writing such as capitalizing the first letter in a sentence and having end punctuation. When students include contextual words from the question, prompt, or reading in their writing to show that they understand the concepts being taught and use correct sentence structure, teachers can then move on to more challenging writing tasks that elevate student

learning. If most students can master these two basic writing practices, then WAC would be much more effective to deepen understanding.

One of the benefits of WAC is that it is not a program with defined parameters, but rather, it is a strategy used to increase the use of all types of writing in various content areas (Holmes, 2015, p. 80). Therefore, the way writing can be used will vary, making it more acceptable to those not adept at using writing in their instructional practices. While there were some consistencies, participants in this study outlined several important aspects of writing that are beneficial or that students need for success.

One important aspect mentioned by several participants was that writing forces students to think, which sometimes shifts to students thinking at higher levels. Also mentioned was that writing allows students to make connections with past learning or other relevant information. The last concept mentioned by several participants was that writing allows students to process and analyze. For secondary educators, analysis was cited as a necessary and relevant skill for students to master. All these facets of writing mentioned by the participants are consistent with literature exploring writing and how it supports cognitive development.

Through writing, students can explore content, monitor understanding, and evaluate and connect new knowledge with prior knowledge (van Dijk, et al., 2022, p. 4). While only two participants in the study directly mentioned that writing allows students to monitor their own understanding, many of the participants emphasized the need for students to deepen understanding and connect with the content being studied. This would ensure that students understand and remember the content long term which would positively impact achievement and better prepare students for future learning.

Such writing practices and skills are also supported by Vygotsky's theory of social cognitive learning in which learning will become concrete and deepen when students can compare the subject matter to something familiar (Smagorinsky, 2011, p. 116). In short, for student learning to take place, socialization, communication, and internalization are necessary (p. 130). All these processes are supported by WAC and were also identified as important by the participants in this study.

Realities of Using WAC in the Classroom

While it seems that educational leaders are clear on the benefits of writing and the need for more writing in all content areas, overcoming the obstacles many teachers face seems to be very influential in determining the use of WAC. One of the differences between this study as compared with other studies on WAC was a focus on teachers not embracing WAC due to their lack of comfort in teaching and using writing (Lilge, 2012; van Dijk, 2022; Wahleithner, 2018). All the participants in this study expressed that they feel comfortable teaching writing and using it as an assessment, particularly when the assessment grade focuses only on content.

The biggest obstacle presented in this study is the frustration with students being such poor writers. This creates a lack of patience and a concern that the widespread practice of writing will take up too much classroom time. Many secondary educators in content areas outside of language arts want to incorporate writing that involves research, presentations, argumentative pieces, and document-based analysis. However, because of the students' lack of writing skills, some teachers avoid writing all together or only incorporate short response writing. When teachers face the monumental task of needing to train students on the basics of writing before they can use writing to take student learning to the next level, time constraints and frustration impact the integration of WAC.

Related to the frustration of students' low writing skills are the issues with both apathy and plagiarism when it comes to student writing. One participant in this study explained that dealing with plagiarized work and AI generated writing was much too time consuming to investigate. He further explained that due to this, he no longer assigns larger writing projects or research papers and instead just requires short responses.

The use of AI and other forms of cheating have certainly been on the rise in schools all over the world. Unfortunately, this creates another obstacle that gets in the way of widespread WAC. While language arts teachers are provided training on how to spot and avoid plagiarism in students writing, many other content area educators are not provided such training. If writing practices are to be expanded into all content areas, then it is vital that all secondary educators receive training on how to help students avoid plagiarism, how students should properly cite information, and what steps should be taken if a student is suspected of turning in plagiarized or AI created work.

Similarly, students often fail to take writing seriously and avoid it all together or plagiarize, as mentioned above (Childs, 2020, p. 45). So, while most of the participants in the study agreed that they had class time available to devote to writing, several stated that the frustrations often outweigh the benefits. This makes it even more important that writing initiatives be supported by the entire district and administrative leadership. To overcome the frustrations of getting students to improve in their writing, all educators need to be dedicated to the task and involved to elicit change and improvement.

How to Assess WAC

All participants agreed that writing was beneficial in building content knowledge, and all stated that they had no concerns assessing students on the content area of their writing. However,

there were mixed feelings on whether a focus of WAC should be to assess the mechanics of writing. Literature on WAC mentions that students become better writers through repetitive practice, which suggests the requirement that students are held accountable for basic writing grammar and mechanics (Hayes, et al., 2018; Lilge, 2012; Morabito, 2017; Soysa, et al., 2014).

In this study, participants had mixed feelings on this, but interestingly, the lack of sentence structure, grammar, and spelling, as well as writing background in general, were mentioned by most of the participants as problematic. In terms of assessing students on writing mechanics within their content areas, the answers ranged. But most of the participants believed writing should be graded on content only or very little on mechanics if included. Several participants mentioned the need for rubrics, indicating that when assessing content, there would be measures in place to ensure that the writing met the expectations set forth. Unfortunately, the grading of writing is often subjective, which may be why some participants indicated a need for more training to fully implement WAC. Research studies on WAC have addressed the concern that if student writing is not properly assessed, the repetition of students writing incorrectly or ineffectively could lead to more issues (Childs, 2020; Waschle, et al., 2015).

One participant mentioned the need to have students correct mistakes in their writing, particularly when the use of content specific vocabulary was misspelled or misused in context. Three other participants agreed that their writing rubrics should align with that of their language arts departments. This holds students accountable for learning across curriculum and fosters collaboration among departments, which is also mentioned in existing literature on WAC (Alam & Ahmad, 2017; Klein, 2015).

How Middle Schools Versus High Schools Use WAC

WAC is used in elementary through college, and over the years, many studies have evaluated its use at these various levels (Clark, et al., 2021; Lilge, 2012; Nielsen, 2021; Strohmaier, et al., 2018). Instrumental in the expansion of WAC has been moving away from teaching in isolation and the growing emphasis on collaboration among educators (Holmes, 2015; Huguet, 2017). Also relevant, has been the concern with students having a lack of 21st century literacy skills and how instructional initiatives like WAC have been used to strengthen and enhance such skills (Jani & Mellinger, 2015; Lopas, et al., 2021; Morabito, 2017; Yildirim & Simsek, 2023).

In evaluation of secondary educational leaders working with middle school students as compared to those working with high school students, there were many similarities in views on how leaders can support WAC. There were also similarities in participants' evaluations of current students' writing abilities, the writing skills desired, the benefits of WAC, and how writing should be assessed. However, there were several data points that stood out and offered some differentiation between these two groups.

When it comes to views on leadership support, participants working with both middle school students and high school students indicated administrative leaders are valuable when encouraging and supporting WAC. Regarding how administrative leaders can best support writing instruction, participants working with middle school students highlighted the need for school leaders to provide more training and work alongside teachers to develop writing curriculum. Whereas participants working with high school students preferred that administrative leaders provide time for collaboration and funding for any additional materials needed.

The difference in views on administrative leadership support indicates that those working with middle school students may not be completely comfortable or knowledgeable on how to implement WAC and teach writing. On the other hand, those working with high school students are more comfortable providing writing instruction. However, they want their efforts to coincide with the writing instruction being used throughout the school building.

When analyzing data on how WAC can be implemented, more participants working with middle school students cited that a lack of class time due to the pressure of standardized testing was a concern. Traditionally, most core subject areas at the middle school level do have some kind of yearly state standardized testing. To prepare for these yearly tests, many districts also implement benchmark tests throughout the year that are predictors for readiness. Therefore, it makes sense that teachers working with middle school students would feel pressure to mimic classroom assessments to match such standardized testing.

At the high school level, only a few classes have state testing which consists of EOC (End of Course) or AP (Advanced Placement) tests. Participants familiar with this testing explained that while teachers who teach these courses do prepare students for these exams and want students to do well, the pressure is not so great that they feel they must avoid writing activities. In fact, since high school students are quickly approaching college or careers, participants working with high school students feel it is their responsibility to make sure students are writing effectively to both learn and improve communication skills.

Another major difference between these two groups was regarding how writing should be assessed. Three of the four participants working with middle school students stated that writing should be graded on content only, and only one participant stated that basic writing mechanics should be assessed along with content. On the other hand, four of the five participants working

with high school students stated that writing should be assessed for writing conventions, while only one participant, a math teacher, did not believe assessing writing mechanics was appropriate for the subject matter he taught.

This data indicates that writing conventions and overall writing ability is more important to those working with high school students. This could be because by the time students reach high school, there is an expectation that basic principles of writing should have been mastered by all students. School leaders working in high school settings see the value in using writing to elevate learning and broaden students' experiences and stamina when writing. When students do not display basic writing skills, elevating student writing and learning becomes challenging.

Something mentioned by two of the participants working with middle school students was the amount of content teachers are expected to cover. They explained that writing activities and writing assessments are not always the best way to assess students because it takes too much time. However, one of these participants did say that it was possible to cut out portions of the curriculum to ensure more time for WAC activities. Again, due to state standardized testing, the pressure to cover all material highlighted in the standards may be more intense for those working with middle school students.

The issue of time was brought up by several participants working with high school students, but the constraint was not the amount of content area required to cover but rather the amount of time necessary to use writing with students who do not display mastery of basic writing concepts and skills. This was articulated by one participant when she stated, "Expectation for good writing is in place, but there is no uniform support for the use of WAC to grow writers. There is a disconnect between expectation and support" (Anna). This indicates that not enough emphasis is put on writing instruction at the middle school level, or the writing

instruction and practices being used at the middle school level are not solidifying writing development through a gradual increase of complexity and accountability. While blame was not specifically discussed or placed by the participants in this study, often in educational settings, blame for student weaknesses is often placed on previous grades. This makes the need for vertical collaboration essential.

Based on the data collected in this study, it is fair to say that middle school teacher leaders see value in writing that reinforces content but do not feel like they have the time or the training to devote to a full implementation of WAC. High school teacher leaders value writing for both analyzing content and improving writing skills and mostly have the class time to devote to full implementation of WAC. Unfortunately, they are held back because students often come to them without the basic writing skills necessary to garner the potential benefits of WAC for their content areas.

An important element highlighted throughout the data in this study is the need for transformational leadership in educational organizations. This aligns with other educational-based research and stresses that to bring about positive changes for all facets of schools and learning, administrative leaders must focus on relationships and be able to encourage and work alongside their staff (Alam & Ahmad, 2017; Mallillin, et al., 2023; Rost, 1993). It is clear from the data in this study, that many educators rely on administrative leadership to fuel initiatives. Educators want to feel supported, and they need the vision, goals, and support for any initiative to be maintained; otherwise, it can easily become lost among the many other tasks and expectations educators have.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

A qualitative case study was a good choice for this research because the collected data offered a multitude of information and insight regarding leadership and WAC. However, because it was a qualitative study, it lacks definitive data and hard facts which likely would have strengthened the credibility of the results. While parts of this study and the overall results require a qualitative analysis, it would have been possible to add in some quantitative measurement for some of the data collected; thus, a mixed methods approach may have strengthened the validity of the findings. Additionally, the use of nine participants does not fully capture the scope of experiences and beliefs regarding these topics. Likewise, there is not an equal representation of content area backgrounds of the participants. This limits the data collected and does not allow for full comparisons to be assessed.

A study consisting of a much higher number of both middle school leaders and high school leaders would strengthen findings and could potentially offer more distinction between how WAC is viewed and used between these two demographics. Ensuring equal representation of the demographics for each group would create more valid and reliable results. This could also result in the potential for more topics and themes to emerge from a grounded theory, constant-comparative analysis. These additional topics and themes could add important details to better understand how leadership support impacts instructional practices and how the use of writing can impact student readiness and achievement.

There are several areas for future research that could add to the findings in this study. A more in-depth understanding of what types of writing are currently used and how each is graded or assessed would be beneficial. This would offer a way to better understand the abilities students lack at specific stages in secondary education and where instruction to develop writing

needs to be added to address these gaps. It would also offer reliable data to hold students accountable for writing mechanics as well as writing for different purposes.

Specific information about how writing is currently used and assessed throughout the year may also reveal major variations in scope and sequence of writing for specific grade levels and content areas. This type of knowledge could provide educational researchers tools to create writing curriculum for all content areas in 6th through 12th grade so that students' writing skills can be developed and enhanced over time. This information might also guide PD topics to ensure that teachers can provide specific writing instruction for their grade level and content area.

A concern of WAC highlighted in some of the literature is that it can be viewed and used in many diverse ways and is open to interpretation (Galbraith, 2015; Holmes, 2015; Klein, 2015; Marabito, 2017). While this creates a situation where many may feel more comfortable adopting WAC for use with their specific content area, it limits our knowledge of truly effective WAC and what specific types of writing have the most impact on building students' content knowledge. It also does not allow for streamlined writing goals and writing skill sets that build as students' progress through middle and high school.

Implications for Theory

The results of this study support many aspects of both effective school leadership and benefits of WAC in existing literature. Data from this study reveals the need for educational leaders to use transformational leadership skills to enact instructional changes with the goal of improving student achievement, particularly when it comes to literacy and writing. If students are to be adept in 21st century literacy skills, teachers need the support of an effective school leader to stress writing initiatives like WAC and provide ongoing support necessary for success.

Leadership in education is certainly multifaceted and requires a multitude of skills. The results from this study reveal what is important to secondary educators to support writing initiatives in content areas outside of language arts. Administrative leaders must instill a vision for change and set goals to ensure that steps are being taken. Administrative leaders must also be adept at understanding curriculum and instructional practices and provide ongoing support for teachers who may not be as skilled or familiar with the goals of initiatives such as with WAC. Since WAC is focused on increasing writing in all content areas and not just language arts, it's a good program choice for district and administrative leaders to support.

In addition to providing support, teachers in this study indicated the need for time to collaborate and some even suggested that school leaders work alongside teachers to create the curriculum used to support initiatives. Administrative leaders must offer extra training in the form of professional development when necessary and may also find it effective to promote collective leadership to strengthen teacher leaders within the building. Also noted in the data was that administrative leaders need to allow autonomy and recognize that teachers are subject area experts who can fulfill the expectations necessary for school initiatives provided they get the support necessary.

The data collected in this study indicates that secondary educational leaders do understand the value of using writing to engage students in content. Participants understand that writing forces students to think and reason and often creates a deeper understanding of material when students can form connections among the content being studied, past learning, and their own experiences. Data also suggests that regardless of the content area taught, participants believe that it is important that students are able use writing to provide reasoning, justify their thinking, synthesize information, and analyze major topics and ideas.

What is unclear both in the results of this study and in literature on the topic of WAC, is how WAC should be implemented to result in improved writing as well as deeper content knowledge. It seems that some view WAC as incorporating more writing activities into the current curriculum. This seems to be the mindset of many of the participants in this study as well. However, others do view WAC as a total pedagogical shift where the bulk of assessments and students' grades are comprised of writing activities. Again, more research needs to be done and clear guidelines for instituting WAC in the most appropriate and effective way are necessary if students are to be proficient in 21st century writing skills.

Implications for Practice

Confusion about what constitutes WAC is understandable since it is being used differently in a variety of settings. While I did not have to explain what constitutes WAC to any of the participants in this study, their responses about the types of writing and how writing should be assessed indicate that there are different definitions of what institutes WAC. It is also understandable that teachers would be hesitant to change their curriculum in its entirety since this shift would not necessarily create the gains in student writing ability that are necessary. Teachers require guidelines that have been researched and vetted that present the clear expectation that if used correctly, students will show proficiency. Teacher effectiveness will continue to be assessed in various ways including through standardized testing. Therefore, it is imperative that any major curriculum and pedagogical changes are supported by research that proves such changes will result in positive and impactful changes to student learning.

Until more research is done, WAC will continue to be a writing initiative with few parameters other than that writing is incorporated in all content areas. Whether this should include instruction on writing mechanics and effective writing strategies is still unknown. At this

point, the focus seems to be to get teachers outside of language arts to move away from multiple choice and similar test-type questioning and begin to incorporate writing of any form. This can be short answers, projects, research papers, journals, etc.

A practical solution for increasing the use of WAC may be to create a program like South Carolina's Read to Succeed Act, which was established in 2014 that focuses on using writing in all classrooms. Like Read to Succeed, Write to Succeed would require that all K-12 educators receive intense training on WAC and offer standards-based writing practices that every teacher can use in his/her classroom. Ultimately, if such a program proves successful, not only would it provide a multitude of data to study, but ongoing training could become a permanent part of recertification requirements to ensure that teachers are knowledgeable about the most recent writing information, trends, and practices.

As WAC continues to expand, and state educational departments, school districts, and school leaders encourage more writing practices in all content areas, data needs to continue to be collected and assessed. If there is a noticeable increase in students' ability to write on grade level and reveal growth of knowledge through writing activities, the educators can feel more confident in their choice to devote class time to student writing. Only time and continued research will reveal whether positive impacts on student writing result from the subtle efforts that are currently in place.

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APPENDIX A. OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you consider yourself to be an educational leader? If any of the following are true, please answer yes to this question:
 - You are the most experienced teacher in your department.
 - You are on leadership committees or part of a leadership team at your school.
 - You are currently or have in the past hosted practicum and student teachers.
2. What is your current role in the district?
3. How long have you been in education?
4. How long have you been in your current role?
5. Describe how a school leader, such as a principal, can support instruction.
6. How often should teachers outside of literacy courses use writing to assess students?
7. What types of writing have you used in the past or are you currently using to support student learning in your classroom?
8. How should writing be graded in non-literacy courses?
9. How does writing help students understand content area?
10. Do you believe that the district as a whole or the school in which you teach supports writing across the curriculum?

APPENDIX B. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

1. How do you view the role of writing in education at large? In your experience, do most of the students in your school (classroom) write at the level you expect? What writing skills do students lack? What writing skills do students need to be successful?
2. How do you view the role of writing in content area outside of ELA, such as in a biology class or a social studies class? Do you feel comfortable, or do you believe teachers within your school feel comfortable, using writing as an assessment tool? Do you feel, or do you believe teachers within your school feel, that you (they) have enough class time to incorporate more writing in your (their) content area areas?
3. What do you know about Writing to Learn (WTL) or Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)? Do you believe the emphasis on standardized test scores influences a teacher's willingness to use more writing in the classroom?
4. Do you believe that district and school leadership play an important role in encouraging teachers outside of the ELA classroom to use more literacy-based instruction? If yes, in what ways could leadership help teachers incorporate more literacy into the content area being taught?

APPENDIX C. APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH (IRB)



**Human Subjects Committee (HSC)
Institutional Review Board (IRB)**

Dear Amie M Wright,

Proposal Title: The Impact of Transformational Leadership on Writing Across the Curriculum
Submission date: Thursday, January 25, 2024, 1:30 PM

The Human Subjects Committee (HSC) has received and reviewed the submitted above-titled research proposal. I am happy to inform you that AU's IRB has voted to APPROVE your proposal as submitted.

Your approval number is AU202408IRB. Please be reminded that if at any point during the research, the risk level to any human subjects involved changes, either physical harm or loss of anonymity, or should you find it necessary to make any adjustments to the study as approved, please contact the HSC/IRB Chair in advance of implementing such changes. This may require that you submit an IRB Modification form.

We wish you well in your research. If you need clarification regarding the committee's decision, please contact Dr. Gilbert Eyabi, IRB Chair, at HSC@andersonuniversity.edu.

Sincerely,



02/02/2024

Gilbert Eyabi, PhD
Professor of Mathematics,
Assistant Provost,
IRB Chair, Anderson University.

APPENDIX D. CONSENT FORM



INFORMED CONSENT FOR

The Impact of

Transformational

**Leadership on Cross Curricular
Writing to Learn Practices**

You are invited to participate in a research study to examine how school leadership supports the use of writing across the curriculum. This study will only require a small amount of your time and all demographic and personal information will be confidential and not included in the published study.

This study is being conducted by Amie M. Wright, a doctoral student at Anderson University who is under the supervision of Dr. Hunter Strickland, Professor in the School of Education. You were selected as a possible participant because you are considered a leader in your school and therefore have valuable insight into this topic.

If you decide to participate, I will use the information you completed in the survey. I will also arrange a time for a brief interview and use information gathered during our conversation as well. Overall, your participation will only require about 1 hour of your time.

Your participation in this study will require your valuable time to complete a questionnaire and have a conversation through Zoom or on the phone. Our communication will primarily be through technology and there will be no need for you to travel anywhere or meet in person to participate.

Being in education, this research study offers some valuable information on how to better prepare students for 21st century literacy standards. As literacy skills continue to be addressed, any additional research related to literacy is valuable. Your participation will aid in such research and support measures to find the best approaches to improve student literacy.

Any information obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential. Information collected through your participation may be used as part of a dissertation and published through Anderson Universities School of Education. If so, none of your identifiable information will be included. Any confidential data collected in this study will be protected and kept for three years and will thus be destroyed after that time.

You may withdraw your participation at any time before April 1, 2024. In doing so by the declared date, the information you provided will not be used in the study.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not jeopardize your future relations with Anderson University or Anderson 1 School District.

If you have any questions, I invite you to ask them now. If you have questions later you may contact Amie Wright through email at [REDACTED] and by phone at [REDACTED], or you may contact Dr. Hunter Strickland through email at [REDACTED] and by phone at [REDACTED]. You will be provided a copy of this form to keep.

For more information regarding your rights as a research participant you may contact the Chairs of the Human Subjects Committee/Institutional Review Board by phone or e-mail. The HSC Chairs, Dr. Joni Criswell and Dr. Robert Franklin, can be reached at (864) 231-2000 or through email at hsc@andersonuniversity.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. CLICKING 'AGREE' INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.