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Examining the Teaching and Learning
of Writing in Elementary School

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education
in
Teaching and Learning

by

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2006
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The dissertation of Kimberlee Ann Douillard is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2006
For Geoff,
you make the impossible possible

and for

Andy and Nick,
it’s never too late
to find your passion or
to follow your dreams
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Publications
“Going Past Done: Creating Time for Reflection in the Classroom,” Language Arts, National Council of Teachers of English, November 2002
"Reflective Friday: Time Out To Think," The Quarterly, National Writing Project, Fall 2000
"Reflecting on Reflection," in Beyond the Silence: Listening for Democracy, Heinemann, 1999
Profiles of the National Writing Project: Improving Writing and Learning in the Nation's Schools, "Garden," by Lucy Cameron, second grade student from my 1998-99 multiage class, NWP, 1999
"Reflecting on Reflection," reprinted by the Dialogue, SDAWP, Summer, 1999

Professional Presentations

American Educational Research Association Conference, Montreal, Quebec, April 2005 on "Examining a Multiage Class: A Community or a Community of Practice?"

Writing Research in the Making Conference, Santa Barbara, CA, February 2005, on "An Examination of Writing Instruction and Student Writing in Elementary School."


California Teachers of English Conference, San Diego, CA, February 2004, on "Writing to Explore Diversity and Celebrate Differences."

National Writing Project Conference, San Francisco, CA, November 2003, on "In Schools and Online: The Future of Teacher Research in the National Writing Project."

California Writing Project Conference, Sacramento, CA, October 2003, on "Writing to Explore Diversity and Celebrate Differences."

International Conference on Teacher Research, Chicago, IL, April 2003, on “Learning to See/Seeing to Learn: The Development of Critical Literacy in a Suburban Elementary Classroom.”

American Educational Research Association Conference, Chicago, IL, April 2003, on “Learning to See/Seeing to Learn: The Development of Critical Literacy in a Suburban Elementary Classroom.”

National Council of Teachers of English, Atlanta, GA, November 2002, on “Moffett Award Proposal: A Work in Progress.”


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National Writing Project Conference, Baltimore, MD, November 2001, on "Writing Matters: Exploring the Relationship Between Writing Instruction and Writing Assessment."

International Conference on Teacher Research, Vancouver, British Columbia, April 2001, on "Writing What Matters: Balancing Authenticity with the Demands of Standards and Assessment."

San Diego Area Writing Project Renewal Event, San Diego, CA, April 2001, on "Writing What Matters: Balancing Authenticity with the Demands of Standards and Assessment."

National Council of Teachers of English, Milwaukee, WI, November 2000, on "Writing What Matters: Elementary Students Speak Their Mind."

California Multiage Conference, "Every Child a Learner," San Diego, CA, June 2000, on
MAC Kids Love to Write: Creating a Culture of Writing in the Multiage Classroom.

International Conference on Teacher Research, Baton Rouge, LA, April 2000, on "Influencing the Quality of Student Learning: Developing Metacognitive Skills Through the Use of Reflective Thinking, Talking and Writing in the Classroom."

Best Practices of the National Writing Project, University of California, Irvine Writing Project Conference, Irvine, CA, December 1999, on "Reflect to Learn: Developing Metacognitive Skills Through Reflective Thinking, Talking and Writing in the Classroom.

National Council of Teachers of English, Denver CO, November 1999, on "Learning From Student Voices: The Power of Classroom Reflections."

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International Conference on Teacher Research, Montreal, Quebec Canada, April 1999, on "Learning From Student Voices: The Power of Classroom Reflections."

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San Diego Teacher Foundation Grant, December 1996. “Community Study Project.”
This dissertation explores the complexities of teaching writing in elementary school. Through the use of surveys, fourth grade teachers reported on their instructional
practices and described their students’ writing behaviors. Surveys provided an overview of instructional practices and also served as a tool for selecting four classroom teachers for more in-depth study. With the selected teachers, interviews and classroom observations were used to examine writing instruction and to uncover the instructional decisions that these teachers made when teaching writing. Study teachers also provided student writing samples which were then examined in conjunction with the teaching of writing to look for relationships between the student writing and the teaching of writing.  

The influence on the teaching context that emanates from the national, state, and local levels was also analyzed, including the No Child left Behind Act as well as the resulting California English-Language Arts Content Standards in writing, the State Testing and Reporting (STAR) writing test for fourth grade, and the adopted language arts curriculum.

Political, cultural, and technical pressures influenced fourth grade teachers’ decisions about writing instruction. This three-dimensional approach illuminates the many, often competing, influences that teachers contend with as they make decisions about instruction in their classrooms. In the four classrooms studied, teachers tended to focus instruction on form and language conventions in few writing types. This attention to form and conventions served to limit attention to substantive content and awareness of audience and purpose. Students followed the directions that teachers gave, filling in predetermined formats with surface level information. Students viewed writing as a classroom activity to be done for the teacher, in the way the teacher determined. The tremendous need to have student writing look “right” along with competing demands on teaching/learning time squeezed writing instruction and student writing to the point that
writing instruction became a process of teaching students to have their writing conform to predetermined formats. The pressures exerted by political, cultural, and technical factors converged to narrow the definition of writing, limiting students’ experiences with writing and the possibilities that writing can offer as a resource for learning.
Chapter One:

The Need for Effective Writers

The needs of a democratic society and requirements of the workforce bring with them a demand for effective writing. An informed citizenry must understand the ways language works in order to read critically and communicate effectively. Beyond being able to read and comprehend documents such as legal contracts, advertising messages, and political materials, citizens must also have knowledge of the ways documents are composed and the expectations and requirements for those particular documents if they are to read them critically and understand the subtleties they contain. This kind of knowledge comes from opportunities to explore and wrestle with language so that it can be utilized not only by an elite few, but also by the society as a whole. Writing offers these opportunities in ways not available through reading. Writers must manipulate language, understand structures and their demands as well as anticipate the needs of the reader in order to communicate clearly and effectively. Writing, beyond its communicative purposes, also serves as a vehicle for abstract and analytical thinking allowing the writer to clarify and organize thoughts and generate ideas (Britton, 1982; Gere, 1985; Vygotsky, 1978).

A recent survey of 120 major American corporations employing nearly 8 million people concluded that in today’s workplace writing is a “threshold skill” for hiring and promotion among salaried (i.e. professional) employees. Writing also serves as a “gatekeeper” to both higher education and high-skill, high-wage, professional work (The National Commission on Writing, 2004). Although approximately three-quarters of high
school graduates will go to college within two years of graduation (NCES, Conditions of Education 1997), many will arrive unprepared for college level coursework. Nearly half of all college students take at least one remedial course and those rates are even higher for minority students (Educational Trust, 1999). According to a report by the intersegmental committee of the Academic Senates of the Community Colleges, the California State University, and the University of California (2002), only one third of entering college students are sufficiently prepared for the two most frequently assigned writing tasks: analyzing information or arguments and synthesizing information from several sources. An examination of a selection of tests used in high school, for admission to postsecondary institutions, and for placement in college courses revealed gaps between the content of high school coursework and college tests. Even more disturbing is the fact that the most widely used tests in the study did not ask for writing at all. When writing does appear, the types of writing tasks asked for do not match the kinds of writing that are called for in college or in the workplace (Educational Trust, 1999).

Concerns about the quality of student writing are not limited to high school and college. Teachers in classrooms of all levels, from university to elementary, note that students struggle to organize ideas and express their thinking in writing effectively. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports improvement in writing for 4th and 8th grade students from the 1998 sample to the most recent sample taken in 2002 (NCES, 2002). This improvement translates to only 28% of 4th graders and 31% of 8th graders scoring at or above proficient in the nationwide sample. Adding to the problem is the “achievement gap” between white students and African American and
Latino students. The Educational Trust (2003) reports that according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results from 2002, African American and Latino fourth graders were about two years behind their white counterparts in writing performance. Income level is another factor that interferes with student outcomes, with poorer students falling behind their more affluent peers.

According to the National Commission on Writing (2003), writing has become the neglected element of school reform. Most elementary students spend less than three hours a week on writing assignments. In high school, many students report having papers of three or more pages assigned only once or twice a month. Some high school students report rarely having assignments of this length. While most students can write, most do not write well. The NAEP 2002 writing assessment showed 58% of fourth graders and 54% of eighth graders writing at the basic level. Writing at the basic level lacks attention to audience and elaboration that clarifies and enhances the central idea (NCES, 2003). Writers at this level are not writing well enough to meet the demands they face in higher education and the work environment.

In its report, The Neglected “R”, the National Commission on Writing highlights some major challenges to the teaching of writing including the problem of having adequate time for writing in the classroom, the problem of measuring results, the problem of teachers’ knowledge of writing, and a lack of support for teachers teaching writing. In addition to these challenges in the classroom are the challenges researchers face measuring the effectiveness of particular approaches or instructional techniques. Effective writing is not easily measured and does not lend itself to efficient large-scale assessment. There is not one correct answer that all students will produce in response to
a particular writing task. Writing is messy, complicated, and it takes time—which
creates problems in measuring results and pinpointing effective instructional practices
with research data.
Chapter Two:

Research on Writing: What We Know So Far

Historical View

Research on the teaching of writing is relatively new. The third edition of the Handbook on Research on Teaching (1986) was the first to include a section on research on writing. In fact, Scardemalia and Bereiter, the authors of the article, stated that the inclusion of the section was due to a "dramatic increase in research activity" (p.778). They went on to say that in 1974 there were no sessions at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) annual meeting presenting research on writing but by 1979 there were 16 sessions on that topic. (The 2005 AERA Annual Meeting Program had 32 sessions on writing in the index.) Throughout the article they refer to the "writing crisis" and point out that the crisis was not limited to any particular group. "It thus appears that the 'writing problem' is not a matter of a minority for whom writing is especially problematic but rather a matter of the majority." (p. 778) While writing continues to be a struggle for all students, Hispanic and African American students, as well as students who live in poverty, experience greater struggles with writing in school and in school-based assessments.

In contrast to the limited research on writing prior to the 1970’s, during the past three decades an unprecedented amount of attention has been given to what people do when they write. This last thirty years of research has caused a significant shift away from studying the writing products of students to studying the processes associated with
those products. Reformers of the teaching of writing reflected Dewey’s (1959) belief that learning is a process to be cultivated rather than a body of knowledge to be disseminated, and that the child is an essential contributor to the process. In the name of process, reformers of writing often rejected the rhetorical formulas and grammatical rules that were traditionally offered as descriptors of exemplary writing but were disconnected from the production of such texts (Graves, 1975; Hillocks, 1986). Teacher intervention and prescriptive guides were thought to inhibit good writing. According to Elbow (1973), the very process of writing was so self-generating and writer centered that he called his text *Writing without Teachers*. Reformers subordinated content to personal expression. Intervention was abandoned as oppressive, a violation of natural, holistic, and heuristic process. This shift was not without a backlash. Different groups of educators championed one approach over another. According to Strickland (2001) the lack of a consistent and coherent framework to guide teacher education and research within the fragmented field of English studies led to two problematic outcomes. One was the over-rejection of the conventions of standard English. The other was the reduction of the approach of teaching writing as simplistic “self-expression. Confusion and varying implementation of a process approach to writing instruction still occur. In their 2000 study, Lipson and her colleagues examined the writing instruction of eleven fifth grade teachers who described their writing instruction as utilizing the “writing process.” They found that the teachers implemented instruction in different ways that created different climates and purposes for writing in their classrooms. The Lipson, et. al. study reflects the concerns of Dyson and Freedman (1990) that writing process might become a rigid set of activities in the school week: Monday we plan, Tuesday we draft,
Wednesday we respond to drafts, Thursday we revise, and so on. Worse yet are the interpretations of writing process that assume recopying a corrected final draft counts as process. The outcomes that Strickland described and that Dyson and Freedman feared are reflective of the confusion and debates still present in the teaching of writing. The approaches and methods used to teach writing still vary widely, reflect a wide range of understandings about the purposes and forms of writing, and are not well defined, particularly at the elementary level of schooling.

Writing instruction in elementary school settings falls into the curriculum category called Language Arts. Language Arts includes everything related to reading, writing, listening, and speaking including but not limited to phonics, reading comprehension, spelling, grammar, and handwriting. In high schools, writing is generally found in English courses whose primary focus is having students read and analyze literary works. In contrast, at the university and college level, teaching students to write happens in a field called Composition. The teaching practices and instructional materials for teaching writing in elementary settings are not explicitly grounded in a particular theory of composition. Additionally, theories of composition used in elementary classrooms appear to be derived from those developed for adult writers in university classrooms. Three major theories of composition seem to be influencing writing instruction in classrooms today.

Three Major Composition Theories

As a university-based field, composition has developed theories to underlie its work. An examination of pedagogical theories in composition reveals variation in the
ways theories are named and delineated. Drawing on the work of Berlin (1982), Faigley (1986), and Mitchell (2004), three major theories are described.

**The Traditional Approach**

What is described as a traditional approach (Mitchell, 2004) or Positive or Current-Traditional (Berlin, 1982) is prevalent in writing instruction, especially in the teaching of struggling writers in schools today. This approach emerged at a time when universities were expanding their student population and admitting students who were not only the children of wealthy and powerful people. The increase in students meant more variance in the preparation they had received and as a result, more students who struggled with the writing required of them in college. Teachers of writing found themselves overwhelmed with the volume of student writing produced. At this time the five-paragraph essay emerged as the “ideal form” as it imposed a limit on the volume of writing, allowing writing instructors some semblance of a life outside the classroom. Hairston (as cited in Mitchell, 2004) describes the successful writer as “one who can systematically produce a 500-word theme of five paragraphs, each with a topic sentence.”

The traditional approach is characterized by an emphasis on the composed product rather than the composing process, a concern with usage and style, and a preoccupation with the informal essay and the research paper. This approach assumes that writers need only master the rules: forms, grammatical constructions, and mechanics, to communicate effectively. There is an assumption that writing is a linear process and that mastery of skills precedes effective writing. Students must master the sentence
before proceeding to the paragraph. Skills are often taught in fragmented, unrelated components through decontextualized exercises. This approach suggests that competent writers know what they are going to say before they write—they need only organize the ideas into the proper form.

The Individual Approaches: Expressivist View and Cognitive View

What I will call the individual approach is most often divided into two theories, the expressivist view (Faigley, 1986, Berlin, 1982, and Mitchell, 2004) and the cognitive view (Faigley, 1986, Mitchell, 2004). Both views focus on the individual— their innate talents, experiences, and processes and call for teachers to “get out of the way” so that students can write. The expressivist view is characterized by sincerity, spontaneity, and originality following the romantic tradition that views writing as “the act of a private consciousness” (Faigley, 1986, p. 535). The cognitive view marked a shift from product to process in writing instruction. Since internal processes are not visible, there is an assumption in the cognitive model that external processes would replicate the internal processes of the mind. In this view there is a belief that individuals will become better writers if they learn to think and act like good writers. This model is sometimes called the “autonomous model” of literacy assuming that students will discover the necessary forms and processes for effective writing through their own writing.

Both the expressivist view and the cognitive view focus on the individual. The individual approach takes us back to the romanticized reclusive writer, described by Brodkey (1987) as a “solitary writer alone in a cold garret working into the small hours of the morning by the thin light of a candle.” While both views purport to democratize
writing instruction, there is an assumption that the talent lies in the individual and that writing is not taught and perhaps cannot be taught, it is modeled and facilitated by the instructor. The individual approach can result in a mismatch between teacher expectations and student experiences. Since writing ability lies within the writer, the student who fails to live up to the instructor’s (or the institution’s) expectations must lack the ability to write. While this approach claims to honor the individual and what that person brings to the writing and learns through the writing, it ignores the goal of academic writing. Within the academic context there are certain expectations about what constitutes well-organized and well-written prose and certain forms are privileged within particular disciplines and within the university.

**The Social/Cultural Approach**

The third major theory is labeled the New Rhetoricians by Berlin, the social view by Faigley, and the social/cultural approach by Mitchell. In this theory writing is seen as a social act. Written language emanates from the community to which the writer belongs. This model seeks to understand literacy in terms of social practices and in terms of the ideologies in which different literacies are embedded. According to Bruffee (1986), “Social construction offers a language with which to cope with that diverse, rapidly changing world, a world in which relations between people and things has become subordinate in importance and long-range effect to relations among people and among communities of people” (p. 779).

Since the academic context has particular expectations for writing, learning to write within the school context can be seen as a socialization process characterized by
direct teaching of forms and uses of academic discourse. This is important because as Shaughnessy (cited in Mitchell, 2004) points out, what differentiates poor writers from successful writers is the lack of understanding of academic discourse conventions. Even though the social approach explicitly teaches particular forms and uses of academic discourse it differs from the traditional approach. In the social approach, form is taught in order to give students access to academic discourse and the power that goes with it. This approach does not have as its goal the elimination of other discourses, instead it focuses on recognizing the multiple discourses that exist and the varying purposes they serve.

**Developing a Framework to Describe Instruction**

These three major theories provide the context for instruction based on the assumptions and understanding about writing and learning that underlie them. Each of these three approaches defines writing in ways that determine the kinds of instruction (or lack of instruction) that are to be provided, the kinds of writing that are expected of students, and the social contexts for writing. Within the K-12 setting, not only are theories of composition not explicitly stated, but practices are employed in ways that demonstrate a lack of understanding of how the instructional practices construct student writing.

Without explicit theories to describe writing instruction in K-12 settings, researchers have categorized instructional practices in order to develop frameworks to describe writing instruction. One prevalent framework was developed and utilized by Hillocks (1986) in his analysis of the body of research on written composition conducted
from 1963 and 1982. This framework, more than twenty years old, continues to be referred to as a way to understand writing instruction (Smagorinsky, 2006; MacArthur, Graham, & Fitzgerald, 2006) and as a framework for conducting current studies (Sadoski, Willson, & Norton, 1997). This framework includes four distinct modes of instruction and enumerates common foci of writing instruction.

**Instructional Modes**

Hillocks (1986) in his review of research in written composition describes what he refers to as *modes of instruction*. These modes refer to the role of the teacher, the kinds of activities present, and the clarity and specificity of objectives and learning tasks. Four modes are described, specifically referring to the instructional style, not the focus or content of instruction.

**Presentational Mode**

The presentational mode is characterized by: clear and specific objectives, lecture and teacher-led discussions dealing with concepts to be learned and applied, the study of models and other materials which explain and illustrate the concept, specific assignments or exercises which generally involve imitating a pattern or following rules that have been previously discussed, and feedback following the writing coming primarily from teachers.

The presentational mode is said to dominate in all subject matters, with 70 percent of all instruction time consisting of talk, with teachers doing the majority of the talking (Goodlad, 1984 as cited in Hillocks). The assumptions underlying this mode
assume that knowledge is best conveyed directly in the form of verbal formulas, rules, and examples. It also assumes that students will be able to convert the rules and examples into guides for their own writing. Hillocks’ review of studies of the teaching of writing using the presentational mode shows that this mode has the smallest positive impact on student writing of the four instructional modes.

Natural Process Mode

The natural process mode is characterized by: generalized objectives, free writing about whatever interests the students, writing for audiences of peers, generally positive feedback from peers, opportunities to revise and rework writing, and high levels of interaction among students.

In this mode the teacher is seen as a facilitator whose role is to free the student’s imagination and sustain a positive classroom atmosphere. The avoidance of the study of model pieces of writing, the lack of presentation of criteria required in the written product, and not using the teacher as the primary source of feedback are prevalent. Instruction in the natural process mode may include prewriting activities to stimulate students’ memory or imagination. Some assumptions underlying this mode are that writing for an audience of peers will improve writing and that the teacher’s role should be reactive—that is responding to what the student writes rather than planning instructional experiences to result in learning particular writing strategies. The natural process mode showed slightly more positive gains in student writing than the presentational mode.
**Environmental Mode**

The environmental mode is characterized by: clear and specific objectives, materials and problems selected to engage students with each other in specifiable processes important to some particular aspect of writing, and activities conducive to high levels of peer interaction concerning specific tasks.

Teachers in this mode are likely to minimize lecture and teacher-led discussion. The inclusion of small groups working with concrete materials and problems with students engaged in the use as well as the principles to be taught is a common practice in this mode. The teacher provides clear goals and structured tasks, but in contrast to the presentational mode, the students learn by working through the problem rather than by the teacher telling them what to do. Assumptions underlying this mode include that teaching can and should seek to develop identifiable skills in learners and that these skills are developed by using them orally before using them in writing. The use of these skills is often complex and may require collaboration with and feedback from others. The environmental mode of instruction was found to have significantly greater effect on student writing than any of the other modes.

**The Individualized Mode**

The individualized mode is characterized by the use of tutorials, programmed material of some kind, or a combination of the two. This mode strives to help students on an individualized basis. This mode is often referred to when the student-teacher conference is the primary mode of writing instruction. An assumption that underlies this mode is that a teacher working with a single student is more effective than a teacher
Focus of Instruction

Focus of instruction, as defined by Hillocks (1986), describes the types of content or activities used by teachers of writing. He outlines some major foci of instruction including grammar and mechanics; sentence combining; models; scales; free writing; and inquiry. The particular foci described are not meant to be comprehensive, instead they represent some common foci found in research literature.

Grammar and Mechanics

This focus includes the study of parts of speech and sentences. Sometimes called formal grammar or traditional school grammar, instruction of this sort typically involves identifying a noun as the name of a person, place or thing and identifying (usually eight) parts of speech. In spite of research that suggest that the study of formal grammar has a small or even harmful effect on the improvement of writing (at least in part because it typically displaces time spent actually composing), grammar continues to be a major focus of instruction in elementary and secondary schools (Hillocks, 1986, Smith, Cheville, & Hillocks, 2006).

Sentence Combining

Sentence combining, which became a focus for instruction in 1973, involves having students take two or more sentences and combine them to produce a single
effective structure. The goal of this work is to help students move to more mature sentence constructions and writing patterns. Generally this approach has been found to improve the syntactic maturity of students’ sentences.

The Study of Models

The study of models comes from the assumption that familiarity with great writing will enhance a writer’s own work. This has been extended by teachers to mean that by seeing and imitating forms and techniques, writers will learn how to write well. Models have been used in different ways in classrooms including the studying of a variety of models and then identifying particular features, using a good and a bad model to contrast the differences between the two, and using a single model to follow as a guide. The use of models has had varying results in improving writing (Hillocks, 1986, 2006).

The Use of Scales

Scales or sets of criteria describing elements of effective writing are used by students to apply to their own writing or the writing of others. In some cases students are asked to judge or rate a piece of writing according to the scale, in others to improve the piece of writing according to the scales. Scales can take a variety of forms including feedback sheets and questions as well as the more classic use of scales with number rankings. The use of scales was found to have a positive effect on both revised writing and on new writing produced after the use of the scales.
Free Writing

Free writing is often used to increase verbal fluency, gathering and discovering ideas, and exploring what the writer knows. Many studies that include free writing are also studies that used frequent peer feedback and revision or drafting, making it impossible to judge the results of free writing independently.

Inquiry

Inquiry focuses on immediate and concrete data during instruction and practice and involves students using that data to help them develop skills or strategies to say or write something about it. The inquiry focus had a large effect on improving student writing across different writing types including narrative/descriptive, analytic, and argument (Hillocks, 1986).

The Relationship Between Frameworks and Theories

Instructional modes and focus of instruction as presented by Hillocks are related in some ways to the three major theories of composition. The traditional approach in composition is similar to the presentational mode of instruction and includes many common foci including a focus on grammar and models. The individual approaches (expressivist view and cognitive view) are similar to the natural mode with an emphasis on the student writer finding his/her own way to writing by writing, often using free writing as a way of getting there. The environmental approach has a connection to the social/cultural approach in helping students support each other as they work through situations calling for specific writing skills in the process of gaining those skills. While
Hillocks cautions that the instructional modes can be used with any of the foci, it is interesting to note that particular foci tend to remain connected to particular instructional modes, further influencing the effect of that combination on student writing.

The Complexities of Teaching Writing

The approaches described in composition theory and the various instructional modes and foci begin to hint at the complexities of writing and of teaching writing. The complexities of writing are often underestimated in curriculum design and course development with the focus often placed on either surface features of the writing (spelling, handwriting, and language mechanics) or on the format or organizational structure (five-paragraph essay, thesis statement followed by three supporting details) of the writing (Matsumura et al, 2002). Adopted curricula and state standards do little to offer solutions or support for writing instruction. Writing is subjugated to reading in the Language Arts instructional materials recently adopted by schools in the state of California, offering opportunities for extended writing once during each theme rather than on a daily basis (Cooper & Pikulski, 2003). The California standards for writing further confuse what is expected in terms of instruction by offering little or no writing content in the early grades (K-3) and then demanding a dramatic increase in both volume and number of writing applications by grade 5 (CA Dept. of Ed., 1999).

For teachers, the problem of learning to teach writing becomes even more complicated than the issues revealed by curriculum. Three issues: the problem of defining writing as a school subject, the problem of teaching writing, and the problem of influencing teacher learning (Kennedy, 1998) make learning to teach writing effectively
even more problematic. Writing is not considered a content area like math, science, or English. It is often thought of as practices that are without content and can then be applied across content. This can cause writing to be seen as a set of skills to be learned and then applied without regard to content. Writing is often not taught in science and math, instead teaching writing is frequently seen as the exclusive domain of English teachers. Unfortunately, even English coursework and Language Arts methodology courses do not focus much time on the teaching of writing, emphasizing the teaching of reading and/or literature instead.

Kennedy refers to three main ideas about the school subject of writing that she calls aspects of writing. They include the most traditional where the subject matter is largely prescriptive consisting mostly of grammatical and conventional information such as capitalization and punctuation. The second where the subject matter is largely conceptual which includes concepts such as metaphor, chronology and argument that allow students to appreciate the quality of texts they read and use these same concepts to analyze and improve their own writing. And the third aspect where the subject matter is largely strategic and purposeful so students are familiar and comfortable with the ways their ideas can be generated and transformed into texts and be able to use the process of writing to refine and clarify their own thinking. Even when teachers follow curriculum guides, these three aspects of writing leave teachers to decide in each teaching situation whether they should be concerned about prescriptions, concepts, or strategies. In addition, teachers face the tensions that come with mandated expectations of teaching and learning such as state standards and high stakes testing (High School Exit Exam, Grade 4 and 7 writing assessment). They have to make decisions about providing
students with authentic writing situations and the need to ensure that students learn particular concepts and prescriptions that they will need to succeed on district, state, and national assessments.

To further complicate matters, teachers have to be aware of their own preconceptions about the nature of writing and their role in student learning. Many teachers are more familiar with writing prescriptions than with writing strategies based on their own experience with writing in school which influences their approaches to teaching writing. This “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975) pervades not only the ways teachers see themselves as instructors but also influences how administrators, parents, students, and the public see the teacher’s role and as a result what they expect teachers to do in the course of instruction.

The Complexities of Learning to Write

The complexities of writing also extend beyond the teacher and the teaching of writing. The composing process demands that students attend to multiple goals including expressing knowledge about the topic, satisfying the expectations of the teacher, and attending to the mechanical aspects of writing. Inexperienced writers cope with these demands by simplifying the writing task to the point where only one goal at a time needs to be considered. According to Siegler (1998), the simplicity of this organization accounts for one of the most striking features of children’s compositions: their brevity. In elementary school years, compositions are typically half of a typed page or less. This brevity results in writing that is underdeveloped and often simplistic in content. While the brevity and underdeveloped nature of the writing is often attributed to students’
cognitive development in the early elementary years, the writing of inexperienced writers of all ages is characterized by brevity and underdevelopment (NCES, 2002).

Vygotsky (1978) points out the differences between oral speech, inner speech, and written speech. Written speech is a separate linguistic function, differing from oral speech in both structure and mode of functioning. Writing requires a high level of abstraction and deliberate analytic action. Written speech must explain the situation fully, clearly articulating the context in order to be intelligible, in contrast to oral or inner speech, which are already embedded in context.

Moffett (1979) described five levels of writing beginning with the lowest definition that reduces writing to drawing letters or making graphic symbols. This level is commonly referred to as handwriting. The next level he described is the transcribing of speech sounds. This level often consists of the direct copying of an existing text. The third level marks a shift from copying to some degree of composition. Paraphrasing consists of reading a text and then summarizing or rewording that text, usually to express understanding of the text. Craft is the next level described by Moffett, which includes how to construct good sentences, paragraphs, and overall organization. The highest level, the level Moffett described as “true authorship” is what he called revising inner speech. He defined it this way to insure that writing would be acknowledged as thinking. Writing, according to Moffett, does not consist of just one of these levels but consists of all of them at once. When people write, they simultaneously draw letters, transcribe their inner voice, paraphrase concepts and frameworks from their knowledge and experiences, craft their thoughts into language, and revise the raw thoughts of their inner speech. According to Moffett, these are not isolated stages to be mastered before progressing to
the next—even beginning writers can incorporate all of the levels to some degree to produce writing.

**Gaps in Achievement and Expectations**

Like in other curricular areas, large performance gaps in writing exist between white and black students, white and Hispanic students, and between those eligible and not eligible for free/reduced-price school lunches (a measure of poverty). A study conducted by Guadalupe Valdez (1999) used case studies of immigrant students to study the development of English writing abilities—and also incidentally examined the kinds of instruction and assignments they received. This study did not explicitly evaluate writing assignments according to specific criteria. It found, however, that when tasks demanded more thought and decision-making from the student, that the student writing developed. In a study commissioned by the National Writing Project by the Academy for Educational Development (2002) researchers studied third and fourth grade classrooms of writing project affiliated teachers, purposely over-sampling classrooms with a majority of low-income students. They found that student achievement in writing was at high or adequate levels in rhetorical effectiveness, organization, and in writing conventions. While participating teachers used no single approach to writing instruction, they provided students with opportunities to perform authentic intellectual work (which was defined in the study as the original application of knowledge and skills rather than the routine use of facts and procedures) and to construct knowledge (rather than to reproduce facts). In two other studies that examined the quality of writing tasks in classrooms in high-achieving and low-achieving schools (Matsumura et al, 2002;
Needles & Knapp, 1994) the authors determined that the quality of writing tasks was higher in high-achieving schools than it was in low-achieving schools. Higher quality tasks were defined by the degree of authenticity, relationship to student backgrounds, degree of cognitive challenge, and the clarity of learning goals. In the same studies the authors asserted that higher quality writing tasks are associated with higher levels of writing competency. Low-achieving schools in these studies included students who were poorer, and in the Matsumura study, primarily Latino.

The 2002 NAEP Trial Urban District Assessment supports these findings. In this assessment, only 11% of Hispanic and 12% of Black 4th grade students in Los Angeles Unified School District (the only California district participating) scored at proficient or above compared to 34% of white 4th grade students. The assessments and studies suggest that students in poorer communities and with large populations of Latino and African American students receive writing instruction with more emphasis on low quality writing tasks including review, drill, and practice rather than tasks that involve writing to construct meaning or communicate to authentic audiences.

**Writing in Elementary School**

Research on writing has frequently focused on college students or on the developing skills of emergent writers. Less attention has been focused on the development of sophistication in writing, particularly with elementary students. Additionally, while there are studies that suggest that particular approaches to the teaching of writing are more effective than others, the role of the teacher in the teaching of writing and the context (including the particulars of the setting and the make-up of the
student population) are often not considered. Since writing frequently serves as a gatekeeper to academic success, even beyond test scores, it seems important to understand how to support student writers in the development of their writing.

While research in the field of writing has developed dramatically over the last 30 years, there continues to be a disconnect between the instructional approaches that research show to have a positive impact of student writing and the information that teachers access in terms of writing instruction. The complexities of teaching writing and learning to write are further complicated by high stakes accountability systems that reduce writing to a set of discrete skills to be tested using multiple choice exams, by curriculum that pushes writing to the fringes of instruction in favor of reading, and by professional development for teachers that does not acknowledge the scope and scale of writing.

In addition, a lack of attention to the ways writing, beyond the mechanical components, develop in children cause reduced expectations for student writing rather than documentation of the ways children convey their ideas in writing. Even while studies (Valdez, 1999, Matsumura et al, 2002, Needles & Knapp, 1994, Academy for Educational Development, 2002) show that writing improves when students are asked to construct their understanding through their writing, instructional materials do not reflect that knowledge. There is a need for continued research on the practices that teachers employ to teach writing, how they make decisions about instructional practices, and the ways that students incorporate that instruction (or do not incorporate it) into their writing.
Chapter Three:  
Research Design and Methods  

Research Questions

My experiences as a classroom teacher and as an educator interested in student writing and the teaching of writing led me to ask questions about writing instruction in schools in the San Diego area. Informal conversations with teachers throughout the area and a review of the research literature suggest that writing instruction is often a challenge for teachers at all levels and that their students struggle to write effectively. My research was designed to answer the following questions:

- How is writing instruction implemented in San Diego’s urban elementary schools?
- What influences the decisions teachers make about writing instruction?
- What is the relationship between writing instruction and students’ writing products?

As I designed and implemented my research, I was also a part of the research process bringing both my expertise and my biases into the research. Understanding my positionality in relation to the research is critical to my research methodology.

Positionality

Positionality (Tetreault, 1997) or Standpoint Theory (Collins, 1997) brings to the surface the ways groups and individuals are shaped by their experiences. The idea of
neutral research underestimates the often unseen biases held by researchers when designing and implementing research. The development of a research question to be studied is not neutral; each question brings with it a political stance, personal interests, and identifications associated with group membership. Even passive researchers influence the subjects of their research by their presence, their data collection, and by their analysis. Awareness of positionality requires that the researcher situate her prior knowledge, experiences, and the resulting biases within the research, alerting others to the background the researcher brings to the research.

As a classroom teacher who has studied writing and implemented writing instruction in my elementary classroom, I hold strong beliefs about the value and usefulness of writing in the learning process. As a member of the group called “teacher,” I bring knowledge of school practices, time spent receiving and conducting professional development, and my own experiences with the credentialing process. I am familiar with the legal requirements associated with teaching and with curricular materials available. As a teacher researcher, I have straddled the roles of teacher and researcher as I explored my own teaching practices and the learning of my students. I was both researcher and subject, informing my own inquiry. In the role of teacher researcher, I have examined ways that writing supports and facilitates thoughtful reflection and encourages connections between classroom learning and students’ lives outside the classroom (Douillard, 2002). I have also investigated writing assessment practices within my school in an attempt to better understand the relationship between classroom writing instruction and school-wide assessment (Douillard, 2003). As an educational researcher, I step outside my role as teacher to learn from teachers and students beyond my own
school context. My relationship and role when interacting with the teachers in this study was often unclear. At times we were colleagues discussing the challenges and successes associated with our work, using shared terminology and understanding of the intricacies of elementary education. At other times I held a position of authority over them as they accommodated my requests and allowed me access into their classrooms without questioning my goals.

My multiple roles as a classroom teacher, teacher researcher, and an educational researcher put me in a position to conduct and analyze research on student writing and writing instruction from multiple perspectives. I bring to this study more than relevant research questions and familiarity with the research literature in the field. I also bring an understanding of classroom teaching and writing instruction anchored in my experience with both. While I bring the biases and feel the contradictions associated with my experiences, I also bring additional lenses with which to examine student writing, writing instruction, and teaching. I bring experience and understanding of the often-invisible work of teaching. I know that the lessons observed at any given time in the classroom are the result of the teacher's understanding of the curriculum and expected student outcomes. They include the integration of the teacher's content knowledge and teaching pedagogy. They are also connected to the teacher's beliefs about teaching and learning and strongly influenced by the teaching context.

Being aware of my strengths and biases allows me to use my positionality as an asset. I used my teacher identity to gather information informed by my knowledge of students, curriculum, and schools. My researcher identity helped me to step back, listen carefully, and think deeply about the data collected. Awareness of my experiences and
expertise grounded in the different professional roles I play allowed me a view of writing instruction informed by these multiple perspectives.

**Research Design and Data Collection**

**Design of the Study**

Writing is complex. Attention to intent, audience, content, and format are important to effective and compelling writing. The teaching of writing is also complex. Teachers must understand both writing and the teaching of writing in order to teach it effectively. To capture the complexities of teaching writing and learning to write, this study uses a variety of data collection points implemented in two phases.

Phase I employed a survey designed to collect demographic information as well as self-reported information in response to questions about writing instruction and student writing. Phase II took an in-depth look at four classroom teachers using teacher interviews, classroom observation, and the collection of student writing.

**Surveys**

Surveys (appendix A) included questions to collect demographic information as well as a combination of both Likert-type rating scales and free response answers to questions about writing instruction and students as writers. Survey questions were adapted from surveys in the research literature (Brindley & Schneider, 2002; Graham, Harris, MacArthur, & Fink, 2002) describing teachers’ approaches to teaching writing. The inclusion of demographic questions, rating scales, and free responses allowed me to construct a picture of the pool of respondents in terms of location, experience, and
background. It also allowed me to examine the ways the respondents used language to report on their teaching and their students as writers.

Prior to the study survey questions were tried informally with two groups of educators, different from the target group, who provided feedback both through responding to the survey and by offering insights about taking the survey. Their responses verified questions I had about the survey and informed my decisions about revisions to the content and order of the questions. As a result of the feedback, I made a number of changes to the survey including reorganizing the order of the questions, rewording questions, and revising the Likert-type scale from a 5-point scale to a 4-point scale to eliminate the tendency for respondents’ responses to fall toward the middle. The survey purposely included both scaled responses and open-ended questions. Because teachers often use common terminology to report on writing instruction, it was important to ask teachers to describe their instruction without limiting the description to a label such as “writing workshop” in order to get a clearer picture of the instructional practices.

**Interviews**

Interviews of teachers from phase II (interview guide-appendix B) were collected, in most cases, twice during the study—once prior to the classroom observation and once following the observation. Interviews allowed me to ask questions about teachers’ backgrounds related to their own schooling and to learn more about the context of their teaching. The two-part interviews also allowed me to follow up on questions that arose as a result of the classroom observation. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed me to collect common data across subjects as well as allowing the flexibility to
follow up on comments and topics that were confusing, interesting, or unusual.

Interviews also allowed the interviewees to direct the nature of the conversation.

Through their answers they either elaborated on questions that they had more information to convey or limited their responses to other questions. All interviews were recorded using a digital audio-recording device.

**Classroom Observations**

Classroom observations were conducted during one period of writing instruction selected by the teacher. During observations teachers were not required to perform any specific tasks or procedures other than their expected and usual roles as teachers. The length of the observation varied according to the time frame devoted to writing instruction as determined by the teacher. Classroom observations gave me an opportunity to hear how teachers used language during instruction and to compare survey and interview descriptions to my own observations of the teacher in action. In this way, observations offered a glimpse into the ways terms used in surveys and interviews were enacted in the classroom. Field notes were taken during observations without the use of any recording devices.

**Student Writing Samples**

In addition to interviews and classroom observations, I collected a set of student writing from each classroom. Teachers were asked to provide a set of student writing related to the lesson I had observed with the student names masked prior to giving them to me. Teachers made the decision about what constituted student writing, whether or
not to include graphic organizers or other materials that accompanied the assignment, and whether or not to include teacher comments on the student papers. Student writing opened a window for seeing how writing instruction, as described by the teacher and observed in the classroom, was enacted by students.

The Research Sample

Fourth grade classrooms and their teachers were selected as the target population for this study for a variety of reasons. Students at the primary level (usually identified as kindergarten through grade three) are frequently defined by their developing cognitive abilities. In the primary grades differences in student writing are often described in terms of developmental stages or cognitive development rather than knowledge about writing itself. In addition, young students’ developing fine motor skills are often seen as a barrier to writing and writing instruction. To avoid these complications, I chose a grade level with a student population not usually identified by its developing cognition and fine-motor coordination. Fourth grade students (typically around age nine) are seen as capable of the physical demands of writing and able to think abstractly enough to handle the cognitive demands of writing. Additionally, fourth grade students are the only elementary-aged students in California to take the annual standardized test (California’s STAR test) that includes a writing sample. This testing situation suggested that fourth grade teachers would be concerned with the writing abilities of their students and as a result, consciously include writing instruction as a priority in their instructional programs.
To select teachers to survey, I focused on schools and districts in the San Diego area that included schools considered urban. Urban, as I defined it for this study, describes schools located in densely populated areas characterized by diverse student populations including English learners, immigrant groups, and racial and ethnic minorities. I distributed surveys through contacts I had at urban elementary schools around the county to reach fourth grade teachers at those schools. Seventy-five surveys were distributed with twenty completed surveys returned, a return rate of approximately 27 percent. Completed surveys were also used to identify teachers to include in the second phase of the research.

**A Case Study Approach**

A case study approach was utilized in the study of the four teachers in phase II of the research. Case studies allow researchers to focus on particular settings, such as classrooms when studying educational processes. It enables researchers to reach an understanding within a complex context (Mertens, 2005). The strengths of the case study approach, the ability to look closely at complex contexts, maintaining a focus on social practices and cultural meanings, are also its weaknesses. Case study approaches focus on small samples, limiting the ability to generalize to other populations. Instead, the case study approach allows the researcher to generalize individual cases to theoretical ideas and concepts. In this situation, what I learned from these teachers can be generalized to concepts of writing instruction, not to what all teachers do with writing instruction in their classrooms. I was able to observe the way teachers interpreted the writing standards and translated that interpretation to instruction, demonstrating their conception of writing
as defined by their particular constraints and contexts. I was also able to document how a particular word, model, was defined in similar ways across different contexts and implemented in the teaching of writing.

**Data Analysis**

In order to understand the complexities of decision making in elementary classrooms and the interrelationships of instructional decisions, context, curriculum, and students, it was necessary to employ analysis techniques that allowed that complexity to be maintained as themes and patterns were coaxed from the data. In this tradition, data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Strauss, 1987) involving repeated analysis of the data collected. Constant comparison allowed for close examination of each data set as collected, and then re-examination as new information was acquired. Initial open coding allowed for exploration and generation of possible concepts, which was subsequently narrowed by the interrelationships of initial codes and emergence of patterns within and across study participants and data points.

Codes included the focus of the content of instruction and writing types. Characteristics of instruction, including its organization and delivery, and the particular activities in which students engaged were also noted. Additional codes documented the attention to standards-based criteria and testing. Time spent on writing instruction and time that students spent writing formed additional categories.

Analytic memos and jottings, along with the use of matrices helped me keep track of emerging themes, new relationships, and questions that arose during the analysis process. Using a matrix to track the focus of writing instruction and characteristics of
instruction both across data sources for each subject, and across research subjects illustrated the commonalities between teachers, both in what was included and what was notably absent in the writing instruction. My own writing processes, in the preparation of this manuscript, served as another analytic tool to explore the connections and interrelationships that arose in organizing and articulating my results and conclusions for others to understand.

Through the analysis of surveys, interviews, observations, and student writing a need to analyze another data source arose. I found it necessary to closely examine the national and state context as defined by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation enacted in 2001. This additional source of data then interacted with the teacher and classroom data to provide insights into the practices implemented by the teachers in this study. It was in following these intricately interwoven threads that leads me to the results and conclusions that follow.
Chapter Four:

Teaching Writing: The National and State Context

The National Context: No Child Left Behind

In January 2001, George W. Bush announced No Child Left Behind, his framework for education reform. The passage of the NCLB Act followed less than a year later. The NCLB Act, which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), includes increased accountability for states, school districts, and schools; greater choice for parents and students, particularly those attending low-performing schools; more flexibility for states and local educational agencies in the use of Federal education dollars; and a stronger emphasis on reading, especially for the youngest children.

The NCLB Act requires states to implement statewide accountability systems covering all public schools and students. The systems must be based on challenging state standards in reading and math, annual testing for all students in grades 3-8, and annual statewide progress objectives ensuring that all groups of students reach proficiency within 12 years. Assessment results and state progress objectives must be broken out by poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency to ensure that “no child is left behind.”

School districts and schools that fail to achieve at the levels required by the legislation face corrective action, including the possibility of having the school taken over by the state in an effort to get them back “on course” to meet state standards.
Schools that meet or exceed these levels are eligible for state academic achievement awards.

Additionally, under the NCLB Act, federal support is targeted to educational programs that have demonstrated effectiveness through rigorous scientific research. Scientifically based research of educational practices moved toward the medical model with randomized trials and control groups. The effectiveness of educational methods are compared to the medical field with statements like,

For decades doctors have required solid research before treating patients. This scientific approach has produced some of the most effective remedies and the most impressive cures in human history (United States Department of Education, 2003).

One example of this requirement is that the NCLB Act requires that Reading First, a focused nationwide effort to enable all students to become successful early readers, support programs that teach children five skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) because they have been shown to be critical to early reading success through scientifically based research on the practices of reading instruction. In its literature about the NCLB, the U.S. Department of Education website says that the implementation of scientifically based research will help prevent damage caused by what they refer to as “educational fads” (United States Department of Education, 2004).

**Who is Left Behind?**

While this legislation aims to provide quality education for all students, it is not without controversy. The increased focus on accountability, particularly a single
assessment as a measure of student performance, is problematic. Issues of equity, of who is punished and who is rewarded by this legislation, make the goals of leaving no child behind impossible. Schools in poor areas continue to fall behind their more affluent neighbors when progress is measured solely by test scores. And schools that fall behind have more restrictions and less flexibility than those whose students continue to achieve in ways measured by high stakes, standardized testing. Schools and teachers are increasingly pressured to follow scripted curricula rather than attend to the specific learning needs of their students. The standardization of testing leads to the standardization of teaching. No matter how well researched the curricula, it is no secret that all students are not the same, do not have the same opportunities for learning and support systems outside of school, and do not learn at the same rate.

The NCLB Act requires that school systems select reading programs based on specific scientific research criteria. The empirical studies that fit into this narrow definition of research focus instruction on the aspects of reading that can be evaluated quantitatively and isolated from other aspects of reading. The medical model of research may be the best choice for testing pharmaceuticals and their impact on disease, but when applied narrowly to instruction ignores the rich complexity of thinking and learning. Problems in education will not be solved with a miracle cure. No single instrument such as a test or reading program will solve the complex issues involved in teaching and learning.

In addition, this legislation takes away incentives for effective teachers to work at schools with the highest needs. Schools considered low performing are also under the greatest curricular constraints, taking away teachers’ professional judgments and
A review of research by Darling-Hammond (2000) indicates that “measures of teacher preparation and certification are by far the strongest correlates of student achievement in reading and mathematics, both before and after controlling for student poverty and language status.” Teachers need to be experts in the field of education, yet restrictions and requirements that take away the value of professional decision-making take away incentive, resulting in the deskilling of teachers.

This national legislation is the backdrop for statewide mandates that affect instruction in public schools in California. The NCLB Act influences the English-Language Arts Content Standards and the Reading/Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools; the California Fourth Grade STAR Writing Test; and state adopted Language Arts curriculum.

**Teaching Writing in California**

**Reading/Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools**

In 1997, the California State Board of Education adopted language arts content standards and in 1999, the California State Board of Education also adopted a framework that “offers a blueprint for implementation of the language arts content standards” (California Department of Education, 1999). In the preface to the framework, Fausset et. al. state that for high school graduates in California to go to universities or to be employable and meet the challenges of the 21st century they must be “more than merely literate.” They must be able to read fluently and independently and communicate “effectively and creatively” in writing and in speaking as well as comprehend and deliver complex forms of discourse. The authors of the preface also see three additional
aesthetic goals included in the role of educators: “to instill in students 1) a lifelong love of reading 2) a facility and joy of communicating through language and 3) a deep appreciation of literary and informational texts and ways in which print expands our universe and our understanding of history and humanity” (viii).

The English-language arts content standards are described as rigorous and form the basis of curriculum development at every grade level and a statewide assessment and accountability system. This framework that was adopted in 1999 replaced the 1987 English—Language Arts Framework and was named the Reading/Language Arts Framework. It relies heavily on what is described as a “converging research base in beginning reading.” This is significant because throughout the framework and standards, and as a result in California state adopted curricula, reading is the dominant instructional focus with writing, speaking, and listening skills taught in service of reading.

Chapter one of the framework enumerates ten principles that guide the framework and address the complexity of the content and context of language arts instruction. These principles serve to direct the purpose, design, delivery, and evaluation of instruction. Two of the ten principles directly speak to reading instruction including that all students must be fluent readers by at least the end of third grade and that they assume that “virtually all students” can learn to read. Two more principles deal with the need to adapt instruction to the individual needs of students, particularly English learners, special education students, students with learning difficulties, and advanced learners. Another principle promotes a preventive rather than remedial approach, saying the key to success is to make “the first instruction students receive their best instruction” (p.5). Other principles include that programs should be balanced and comprehensive and that the
standards should serve as “curricular guideposts” for teachers. There is also some emphasis on the need to adjust curriculum, instruction, assessment and organization at the school level to fit the contexts and conditions of the school and the needs of the learner. The principles also point out the need for explicit and systematic instruction and that language arts can be learned across all academic disciplines. Finally, the last guiding principle points out that this framework is designed to be useful to a variety of consumers with teachers and publishers and developers of educational materials being the primary audiences. None of the guiding principles focus directly on writing other than to point out that specific skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening must be taught and learned and that the language arts are reciprocal processes that build on each other and can be learned across academic disciplines.

The framework goes on to define what it calls key components of an effective language arts program. These components are what they call an expansion of the four elements detailed in *Every Child a Reader* (California Department of Education 1995). Thirteen components make up their definition of an effective language arts program ranging from assessment, instruction, and instructional time to classroom management, motivation, effort and proficiency in academic language. They also include elements such as administration practices, parent and community involvement, and professional development. Each of the thirteen components is described in the framework and each is seen as an essential component of effective instruction. These components are notable in that they seem not be prioritized. While they are presented in a particular order, there is no indication that some are more important than others. Throughout the document there
is reference to ways these components work together to create effective language arts instruction.

The framework also includes a section titled, Curricular and Instructional Profile where information about designing potential instruction is laid out for one lesson per grade level. Within the profile instructional delivery is described by numbered items such as: “Define writing and tell why it is important to know when to add and delete information in a text, and present the steps in adding and deleting information to revise text effectively” (p.110). This profile provides potential information about what teachers might do with writing instruction related to standards, but does not provide information about how to best provide instruction so that students and their writing will benefit from the instruction.

**English-Language Arts Content Standards**

Teachers are not necessarily familiar with the principles that guide the framework or the key components of an effective language arts program. What most teachers know about this framework, however, is that within this 292-page book are the specific language arts content standards for their grade level. The English—Language Arts Content Standards are printed on blue paper, and for the fourth grade take up four pages. Within these standards for fourth grade are standards for reading including word analysis, fluency, and systematic vocabulary development; reading comprehension; and literary response and analysis; standards for writing including writing strategies and writing applications (genres and their characteristics); standards for written and oral English language conventions; and standards for listening and speaking including
listening and speaking strategies and speaking application (genres and their characteristics).

A closer look at the English—Language Arts Contents Standards for writing (see appendix C) and written and oral English language conventions will help to illuminate the requirements that the teachers I studied negotiated as they taught writing and show ways standards may serve to confuse teachers.

Beginning with writing standard 1.0, called writing strategies, teachers have 10 specific subpoints to ensure that their students master by the end of fourth grade. The main description of writing strategies emphasizes that students write clear, coherent sentences and paragraphs that develop a central idea. They are also to ensure that students progress through the stages of the writing process. Detailed below that description, labeled 1.1-1.10, are skills that vary from content and organizational structure to mechanical skills including indentation, penmanship, and keyboarding skills.

From this document it appears that each point is of equal value and requires equal attention in instruction. Within these standards, attention to composing written texts is mixed with standards of convention (indentation and penmanship) and reading skills (locating information in reference texts using organizational features and understanding the organization of almanacs, newspapers, and periodicals and how to use those print materials). It is important to note that when creating multiple-paragraph compositions, providing an introductory paragraph or concluding with a paragraph that summarizes the points is of equal value and importance to using correct indentation.

Within the second writing standard (2.0 writing applications) students are to write in four different genres: narrative, response to literature, information reports, and
summaries. Descriptions that follow each type of writing give some indication of the content to be included within the genre but do not delineate the format or structure of the writing.

The Written and Oral English Language Conventions specify that students will write and speak with a command of standard English conventions appropriate to this grade level. Beneath this general statement are seven standards divided into five categories: sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. The seven standards specify the conventions that are considered appropriate to the grade level including items like identify and use regular and irregular verbs, adverbs, and prepositions, and coordinating conjunctions in writing and speaking and spell correctly roots, inflections, suffixes and prefixes, and syllable constructions. There seems to be an assumption that teachers will know what standards students have already mastered that precede the requirements in fourth grade. There is no reference to skills students should have mastered in the previous grade or indication that students are building on previous skills.

California Fourth Grade STAR Writing Test

In addition to the content standards, fourth grade students are the only elementary-aged students to take a writing test at the state level. This writing test has been administered every year since 2001 and in following years the California Department of Education produced a teacher’s guide to provide information to teachers about the test and about the scoring of the student writing. This test addresses state writing application standards (2.0) with one exception. Information reports have been
excluded from the STAR writing test. The introduction to the Teacher Guide for the 2005 California Writing Standards Test in Grade Four (California Department of Education, 2005) states, “The California Standards Tests (CSTs) in writing do not assess information reports in grade four or research reports in grade seven because these writing assignments require extended time for students to gather information and/or research topics before writing can begin. In addition, the narrative writing tested in grades four and seven does not include personal or autobiographical narrative. Writing that would invite personal disclosure is not tested in any genre on the CSTs in writing” (p.1).

The type of writing that will be tested on the STAR writing test each year is not revealed prior to the test. During any year students may be writing summaries, responses to literature, or narratives (imaginative, not personal). Fourth grade teachers worry about preparing their students for this writing task, knowing that students will need to master the three genres by the end of March since the writing test is usually given in early April.

Prompts for the writing test are general in nature and closely follow the language of the English-Language Arts Content Standards (appendix D). For the summary and response to literature tasks, a piece of reading is included as well, which the student must read and understand in order to complete the writing required. The directions tell the students to read the informational article for a summary task, to mark the article or make notes, to write a summary (reminding the students that they have time to read, plan, write, and proofread), and that they may go to the article at any time during the test. Under the heading *scoring*, students are given a written explanation that their writing will be scored on how well they: state the main ideas of the article, identify the most important details that support the main ideas, use their own words in writing the
summary, and use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. In the response to literature the students are told to read the story, mark the story or make notes; after reading the story, write an essay, and that they may go back to the story at any time during the test. For scoring, their writing will be scored on how well they show their understanding of the story, support their ideas by referring to the story and to what they already know, and use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

The narrative writing prompt is the only writing type tested by the STAR assessment in fourth grade that does not require students to read and respond to text. As with the other types, students are told they will have time to plan, write and proofread. They are scored on how well they include a beginning, a middle, and an end, use details, and use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. The actual prompt, which is always an imaginative scenario (appendix D) ends with the directions, “Write a story…”

Student writing is scored using a four point holistic rubric (appendix E), with four being the highest score. Holistic rubrics are scoring systems that focus on the writing overall rather than focusing on individual features of the writing. Prior to 2006, two readers scored student writing with the scores added together to produce scores that ranged from two to eight. Beginning in 2006, student writing will be scored by a single reader using the same four-point scale. That score will then be doubled to produce possible scores of 2, 4, 6, and 8. The writing score is then combined with the score from the language arts portion of the California Standards Test (CST) made up of 75 multiple-choice questions encompassing the standards delineated in all the areas of the language arts standards. Out of a possible 83 points, the writing test provides a maximum of eight
points, less than ten percent of the total score. It is important to note that there are no performance levels or passing scores determined for the writing portion of the test and the performance level students achieve on the language arts portion of the CST (advanced, proficient, basic, below basic, and far below basic) should not be equated to the student’s writing score (California Department of Education, 2005).

Scores are reported to schools and parents, generally during the summer or early fall, following the test. Scores are reported as percentages correct within the categories of the multiple-choice portions of the STAR test (in English-Language Arts the categories for fourth grade are word analysis and vocabulary, reading comprehension, literary response, written conventions, and writing strategies) and given a number (2-8) for the writing applications score (the writing test). Teachers, parents, and students never see how the individual student writing was scored and are not able to look over student writing in an attempt to understand how the writing was scored. Sample scored student writing with commentary is released each year following the STAR writing test for districts, schools, and teachers to use, but teachers do not receive feedback on their own students’ strengths and weaknesses in writing.

**State-Adopted Curriculum**

Writing at the elementary level is found under a curriculum category called language arts. Language arts includes reading, writing, listening, and speaking and all of the sub-skills those processes entail. Language arts textbooks are most often reading series that also include the other aspects of language arts.
In the state of California, textbooks are adopted in seven year cycles. In order to be approved for adoption, textbooks must be approved at the state level. The passage of the NCLB Act, through its requirements for scientifically based research, restricted the types of materials the state approved. In addition, through the NCLB Act, schools are limited to purchasing only approved textbooks using the funding available for textbook adoptions. These monies, provided for purchasing curricular materials, may only be used for items on the approved adoption list. Any other materials must be purchased with school district general funds or other discretionary funding. Currently, in the state of California, students must be provided a “standards-based” curriculum that has demonstrated effectiveness through scientifically based research. In the latest adoption period, only two reading series met the requirements for the California language arts adoption: Open Court (SRA) and Houghton Mifflin Reading.

In order to qualify under the demands of NCLB and adhere to the California content standards, Houghton Mifflin Reading was developed on the scientific evidence of the National Reading Panel and includes the five skills required by Reading First (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension). To ensure that the program would meet these research requirements, two members of the National Reading Council (NRC) research group participated in the Houghton Mifflin research symposium held in 1998. One of those two researchers subsequently joined the author team of Houghton Mifflin Reading. According to the Houghton Mifflin Company, the dialogue with NRC researchers impacted many aspects of Houghton Mifflin Reading and fourteen were highlighted in the document describing the research base of the curriculum
(Houghton Mifflin, 2002). Of the fourteen aspects highlighted, none of them deal with writing and the majority emphasize phonemic awareness, phonics, and spelling.

In San Diego County a majority of school districts selected Houghton Mifflin Reading as their language arts curriculum. It is safe to assume that most fourth grade teachers have this textbook series in their classrooms. A first glance at the fourth grade teacher’s edition of Houghton Mifflin Reading (Cooper & Pikulski, 2003) makes clear that reading is the focus of the textbook. Literature is highlighted along with making the “California standards visible, accessible, and achievable for all students.” An overview of how writing instruction fits into the overall language arts program is available in the “Daily lessons plans” for selection one. These plans lay out a five-day plan for teaching reading, word work, and writing and language. Within this frame 60-80 minutes daily are allocated for reading, 30-40 minutes daily are allocated for word work (spelling, phonics, and vocabulary), and 30-40 minutes daily are allocated for writing and language (grammar, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing).

A closer look at the focus of the writing instruction reveals a traditional approach to the teaching of writing as described in chapter two. Each writing section begins with a lesson called grammar skills. The first grammar lessons in fourth grade concentrate on sentences—their definition, rules, identifying subjects and predicates, joining and punctuating compound sentences, and underlining nouns. The actual writing activities are worksheet-driven, with the underlying assumption that if students can follow the rules and format of the particular kind of writing (like a news article) they will be successful writers. There is no explanation for the teacher about the best ways to teach the writing activity—the assumption seems to be that the worksheets will do the
teaching. In this section there is no sense of process in the writing, even the section that
instructs the teacher to “have students review their news articles and add details where
needed to improve their writing” directs the teacher to “assign practice book page 17” to
accomplish this task. This pattern of writing instruction follows each reading selection
throughout the more than 20 reading selections that comprise the series.

In addition to this traditional approach, within each theme (there are six themes
with four stories each) there is a section called Reading-Writing Workshop. This section
focuses on a particular type of writing that includes personal narrative, description, story,
persuasive essay, personal essay, and research report in the fourth grade. These sections
begin with a student writing model, then go on to give ideas for choosing a topic and
organizing and planning (including a graphic organizer in the form of a worksheet), two
focus skills for drafting such as writing a good beginning and keeping to the focus, a
revising idea such as varying sentences with accompanying practice book pages,
proofreading that is focused solely on spelling, ideas for publishing, and a scoring rubric
for evaluation. This workshop section seems to be drawing on the idea of the process
approach to writing, though it seems to be an afterthought in the textbook. It is not
included in the pacing chart and there are no guidelines for how to implement this
Reading-Writing Workshop into the language arts program.

The Dominance of Reading

The California standards, testing, and curriculum all focus more on reading than
on writing. The demand for all students to read by third grade does not extend to a
requirement for all students to write by third grade. Writing seems to be an afterthought
in the state standards, testing, and curriculum—something to be squeezed into leftover time or used to show what students have read and understood from texts written by others and included in textbook series. In all cases there is a focus on grammar, spelling, and language conventions with an assumption that students will use “the” writing process and follow standard writing formats such as write stories that have a beginning, middle, and end.

The privileging of some areas of the curriculum over others is obvious with a close look at federal and state mandates. Traditional worksheet and drill approaches to instruction make the focus on grammar, language conventions, and format a natural choice. Surveys, interviews, observations, and student writing reveal how teachers and students in this study interpreted these requirements.
Chapter Five:
Teaching Writing: Fourth Grade Teachers Report

A Look at the Survey

Of the twenty teachers who responded to the survey, 80% of them were classroom teachers with the remaining 20% holding coaching or resource (providing support to classroom teachers) positions. The respondents represented three school districts and eight individual schools. Half of the respondents held a bachelors degree and half held a masters degree. Seventeen respondents (85%) were female and 30% spoke a language in addition to English—mostly, but not exclusively Spanish. All of the respondents worked with fourth grade students, either as classroom teachers or in positions that support fourth grade teachers and students. Teaching experience ranged from 25% of respondents having taught five years or less, 40% teaching between six and ten years, 25% between 11 and 15 years, and 10% having taught more than 20 years. All of the survey respondents reported that they had participated in professional development in the area of writing.

I expected surveys to reveal a variety of approaches to teaching writing and differences in the emphasis of instruction. My expectation was that some teachers would approach writing instruction from a process approach that included time for multiple drafts with response and revision between them (Graves, 1975; Hillocks, 1986), that some would approach writing instruction from a more formulaic or structured approach that depended more on teacher direction and focus on product (as described in the
traditional approach in chapter two), and others might use a more eclectic approach that combined techniques and strategies from more than one instructional approach. I also expected that the range of time devoted to writing instruction would vary as well as the attention to and selection of components of instruction (use of journals, prevalence of response and revision, use of graphic organizers, etc.) Unexpectedly, survey results showed surprising homogeneity in language arts terminology and in responses to survey questions.

When asked what kind of writing instruction they provide to their students, 60% of respondents specifically mentioned modeling as the instruction they provided. Additionally, 85% of respondents mentioned model, modeling, or modeled in responses about writing instruction—using this word (in one of these three forms) 43 times in the 20 surveys. The prevalence of the word model (in all its varieties) raised questions for me that sent me back to the surveys to look closely at the context associated with this word and to interpret what this word means to fourth grade teachers. In some cases the word modeled was used in conjunction with some other common instructional terms: modeled writing, shared writing, guided writing, and independent writing. These terms are part of what is called “Balanced Literacy” instruction (Freppon & Dahl, 1998). Balanced Literacy can take a variety of forms, emphasizing different aspects of instruction and is rooted in reading instruction. In the Literacy Framework (K-12) published by San Diego City Schools, modeled writing is defined in this way. “Modeled writing introduces students to the joys of writing. Teachers demonstrate strategies as proficient adult writers. Teachers model the writing process and through the process add, revise, ask questions, and clarify the purpose of the writing” (San Diego City Schools,
Modeled writing is a procedure where a teacher writes in front of her students, thinking aloud as she puts words together. While this is a common practice in the primary grades, particularly kindergarten and first grade, it is less prevalent in upper grade classrooms. Modeling, defined in these ways, asks teachers to model the behaviors and decision-making processes of experienced writers. The surveyed teachers seem unaware that they were describing a balanced literacy approach with none of the respondents using the term balanced literacy. The combinations of modeled writing with other components occurred in seven surveys, and in those seven was combined in four different variations including:

- modeled writing and shared writing
- modeled writing and guided writing
- modeled writing, shared writing, guided writing, and independent writing
- modeled writing, group or partner writing, and individual writing.

This variation suggests that these terms are widely used to describe writing instruction but are no longer strongly tied to their original definitions or intents. Most definitions of a balanced literacy approach specify how each component works in conjunction with the others and in which situation each is used. The adaptation and interpretation of terms and practices is not necessarily negative, but the use of these terms in such similar ways across the body of surveys indicates that model (in some form) is used in materials that guide teachers in writing instruction.

The word model, particularly in conjunction with whole class instruction, direct instruction, and organizers in these surveys seems to imply that teachers need to show their students how to write the particular kinds of assignments expected of students in
fourth grade. Throughout the surveys multiple models or students examining models to extract essential elements of the writing type are not mentioned. In no instance did respondents explain or describe modeling or modeled writing or suggest how models are used in writing instruction other than the implication that teachers model how to complete writing assignments.

Very few writing types were mentioned in these surveys. While some other types of writing were listed, the overwhelming majority of respondents (over 70%) when asked what types of writing students do in their classrooms answered with narrative, summary and response to literature. These writing types are three of the four explicitly described in the California writing standards (information report is the fourth type described). Not surprisingly, those are the three writing types that may appear on the fourth grade STAR writing test. This narrow focus of writing instruction suggests that the writing instruction in these classrooms is focused on preparing students for the writing test. It seems likely that the modeling that teachers provide replicates what they perceive students will need to do to be successful on the writing test.

Seventy percent of respondents name specific programs as resources they draw on to teach writing but do not limit responses to state adopted curriculum or district-wide writing programs. They name, but do not describe, everything from standards and the STAR website to published resources such as those from Write-Source and Learning Headquarters. Teachers in a district with a district-wide program clearly depended on that program for instructional resources and information. Teachers in districts without a writing program seemed to draw on a variety of resources with only a few mentioning the state adopted Language Arts series (Houghton Mifflin). The fact that few teachers
mentioned the Language Arts series that they use to teach reading as a resource for writing instruction suggests that they view Houghton Mifflin as a reading program. The teachers who responded to this survey did not see this series as a resource for teaching writing.

All of the respondents agreed that students needed opportunities to share their writing with their peers with many explaining that sharing motivated students and helped them learn from each other. Only one respondent described the value of having students share their writing as the opportunity to have an impact on an audience. The idea that student writing can evoke emotion (laughter, excitement, tears) was not present in the reasons respondents saw for having students share their writing with others. The other assumption that respondents made about this question was that sharing writing with others meant sharing writing with their classmates. There was not a mention of audiences beyond the classroom, though many mentioned the value of having students listen to the writing of their peers.

The majority of the respondents identified their students’ writing behaviors by pointing out what their students needed to improve or by describing the struggles their students had with writing. The majority of these struggles were about sentences—that the sentences were simple and not powerful, that they were run-ons, that they were not coherent, that they were not varied, that sentences were not complete, and that they had syntax errors. There were also many mentions of problems with spelling, grammar and other conventions. The other frequent struggle that respondents mentioned were problems with organization, structure, and form. A few respondents noticed that their students had problems generating text. Only one respondent mentioned a problem with
the quality of content. The survey indicates that respondents were focused on the surface features of students’ writing when describing their writing behaviors. There were infrequent comments about student strengths as writers, and general comments, “they develop more ease and confidence over the course of the year” and that girls are more motivated to write than boys. These responses illustrate the attention given to surface features of writing rather than to the communication of ideas or clarity of the composition.

The survey results suggest that California’s statewide writing test impacts instruction in fourth grade classrooms. Teachers’ responses indicate that they are concerned that students learn how to write correctly: following specific formats, learning specific writing types, and attending to spelling and other language conventions. In these surveys this trend held true across years of experience, across districts and across schools.

As a result of the homogeneity of the survey responses, I intensified my examination of the responses looking for subtle differences in the way respondents thought about or saw themselves in relation to the teaching of writing. One question, what do teachers need to know to teach writing, revealed some variety in response. After coding and sorting answers to that question, responses fell into four major categories: what teachers do (model, scaffold), what teachers have (standards, structures, programs, formats), what teachers know about students (development, levels, how to manage behaviors), and writing as content (process, feedback, purpose). While respondents did not cleanly fall into a single category, many respondents’ answers fell predominately in a particular category. Once the survey responses were sorted into these four categories, I
selected teachers to include in a more in-depth examination of writing instruction in their classrooms and the opportunity to explore questions raised by the surveys. The use of the categories was an attempt to include teachers for additional study whose instructional practices might be different from one another.

**Four Teachers, Four Classrooms**

Four teachers were selected for a closer look at writing instruction that included interviews, a classroom observation during a teacher-selected writing lesson, and the examination of student writing related to the lesson observed. Originally one teacher was selected from each of the four categories that resulted from the responses to the question, what do teachers need to know to teach writing? The four teachers, their principals, and their districts agreed to participate in the study. These teachers came from two school districts and three schools. Based on their survey responses, two had taught 0-5 years and two had taught 6-10 years.

Once data collection began, I learned that one of my study participants would not be able to participate in the research. She decided that she did not have time to be interviewed and observed for the study. That left three teachers from two districts and three schools. A fourth teacher from another school and district was included in the midst of data collection. This fourth grade teacher did not complete a survey and did not teach in an urban setting. Originally data was collected from this teacher because she was interested in participating in the study. Her data is included because, in spite of teaching in a suburban setting, writing instruction in her classroom revealed similar emphases and was shaped by similar pressures to the teachers from more urban settings.
Alison

Alison’s School and District

Alison teaches in a medium-sized school district in the eastern area of the county. Lincoln Elementary School is a Reading First school. Reading First is a focused nationwide effort to enable all students to become successful early readers. Funding is allocated to provide professional development for teachers using scientifically based reading programs and to ensure accountability through “ongoing, valid and reliable screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based assessment” (United States Department of Education, 2005). Not all schools in the district are Reading First schools, only schools with students performing below an acceptable range on state tests are eligible to apply for Reading First Funding. Alison’s school district, like most districts in the San Diego area, adopted Houghton Mifflin Reading as their language arts series. The Reading First program is focused on grades kindergarten through third. Under the guidelines, Reading First schools are required to implement all elements of the series “with fidelity” with additional requirements for periodic assessments at regular intervals. Even though grades 4-6 at Lincoln School are not under the same requirements as K-3, the majority of language arts instruction is based on the Houghton Mifflin Language Arts series.

Alison’s school district offers many opportunities for professional development including district-conducted professional development in writing. The school district also has a district-wide writing program developed in 2001 and revised in 2004 that is used at all grade levels, except for in grades K-3 in Reading First schools.
Lincoln School describes itself in this way, “Lincoln Elementary School is a large K-5 school, nestled in a community of apartment buildings. The student body is diverse, which includes 13 different languages and cultures, attributing to a school population consisting of 43% English learners. Lincoln School is an identified schoolwide Title I program school. This program allows all students to receive support, as needed, to promote student academic achievement in reaching grade level proficiency in reading, writing, and math. Additional funding includes: English Learner/Economic Impact Aid, School Improvement Program, Title III” (California Department of Education, 2006).

At Lincoln School students are separated for Language Arts instruction in a variety of ways. English learners receive instruction using Highpoint (a textbook series published by Hampton-Brown, state adopted for use with English Learners) in another classroom. Students with learning disabilities who have Individual Education Plans (IEPs) work with the Resource Specialist in her classroom, students who are not English learners and who, based on standardized testing, are far below their grade level expectations receive instruction using Read 180 (published by Scholastic, state adopted as an intervention program for grades 4-8) and the WRITE program (an intervention program developed by the San Diego Office of Education, not on the state adopted list), in another classroom. Alison is the only Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) certified teacher at her grade level, so students who have tested as GATE work with her. This practice of separating students for language arts instruction was described by Alison as a way to meet the learning needs of students. She did not seem to find the practice problematic and seemed to think this was beneficial to her students.
Alison’s Background

Alison has taught for six years, five of them in her own classroom. She received her teaching credential from a local state university in a program that worked in partnership with the school district where she now works. Alison does not remember any coursework in writing instruction in her credential program, though she did mention a course in reading. She is a fully credentialed teacher with a supplementary authorization in English. Alison is currently completing her master’s degree at the same university she received her teaching credential. She has taught at four different schools in her school district and three different grade levels including first, fifth, and fourth. This is Alison’s second year at Lincoln School.

Alison describes herself as someone who loves to write. In her words she “always lucked out with writing” and found writing easy. She remembers a piece of writing assigned in sixth grade by her favorite teacher. She described it as an essay on Husky dogs that was a five-paragraph essay. She described it as “an amazing experience.”

Observing a Writing Lesson in Alison’s Classroom

Alison’s classroom is typical of classrooms in schools built in the 1960’s. Like many schools in San Diego County the buildings are all one story and are organized in “wings”, several classrooms all down a common outdoor hallway. The rooms generally have windows on one side of the classroom with the other side being devoted to wall space for bulletin boards and chalk or, more recently, white boards. The classroom is a large open space with tall cabinets in the back of the room and whiteboards in the front
of the room. Student writing hangs from the cabinets in the back of the room. Desks are arranged in groupings of sixes, fours, twos and threes. Many desks face forward toward the white board and a few face toward the center of the room. Since the groups are not even in number, I assume that the arrangement does not also serve as working groups for student assignments. Many of the desks were empty when I visited, with 34 desks available and 20 students in the room.

An overhead projector sat on a table at the front of the room. There was a bulletin board related to the theme from the Houghton Mifflin textbook they were working on at one side of the room. The bulletin board included the title of the story they were reading, the author’s name, and the genre: realistic fiction. It was titled Problem Solvers. At the front of the room, clipped to the white board was a chart (table 1) detailing what to include in a response to literature.

### Table 1: Response to Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Language Conventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stay on topic</td>
<td>Make first paragraph clear and include a main idea statement</td>
<td>Use a variety of sentence forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intro-must include title, author, (genre), main idea and brief summary</td>
<td>Body-at least 1 paragraph long</td>
<td>Use proper grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support the main idea with at least 2 examples</td>
<td>Use transition words</td>
<td>Use capital letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion must restate main idea</td>
<td>Use correct indents and margins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tell what you learned</td>
<td>Check spelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Include a link to your life experience</td>
<td>Check punctuation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alison directed instruction in her classroom. Students looked to her for direction and for approval. She gave students a Xeroxed copy of a writing prompt and directed students to
read through it. Alison used a small timer when she gave students a task to do. She gave students a direction such as, “This is your writing prompt. Read it in your head.” She set the time for a minute or so and when it chimed she continued with instruction. Each part of the lesson was reviewed with the whole group and Alison wrote on a transparency of the student worksheet on the overhead projector. Once Alison went over what students should fill in on the sheet she directed them to begin filling in the sheet and then while they were doing that, she wrote what they had discussed on the transparency. The lesson I observed lasted for approximately 45 minutes. The majority of the time was spent on teacher directed discussion related to the text they were reading. Interspersed in that period were short bursts of time for students to fill in their graphic organizer. According to Alison, writing lessons in her classroom are typically 30-45 minutes in duration.

**Alison’s Student Samples**

Alison agreed to provide me with student writing samples related to the lesson I had observed. She made the decision about what she gave me and although I asked for a class set of papers, she provided me with six samples of student writing.

Each sample of writing from Alison’s class included Xeroxed copies of guidelines for response to literature, a character map graphic organizer with one character trait completed by students, a literary response practice prompt, a story map graphic organizer, and the student essay. Each student wrote a three-paragraph essay with the first paragraph stating the title, author, genre, and summarizing the story. The second paragraph included a quote from the story. Some students were able to expand on the quote to explain its significance while others seemed to leave the quote to stand for
itself. All students used the same quote. The third paragraph seemed to attempt to explain how the character solved her problems and some students attempted a personal connection to the story and problem solving.

This writing was the product resulting directly from the lesson I observed. According to Alison, this was her students’ first exposure to writing a literary response (table 2). She told me during the interview that she would guide her students through each step and that many students would copy her writing. It seemed from reading the student essays that the students did copy the bulk of the essay from the whole class lesson. When I asked Alison about her students’ writing she said that they had produced what she expected for a first attempt at this genre. When I asked about her concerns she referred back to the students’ classroom behaviors when I visited, saying that the students were “unbelievably quiet.” She said that she felt like she had to “pull everything out of them and it’s not normal for that class.” She did say that the next literary response they did was easier. She said that the conclusions were fun (the third paragraph) because the twins in her class (she has one set of twins in her class and another student who is a twin with her sister in another class) could relate to being called by the wrong name (one of the problems that came up in the story).
Table 2: Literary Response Practice Prompt

Literary Response Practice Prompt: My Name is Maria Isabel

Background:
Choose one individual in the story My Name is Maria Isabel, and think about his/her character. Is that person courageous, honest, dishonest, truthful, generous, etc.? Use examples from the story that show the individual demonstrating his/her character trait(s).

Task:
Write a three to five-paragraph literary response in which you identify Maria Isabel’s character. Use examples from the story that show Maria Isabel’s character trait(s).

Procedure:
1. Before writing, organize your thoughts by completing a pre writing activity. You may use a web, graphic organizer, cluster, list, or map.
2. In the first paragraph state the title, author, give a brief summary, and identify Maria Isabel’s character.
3. In the body paragraph(s) use examples from the story to describe the events that happen that show Maria Isabel’s character.
4. Your concluding paragraph should link to the main idea and include a final connection or reflection.
5. Use transition words to make your essay flow smoothly.
6. Reread your paper to see if it makes sense. Revise and edit your paper, checking for spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, margins, and content.
7. Your finished essay should be neat and easy to read.

I was surprised that Alison elected to provide me with only six student writing samples. I'm not sure if she felt limited by needing to make copies of the work or had reservations about letting me see each student’s writing. The papers do seem to represent a range of student ability with some essays being more developed than others. It is unclear if the student writing is the first (and only?) draft written or if students completed an edited draft. Since the pieces are so similar, revision does not seem to be part of the process of writing these essays.
Rebecca

Rebecca’s School and District

Rebecca works in the same district as Alison, but at a different school site about a mile away. Adams Elementary School is also a Reading First school. Adams School has a diverse student body that is approximately 40% Latino, 10% African American (California Department of Education, 2006), and also includes a sizable Chaldean population who Rebecca described as Catholics from northern Iraq, many of whom speak Chaldean, an Aramaic language, as their primary language.

Like Lincoln School, Adams School also separates students by levels for Language Arts instruction using the same programs and textbooks. The students that Rebecca works with during this time are either “at standard” or close to standard for fourth grade. Like Alison, Rebecca described this practice of separating students by ability as a way of meeting students’ individual needs. She did not find the practice problematic.

Rebecca’s Background

Rebecca has also taught for six years, the last four of them teaching fourth grade at her current school. All of Rebecca’s teaching experience has been with fourth graders, with her first year including fifth and sixth graders as well in a “support” position. Rebecca received her teaching credential from the same program as Alison. When asked about writing instruction in her credential program she mentioned learning to teach writing from her master teacher using the district-wide writing program. She could not
remember any course work related to writing instruction. She is also a fully credentialed teacher.

Although born in the United States, Rebecca describes herself as a second language learner who did not learn to speak English until she was five years old. Rebecca finds that her bilingualism is an asset for her as a teacher, both to communicate with parents and to understand the struggles of her English learner students.

When asked about her experiences learning to write, Rebecca said she hated writing. She said she didn’t know how to write. Rebecca credited her tenth grade teacher who had her come in for tutoring after school, for teaching her to write.

Observing a Writing Lesson in Rebecca’s Classroom

Rebecca’s classroom is a “portable” at the back edge of the school property. Portables are temporary buildings, constructed to relieve overcrowding, that are common at many schools in San Diego County. These rooms are often smaller than regular classrooms, are not set on foundations so they echo when people walk in them, and often do not have sinks or any source of water. They are also often more “modern” than other classrooms at the school with white boards instead of chalkboards and more electrical outlets. At the back of the room, where there were long cabinets, hung student poetry and photos. Rebecca explained in her interview that students had written the poetry during the first month of school when the Houghton Mifflin curriculum reviewed skills from the previous year. There was a large chart to one side at the front of the room that tracked test scores on Houghton Mifflin tests. Desks were arranged in rows of twos or threes facing the front of the room with a center aisle between them, two long sideways
rows of six desks framed the outer edges of the desk area. The room also included a reading area with beanbags and bookcases, a kidney-shaped table for small group work, and a sign-out area near the door to keep track of students leaving to use the restroom. A large white board spanned the front of the room and an overhead projector was also at the front of the room.

During her lesson, Rebecca had 28 students present. Like Alison’s class, this class was working on response to literature when I observed. They were reminded of a story they had read and talked about the previous day. It had been decided, it wasn’t clear to me whether students or the teacher made the decision, that the character was “determined.” Rebecca then reviewed the word “determined” by asking students for another way to say determined. Students gave answers such as, “reach goals,” “be determined,” and “work.”

Students then listened to the story on a CD while following along in their Houghton Mifflin textbook. Even though the writing lesson came from the district-wide writing curriculum, the readings that students responded to came from the Houghton Mifflin textbook series. While students were listening/following along, they also had three “stickies” (Post-it Notes) to mark places in the text where they found evidence that the character was determined. It seems that they were given only three “stickies” because they were to give three examples or pieces of evidence to support the claim that the character is determined. Students did not question the number of “stickies” and each only marked three places in the text.

After listening to the story, Rebecca led students through the text by asking them to tell which sections they marked as evidence of determination. As students read their
sections, Rebecca evaluated their responses by questioning whether or not the response was evidence of determination. For those she accepted, she wrote the page number on the top of an overhead transparency on the overhead projector. Those that were not evidence of determination were discussed with the class and dismissed by Rebecca. This process continued throughout the 30-minute lesson and ended without students or teacher doing any writing other than Rebecca recording page numbers on the top of the transparency. Rebecca ended the lesson by telling students that they did not have time to finish and that this was where they would pick up tomorrow. According to Rebecca, writing lessons last for thirty minutes each day. On Mondays and Fridays, however, writing time is used for spelling pre and post tests and accompanying activities.

Rebecca’s Student Samples

Rebecca agreed to provide me with student writing samples related to the lesson I observed in her classroom. She was clear that it would take several weeks for students to write enough to send me samples. When I contacted Rebecca about the writing samples she wanted an additional week and when I arrived to pick them up, she had two different sets of response to literature samples of student writing Xeroxed and ready for me.

Rebecca provided me with 42 samples of student writing. Twenty-four samples were literary responses done after I observed in the classroom and in response to a different story than the one I observed students reading. An additional 18 samples were from a subsequent literary response. Each student sample included a literary response journal (a double entry journal that includes quotes from the text on one side and comments or reactions to that quote on the other side), a first draft of the essay, a final
draft of the essay, and a writing scoring guide that the teacher used to score the writing. Each of the student essays included three paragraphs. The first paragraph was an introductory paragraph that included the title, author, genre, summary of the story, and some idea about the text to be developed in the rest of the essay. The second paragraph included quotations—in this case, three quotations that were meant to support the idea introduced in the first paragraph. The third paragraph concluded the essay and was expected to include a personal connection to the ideas presented in the essay.

These writing samples were not directly from the lesson I observed in the classroom when I visited. Instead, these essays followed the lesson that I saw. Each of these essays did use the literary response journal that students had when I observed, although I did not see students use the journal or hear the directions from the teacher about how to use it. Rebecca did not include a writing prompt with the student writing. It would be interesting to know if she used the same prompt as Alison when responding to My Name is Maria Isabel. The student responses suggest that she did.

Rebecca included student writing with her comments. The response to literature set of papers that the students had done on the earlier date had her handwritten comments on them. She also told me that she met with each student after scoring the essay. She wanted to see that students incorporated her comments as they wrote the next essay. In some cases she saw that they did, but she commented that sometimes students made new errors that they hadn’t made the first time. Looking at the comments Rebecca wrote, I noticed that most focused on language conventions. Common markings on the papers included words written in the margins. Some examples were: indentation, margins, spelling (actually sp with a circle around it), punctuation (punc.), capitals (caps), run-on,
and grammar. A few essays included words with question marks more related to content. Some examples are: Main Idea? Theme? Character Traits? A few papers included the comment, “Own Words.”

Each paper also included a scoring guide with checkmarks and a numeric score. There were a possible 12 points for each essay. These numbers translated to 3-5 below basic, 6-8 basic, 9-10 proficient, and 11-12 advanced. Papers were scored along three dimensions: content, organization and focus, and language conventions. Four points were possible for each of the three dimensions. Both attempts by Rebecca’s students at response to literature resulted in similar scores with approximately 70% of the papers scoring at the basic level (scores of 6-8), about 15% scoring below basic (scores of 3-5), and the remaining 15% scoring in the proficient range (scores of 9-10). No students scored in the advanced range on either response to literature essay.

When I asked Rebecca what she thought students were doing well based on the writing she had given me, she was silent and then explained, “I’m a very critical person.” She then went on to say that the first paragraphs were good for the most part. Students were able to include the title, author, genre, main idea, and a brief summary. She also said that she was not really worried about the content. She said, “It’s more of following the guidelines as far as punctuation goes or making sure to give the author the credit they’re due.” Rebecca’s major concern was sentence structure and language conventions. She said the majority of her students do well on the content and they need a little more work on organization and focus, and language conventions is where they need the most work.
Rebecca’s students’ papers are similar from paper to paper, with many students choosing the same quotes to use in their second paragraph. Papers tended to summarize the text rather than respond to the text in any substantive way. It was not clear from the essays that students were able to analyze text or make a personal connection to the text.

Robert

Robert’s School and District

Robert works in a mid-city school in a large school district. In their School Accountability Report Card (SARC), Washington Elementary School is described as “a single-track, year-round school located in the southeastern section of the city. The school community is made up of older homes and apartments. The enrollment in September 2003 was 826. Approximately 50 percent of the students speak a language other than English. Student mobility is higher than the district as a whole” (California Department of Education, 2006). With a statewide Academic Performance Index (API) of 1, Washington School is considered a school at risk—in its 4th year in Program Improvement, which means the state is watching this school to make sure that its test scores improve or it may face state sanctions.

Since Robert’s hiring, his school district implemented a district-wide reform effort focused on instruction, particularly reading instruction in the elementary grades. Professional development had been available to all teachers, and had included in Robert’s case, an opportunity to work with a literacy consultant from New York in his own classroom. Robert’s district does not have a school or district-wide writing program. As a part of the reform effort, teachers were trained in a workshop model of
instruction that included focus lessons and conferring as integral parts of writing instruction. Washington School had also adopted the Houghton Mifflin Language Arts series but is not a Reading First school.

Robert’s Background

Robert has taught at the elementary level for seven years, a career change after having been in the military. He received his teaching credential at a large local private university that caters to working professionals. Robert did not feel that he learned to teach writing in his credential program, and cannot remember any course focused on the teaching of writing. Robert holds both a bachelor’s and a master’s degree with a major emphasis of study in biology. Robert has taught both fourth and fifth grade in two elementary schools in the area where he now teaches.

Robert learned to write late in life saying he was not a good student. As one of eight children from a poor family, he says he did not get a lot of support at home. Robert attended school in Texas and graduated from high school from “one of the last segregated schools” in the area. He remembers writing as copying off the board. When he went into the military he remembers his greatest problem was communicating in writing so he took classes and went home in the evenings and practiced writing.

Observing a Writing Lesson in Robert’s Classroom

When I came to observe, Robert and his students had just moved from the original Washington School into a brand new school building. This new building is a two-story structure with a large central courtyard. The upper grades are located upstairs
in this new facility. The new building includes all new furniture and advanced technology including a speaker system, which projects the teacher’s voice via a wireless microphone throughout the room. This same speaker system can also be used to project student voices by using the wireless microphone. Robert also said they were still connecting up a “Smart” board and he already had a document camera which he had been using in the old school building. The room still had bare walls and during the interview Robert mentioned that he hadn’t yet hung charts and student work on the boards in the new room. Robert had desks arranged in groups of six with a large open area in the center between groups of desks. In this room it was less clear where the front of the classroom was located. There were white boards along two sides of the room, cabinets across one side, and the door and windows on the other side. An internal door connected this room to the classroom next door. I only saw this door in use during an interview with Robert after school.

Robert used a workshop approach to writing instruction. This was evident in several ways. First, he had a schedule posted on the white board that said, “9:00-10:00 Writer’s Workshop (Focus: observation).” He also had all of his students get their writing folders and come to the carpet and sit in front of a large easel with chart paper for his lesson. During this lesson Robert reminded students that last week they had started observational writing. Directly behind the students was a piece of chart paper where they had brainstormed sentence beginnings like, “I see… and, It feels like…” They continued to add to that list on a new piece of chart paper. After about ten minutes Robert sent the students back to their seats to begin describing an object that he handed to each student from a bag. He passed a small orange citrus fruit to each student. They began to talk
about their fruit and smelled it and asked if they would get to taste too. Robert reminded students to start writing and also let them know that they would get to taste once they had finished describing the outside of the fruit. After about 20 minutes of writing, Robert asked students to stop and asked them to bring their journals to the carpet leaving everything else on their desk.

Once on the carpet, Robert handed his microphone to a student and asked her to read her writing. She began reading, “I am going to describe an object…” After she read she asked for comments. Students appeared to be used to this process and raised their hands to respond. The student called on another student who told her what she liked about her writing. Another student asked her a question about something she had written. The student reader answered the question. Robert reminded students to be sure to say what they mean in their writing. He also reminded them that different people would describe things differently. The microphone was handed to another student who began reading, “It’s small.” Robert interrupted to ask the student what he was doing. Other students prompted this student, telling him, “Say your topic sentence.” This process went on for about 15 minutes with students reading and responding and with the teacher prompting or elaborating on ideas brought up. He then told the students that now he wanted them to write a paragraph on a separate sheet of paper, a proper paragraph with indentation, describing their object. Students returned to their seats to eat their fruit and write their paragraphs. As the time went on, Robert reminded students that if they didn’t finish they could finish it up at recess. While students were writing Robert walked around from student to student. He pointed out things like capitals, margins, and paper
use. The lesson ended with Robert telling students that for writing homework that night they would observe something, writing the observation in their writer’s notebook.

Although Robert used a workshop approach to writing instruction, he clearly directed the lesson. Students contributed ideas to the lesson but never questioned the teacher or ventured beyond the lesson he was presenting. The only questions students asked were about whether spelling and punctuation were important and whether they would get to eat the oranges. Robert’s writing time lasted approximately one hour and it appears from speaking with him that writing workshop time occurs twice each week.

Robert’s Student Samples

Robert agreed to provide me with student writing samples related to the lesson I had observed in his classroom. Before I left on the day I observed, he also told me that he would Xerox from student notebooks from the lesson that day so I could see both the work in the notebook and the student paragraphs.

Robert provided me with 14 samples of observational paragraphs and nine pages Xeroxed from students’ writer’s notebooks written during the lesson I observed. There was nothing else included with the student papers and the papers were unmarked. Each paragraph was less than half a page and all but one was written in cursive handwriting. Some paragraphs included an introductory sentence such as, “I am describing an object.” This kind of sentence was referred to during my observation as a “topic sentence.” Eight of the paragraphs began with this topic sentence and two others used the same type of sentence as a title for their paragraph. Other paragraphs started right in with the description with phrases like, “I notice that it is a small ball” or “It feels like soft.” The
descriptions utilized the sentence starters that were brainstormed during the lesson in class with fairly short sentences like, “The color is orange” and “The shape is like a ball.” Only two of the paragraphs made an attempt at a concluding sentence.

Some of the students appeared to have copied their paragraphs directly from the writing they did in their notebooks during the period when I observed. A few students went from a list in their notebooks to a more conventional paragraph form on their notebook paper. Robert wanted me to notice what he described as “gaps” in the writers that he has. From the paragraphs there were clearly students who had an idea of how to put sentences together and others who appeared to struggle with standard English. He said he was most pleased with his students’ ability to try things that are new to them.

Robert mentioned during our interview that he was not pleased with his students’ topic sentences so he, as he described it, “flipped it”, and instead of writing, had students read and look at what authors do and identify the pieces that form a good paragraph. He said students were doing a “wonderful job” picking out the different parts. Then, they would go back to writing to see if that would help their writing. It was not clear what kinds of expectations for writing a paragraph Robert has made explicit for his students. I neither saw nor heard any criteria that students were to follow or include as they composed their paragraphs other than some reference to a topic sentence and individual comments about margins and capitalization.
Tina

Tina’s School and District

Tina teaches in a small suburban school district in the northern part of the county. Hamilton Elementary School is a neighborhood school in an area with soaring house prices. The school has less than 500 students in grades 3-6, with class sizes at 25 students or less. Hamilton School has a student population that is approximately 72% White and 25% Latino (California Department of Education, 2006). With an API rank of 9, Hamilton School is proud of its test scores and parents in the community expect those scores to continue to improve. Aligned with state standards, Hamilton School has also adopted the Houghton Mifflin Language Arts Series.

Hamilton School is in a new school building, built to replace the original crumbling school facility less than five years ago. Unlike many older schools in San Diego County, Hamilton School houses all its classrooms inside a single building. Interior hallways connect classrooms, the school office, the library, restrooms, and computer lab.

Tina’s Background

Tina is in her sixth year of teaching, her fifth year in the classroom. During her first year, she was hired by the same district where she currently teaches to run a reading intervention program supported by Title I funds. Tina obtained her teaching credential at a small state university nearby. Tina did not remember any coursework in the teaching of writing, but did remember an emphasis on reading instruction, especially since she
was credentialed at the time the Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA) was implemented as part of the credentialing process.

Teaching was a career change for Tina, she worked in the health profession prior to obtaining her teaching credential. Tina has two high school-aged children, both of whom were students in the district and school where she now teaches. Tina has learned about writing instruction in her district both from interaction with her colleagues and from her observations of school work done by her own children.

While Tina has had some professional development in the area of writing, math is the focus of professional development for Hamilton School this year. They recently purchased a new math series and hired a consultant to provide training to teachers. In addition, time spent on math has been increased from an hour a day to an hour and 15 minutes daily.

When asked about writing as a child, Tina remembered learning penmanship and copying sentences from the board. She also remembered, outside of school, that she was always “writing a book”, stapling together any scratch paper she could find to make books. She said she wanted to write because it was a “grown up kind of important thing.”

Observing a Writing Lesson in Tina’s Classroom

Tina’s classroom is tucked into a corner of the school building. Hallway walls in the corridor were hung with student artwork and writing. Inside the room student work was also hanging. Large whiteboards stretched across both the front and back of the room. Student desks were clustered in groups of fours and fives with most students
facing the front of the room. At the front of the room was an overhead projector as well as the white board.

Tina began her writing lesson by giving students a two-minute break to get their pencils ready (sharpened), a drink, and a reading book (I’m not sure the reason for the book). The lesson began with Tina introducing the ideas of comparing and contrasting information and reading the picture book, Stellaluna, to students as they followed along in a Xeroxed version of the same book. During the first 40 minutes of the lesson Tina read the book, discussed the characteristics of birds and bats with students, and asked them to reread the text noticing how birds and bats are the same and different. When a student asked for “sticky notes”, Tina passed them out to the class.

After the reading, discussion, and rereading Tina redirected students and introduced them to organizing information. She told them they were going to use a graphic organizer and reminded them that they used a web the other day when they had used a graphic organizer with a circle in the middle and lines radiating out from it. She told them there were different ways to organize information and today they would use a Venn diagram. Tina put a transparency of a Venn diagram on the overhead projector and passed Xeroxed copies of Venn diagrams to the students. Tina labeled the diagram and asked students to label theirs in the same way. The next 20 minutes were spent with Tina asking students what to put in different areas of the Venn diagram. She wrote on the transparency on the projector and students wrote the same information on their own diagrams. Tina then introduced the idea of an introductory paragraph and gave students a cloze activity (a paragraph that has blanks for words that students will fill in) to complete. Tina guided students through the activity and emphasized points like
capitalizing and underlining titles. She wrote the information on the board that students were to include in their cloze paragraph. Students continued to work on the cloze activity until Tina asked them to clean up telling them they would continue to work on these tomorrow. The entire lessons lasted approximately one hour and 25 minutes. According to Tina, time for writing instruction in her classroom is limited. She has time for writing instruction on Wednesday, which are minimum days, and on Thursdays.

**Tina’s Student Samples**

Tina agreed to provide student writing samples related to the lesson I observed in the classroom. During the course of the study Tina provided three different sets of student writing samples for me to examine.

The first set of student papers that Tina provided me with were copies of the compare and contrast cloze activity and Venn diagram graphic organizer that I saw students completing during the lesson I observed. These 20 papers included students’ written answers on a page, but do not include what I would define as composing. In the case of these papers, students were not even required to write a sentence. Their task was to find information in the text they had read to make the sentences in the cloze make sense. The majority of the students filled in the blank lines with the same words, some directly copied from what Tina had written on the board. Tina made these copies for me following the lesson and I took them with me when I left.

A few weeks later Tina provided me with 21 packets of student work. These packets included a graphic organizer in the form of a Venn diagram, a cloze activity of a four-paragraph compare and contrast essay that had paragraphs and sentences with
blanks in them for students to complete, and a handwritten essay from the student. It appeared that the first two activities (the diagram and the cloze) were completed during one time period and the handwritten essay was written on another day or during another time period since one student wrote an essay without the organizer and diagram and the written essay reflected that the student had not been present during the original activity with this comment, “I’ll bet if I was in the room I would of heard lots of rushing and excitement.”

In a number of cases the handwritten essay is a “final” copy of the cloze paragraph. In other cases students made some changes to the language in the cloze paragraph but seemed to follow the general pattern established in the cloze—introduction, compare, contrast, conclusion with opinion/evaluation. It seems from reading the essays and cloze activity that whole group brainstorming was done in the course of completing the diagrams and cloze. Many students mention similar characteristics and phrase those observations in similar ways.

Tina provided me with a third set of student papers shortly before the end of my data collection. This set of 14 student papers was sent with a note telling me, “We brainstormed ideas together. Students were to get peer editing. They were to have an introduction, supporting paragraphs and a conclusion. No adult help was given.” These five-paragraph essays were narratives describing a field trip the class had taken. Reading the first essay I noticed the use of a lead—an attention getting beginning—followed by detailed description of different elements of the field trip. When I read the second essay, I began to see a pattern develop, by the third I could detail the expectations for each
paragraph and in reading succeeding essays could see this pattern continue. I also noticed similar descriptive phrases from essay to essay.

During my interview with Tina she described this particular assignment as she was talking about her decisions about writing instruction. She explained that they had created a big brainstorm on a piece of paper up on the board. She was aware that the students had used similar phrases but she didn’t care because she wanted them to be able to take information from the brainstorm and put it into paragraph form. She also told them what kind of information to put in each paragraph explaining that she structured it because she didn’t really care about the bus ride or how they had to get their snack. She said she took away some of their choices but then they had choices about content within those parameters.
Chapter Six:

Influences on Instructional Practices: Impact from Three Dimensions

The decisions made by teachers and practices implemented in classrooms are part of an intricate and intertwined educational system. Oakes (1992) and others (Mehan et al, 2005) have described school change as a multi-faceted process with technical, cultural, and political dimensions. These same dimensions can also be useful in examining the multiple influences and pressures that shape instructional practices. This three-dimensional approach illuminates the many, often competing, influences that teachers contend with (often unconsciously) as they make decisions about instruction in their classrooms.

In using these dimensions to examine instructional practices and the decisions that teachers make, it is necessary think about them as they apply specifically to writing instruction and the practices associated with writing and instruction. The technical dimension includes, but is not limited to, curriculum and instructional resources; the cultural dimension examines the influences of teacher training and identity as “teacher”, the local school context, and perceived expectations and purposes of schooling; and the political dimension brings in the demands of government policies and mandates and the expectations of local communities and their impact on instruction and instructional decisions.
The Political Dimension

The political dimension, in the case of writing instruction, brings the interplay of national legislation and its requirements, state accountability systems, and the local constraints associated with them. Within their different local contexts, the four classroom teachers were similarly impacted by the political influences on writing and writing instruction. They each negotiated instruction within the requirements imposed by NCLB and the STAR writing test, they worked to have students achieve the standards outlined by the state, and strove to comply with the norms of their school site and district.

These four teachers were all fully credentialed, qualified teachers as state and national legislation requires. They all had experience with fourth grade students. They took their work seriously and were clear about the expectations (particularly from their school and their community) for students in their grade level. Based on what was said in the interviews and observing them at their work places, they were established in their school communities and participated in decision making at their grade levels and at their schools.

Classroom arrangements were similar. Individual desks in each classroom were clustered in groups, with students either facing the front of the room or with their side facing the front of the room. Three of the classrooms clearly had the white board and overhead projector as the focal point in the room, the fourth room had chart paper that served a similar purpose. Teacher desks in all cases were tucked into a corner and teachers spent little time in that area of the room. Most had kidney-shaped or half-round tables where they worked with small groups or individual children. In all of the
classrooms students demonstrated with their behavior that they knew the classroom procedures and had the majority of their materials in their desks.

When I visited the classrooms, the students were well behaved. They followed teacher directions and were mostly quiet during the lesson. Students asked few questions and there were few volunteers to answer teacher questions. In two of the classrooms the teacher moved a student early in the lesson. My sense was that each of these moves was to keep the particular student from engaging in conversation rather than work. Students took their work seriously and were eager to please the teacher. In most cases students did not ask for help during the lesson, but teachers were alert to potential stumbling blocks and redirected particular students through questioning. Three of the classrooms lessons were conducted through whole class instruction that included short bursts of student work directed by the teacher. In the fourth classroom, the lesson began as a whole group and then broke into individual students writing. That class then reconvened with students reading their writing and responding to their peers’ writing.

These teachers have a lot in common. All of them had been teaching between six and seven years. While their experience level was not a factor in their selection, it becomes significant in light of the fact that all of these teachers began teaching after the California Standardized Testing and Reporting Program (STAR) was initiated. None of them had taught fourth grade before the fourth grade STAR writing test had been implemented or was anticipated, before the state standards were put in place, or before the other standardized tests and accountability associated with STAR. All four teachers were familiar with the state standards and when they talked about writing their language reflected this familiarity.
Political influences play a major, though subtle, role in instructional decisions that these teachers made. While these teachers are competent, well educated, and fully credentialed, there are constraints that impact the content and the structure of their teaching. Two major political influences on their instructional decision-making stem directly from NCLB legislation. They are the California fourth grade STAR writing test and the California content standards for English-Language Arts which serve to narrow the curriculum, restrict time devoted to writing instruction, and limit attention to the individual needs of students.

**A Narrow View of Writing**

**Writing Types and Structures**

As a result of the focus of the state writing test, a major focus of writing instruction in the fourth grade is the summary. The California English-Language Arts content standards describe summaries in this way, “Write summaries that contain the main idea of the reading selection and the most significant details.” This general description does not suggest that students need to follow a particular, uniform format for the writing. In spite of this, all four teachers in the study talked about summary writing being new to students in fourth grade and three of the four teachers described teaching their students a particular format for putting a summary together.

Alison created a chant to help her students include what she (and her district, based on their district-wide writing curriculum) considers essential information for the first paragraph of a summary: title, author, genre, main idea. As Alison snapped her fingers
rhythmically, her students chanted those words. During an interview Alison described how when students were taking a district assessment on summary, they independently began snapping their fingers as they began their summaries. She was delighted that they had internalized this chant to help them remember the essential elements to include in their summaries.

There were also misconceptions about the state writing test that led teachers to emphasize certain kinds of writing. In Tina’s classroom compare and contrast essays are a major focus. I had heard from fourth grade teachers, outside of this study, that the state tests compare and contrast writing. This seemed odd, since there are only four writing types specifically outlined in the standards—narrative, response to literature, information report, and summary. I looked through released writing prompts and scoring commentaries from the STAR writing test to uncover where this emphasis came from. Based on teacher guides released by the California Department of Education, summary writing was tested in 2001 and 2004, narrative was tested in 2002, 2003, and 2005, and response to literature was tested in 2006. Summary prompts from released items from the STAR fourth grade writing tests are all based on non-fiction reading. *Frogs and Toads* and *Beavers* were the two selections used in 2001 and *Kiting* and *The Japanese Art of Bonsai* were the two selections used in 2004. The focus on compare and contrast comes from the first STAR writing test summary selection in 2001. The test prompt, based on the reading selection *Frogs and Toads*, was released the following year along with sample scoring and commentary on the scoring. As educators (not necessarily classroom teachers) tried to figure out the demands of the test, this released sample became the model for preparing for STAR writing. Because the article was about the
two amphibians, teachers must have decided that students would need to know how to do compare and contrast essays to summarize selections like this. The prompt for the summary writing on the STAR test is similar to the wording in the standards. It tells students they will be scored on how well their writing:

- States the main ideas of the article
- Identifies the most important details that support the main ideas
- Uses their own words in writing the summary (paraphrasing)
- Uses correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization

Yet, there is no evidence that compare and contrast writing will be tested or that it should be used within the writing test at all. With the exception of *Frogs and Toads*, none of the other articles used to test summary writing lent themselves to comparing and contrasting as a writing strategy.

There are several instances of compare and contrast in the fourth grade language arts standards. This structure occurs three times within the reading standards. Compare and contrast is part of two separate headings under the general standard *Reading Comprehension* and appears again as a sub point under the general standard *Literary Response and Analysis*. Compare and contrast is mentioned as an example of using traditional structures for conveying information (Writing Strategies 1.3) along with chronological order, cause and effect, and posing and answering a question. All four teachers showed evidence of teaching chronological order (also referred to as time order or sequencing), but I saw no evidence of instruction in using cause and effect or posing
and answering a question as structures for conveying information in writing in these four classrooms.

In addition to the focus on summary, all four teachers also taught response to literature and narrative as writing types. As with summary writing, three of the four teachers described teaching a particular format for response to literature. Both Alison and Rebecca had their students practice response to literature writing repeatedly. In Rebecca’s case, students completed at least three response to literature essays during a one-month period with at least two of them scored by Rebecca using the district scoring guide.

Narrative writing was somewhat less restrictive, but still included, in the case of the same three teachers, some standard format and required elements. This is the writing type that the teachers seemed to find easier to teach and that their students had more success writing. This could be because narrative writing is included in the first, second, and third grade standards. In contrast, fourth grade is the first time that the writing types of summary, response to literature and information report appear.

As a result of information reports not being tested, only one of the teachers I studied mentioned teaching students to write information reports. In the schools with the district-wide writing program, their program only included three genres for fourth grade writing: summary, response to literature, and narrative. Tina described her reliance on the standards for what kinds of writing to include in her instruction and reported discomfort with having students do writing that she could not trace back to the standards this way,

I actually go back and look at the standards…I have my standards books and I know where they are. Because I know in the writing standards
there’s a research report, an informational report, that’s why I did this (Martin Luther King, Jr. report). I know they need to be able to do a personal narrative, that’s why we did the thing about the bus trip or field trip. I know compare and contrast is mentioned, so we did Skittles and Starbursts and we did bats and birds. So those are the kinds of things that I’ve really focused on versus what’s a good story line… the most fun writing I did when I was a kid was when I made up a story and that’s what I haven’t had time to do. Poetry to me is so important and it’s more important that they do free form poetry but they need some structure so I can say this is working on figurative language… I tell them the reason I have them do things is the state has standards for fourth grade and we have to do these things. A fourth grade standard is you have to indent… (T, 2/6/06, p.6).

Tina had her students write poetry shortly before her interview, but with very specific guidelines tied to her understanding of the fourth grade standards. The teachers in this study were more likely to allow their students to write other kinds of writing once the annual writing test was over. Rebecca described a book project that students would engage in during the time when assignments were complete at the end of the school year and Alison said students would do more narrative writing (her favorite) once they completed response to literature.

Surface Features

When talking about student writing, surface features always emerged as concerns for these teachers. From sentence structure and spelling to indentation and punctuation, the teachers felt that their students did not reliably attend to these details or exhibit mastery of these skills. All four teachers mentioned indenting in my conversations with them and many reminded their students to indent while I observed in their classrooms. Indentation and its placement in the standards document exacerbates this concern. Indentation has a prominent place, equal to introductory paragraphs and topics sentences under standard 1.2 of Writing Strategies. This signals, perhaps unintentionally that the
skill is essential to writing a clear and coherent paragraph and doesn’t acknowledge the changing role that indentation has as computer use has become more prominent.

Using paper correctly and attending to margins were also surface concerns of the teachers. According to Rebecca, students “get docked” on the STAR test because they’re not using their margins correctly. She did not say how she knew this to be true, but she stated it with absolute conviction. Neither the scoring rubrics for the STAR test or the scoring commentaries mention margins at all and since samples are typed for the guide that is produced to help teachers prepare students for the test, it is not possible to see how the students used the page for their writing. Margin and paper use are not mentioned in the standards documents.

Spelling was a concern that was frequently brought up, and students mentioned spelling when I visited the classrooms. Teachers were also worried about students’ sentences. Robert stated that he had to begin the year focused on sentences instead of paragraphs because his students were not able to construct them properly. Rebecca lamented the simplicity of sentences and the structure of her students’ sentences. Both Robert and Rebecca felt this was more of a problem for students who were English learners.

Only one teacher focused on handwriting (penmanship) that I observed. Robert required his students to do all writing in cursive, including drafting that would be recopied. The other three teachers did not require cursive writing and there is no mention of handwriting in the scoring for the state writing test, although cursive handwriting is included in the fourth grade writing standards.
Approximately half of the writing standards are focused on conventions and surface features of writing. It is clear that this focus impacts decisions that teachers make about instruction. In addition, Houghton Mifflin Reading and other resources are filled with exercises about sentences, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. It is apparent from the abundance of resources that this is how language conventions are taught in school.

**Time**

Less obvious, but probably more insidious are the time constraints on instruction that state and federal mandates impose. In Reading First schools, scientifically based curriculum must be implemented with “fidelity.” Even though Reading First is focused on kindergarten through third grade, schools with Reading First funding generally require all of their teachers to implement the adopted curriculum in similar ways. This means that language arts instruction can easily take half of the school day, leaving the remaining time for all other school subjects: math, science and social studies, time in the computer lab and library, physical education, art, music, special assemblies, and school-wide events.

Time pressed heavily on the teachers in this study. All of them talked of working long hours themselves, taking work home, and the tremendous burden of trying to fit “everything” they needed to teach into the school day. Time constraints were framed in different ways at different schools in different school districts. Both Alison and Rebecca were constrained by the way their school grouped students for language arts instruction. While their grouping allowed students to received differentiated instruction (in
homogeneous groups), it also meant that beginning and ending times for lessons were not flexible. The time was fixed, not allowing for adjustments when students needed more time for a particular lesson or a shortened time to allow for something else. It also meant that the possibilities for integrating the curriculum were limited because students did not remain in their core classroom throughout the day. While a teacher had all her students for social studies and science, she had only a subset of them during language arts instruction.

In all cases it seemed that time for writing was limited. Alison said she taught writing 30-45 minutes per day. Rebecca taught writing 30 minutes per day, but did not usually teach writing on Mondays or Fridays because she needed to give spelling pre and post tests. Robert had writer’s workshop scheduled two times a week for an hour and Tina only had time for writing on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

In all four cases, others dictated the teacher’s schedules. Student schedules had to be coordinated with instructional schedules to allow for mandated interventions such as English Language Development (ELD) for students still learning English and the inventions associated with the Individual Education Plans (IEPs) of Special Education students (speech, individual tutoring). Time for activities like going to the computer lab or the school library had to be scheduled around the core reading and math curriculum. In most cases reading and math instruction happened before lunch with all other instruction wedged into short afternoons. Subjects like physical education, art and music were infrequent or in some cases nonexistent.

From observing during writing lessons it was apparent that teachers felt restricted by time. Alison said she chose stories her students had read during reading instruction,
even if they didn’t engage students, for use with summary and response to literature
writing because she didn’t have time for her students to read and understand additional
texts in order to practice their writing. During Rebecca’s writing lesson, students never
picked up a pencil because the time was spent reviewing the story and looking for quotes
to support an idea related to the story. During the four lessons I observed, students did
not write for any extended period of time. The most time spent writing was in Robert’s
classroom with 15-20 minutes spent observing an orange and writing to describe it.
While more extended writing could be occurring during lessons I did not observe, it was
clear that writing was squeezed into time periods that teachers and students found
confining and that left them having to stop in the middle of discussions and activities to
be picked up during the following lesson. The stops did not fall at convenient breaking
points, they were controlled by the clock rather than by the design of the lesson.

The Individual Needs of Students

It seems from observing these classrooms that standards standardize the
curriculum. Differentiation, a prominent buzzword in education, was not apparent in
these classrooms. Whole class instruction dominated with questions scattered in by
teachers to check on students’ understanding. None of the teachers, when I asked about
adapting instruction to students’ varying needs, gave any indication of knowledge of
students’ varying individual writing strengths or using this kind of knowledge to tailor
instruction to best support the writing of individual students. They taught the lessons as
though the information presented was new for all of the students and that their needs
were similar. Students who finished assignments early were either instructed to add
more description or allowed to go on to another activity. Teachers told me that
struggling students got extra attention, often completing their writing at a table rather
than their desk, with the teacher guiding them through each step.

For Alison and Rebecca differentiation happened through the ways students were
grouped for instruction. This kind of grouping, often referred to as tracking (Oakes,
1985) has been shown to have many negative consequences including low expectations
for some students and less access to a full range of curricular activities. Robert described
the range of learners in his classroom as his greatest struggle in teaching writing. Tina
admitted that more involved writing tasks (like poetry or research reports) often took
place when her struggling students left the classroom to participate in intervention
programs.

Writing instruction in these four classrooms was geared toward what teachers
thought their students needed to know as fourth grade writers as they understood the
demands of the STAR writing test and the requirements of the state standards. It
becomes apparent when examining the political dimension that isolating it from other
influences proves difficult. The cultural and technical dimensions interact with the
political dimension complicating the influences and their impacts on instruction.

The Cultural and Technical Dimensions

Added to the political dimension are the ways instructional practices are
influenced by the interaction of the cultural and technical dimensions. While at first they
appear to be discrete dimensions, in practice the cultural and technical dimensions press
up against one another blurring the edges that separate them, making them blend and
bleed into one another. Curriculum and instructional resources play a role in instruction, but their implementation is influenced by the ways teachers interpret their roles as teachers, what they have learned about teaching in professional development and in their schooling, and by their knowledge of and comfort with the subject matter they are teaching.

In this small sample representing three school districts, one small, one medium sized, and one large, and four schools, three that struggle to meet state accountability scores and one that ranks near the top, the instructional practices were surprisingly similar. Even though all of these teachers use the Houghton Mifflin series for their reading instruction, none of them rely on it for their writing instruction. What they do seem to rely on, however, is a common instructional mode, described in chapter three as the presentational mode (Appendix F).

Role of the Teacher

Alison, Rebecca and Tina clearly utilized a presentational mode of writing instruction in their classrooms. A notable characteristic when talking to them about writing instruction in their classrooms was that they spent more time planning for writing and figuring out how to help their students write in particular ways than their students did writing. In each writing situation that these teachers described, they wrote first and/or worked out the organization and content of the writing for the students and posted it for students to refer to during the process of writing. They read and responded to everything their students wrote and carefully corrected as many errors as possible. Each teacher knew exactly what she wanted students to achieve (a specific goal), created or provided a
model for students to follow, led the discussion and/or instruction for students, and provided the only feedback to the writing which was generally focused on whether students had executed the writing correctly in terms of form and mechanics.

Robert’s workshop approach to writing instruction required a closer examination to determine his mode of instruction. In his workshop approach, he did not provide a written prompt or post a particular model of writing. But Robert did deliver the focus of instruction and the specific writing topic to his students. He seemed to have some goals, though not as specific as the other three teachers in the study. He clearly led the discussion with the students. Even when students were responding to each other, he facilitated conversation and elaborated on the comments, sometimes validating the usefulness of a particular comment. He gave a specific assignment, and while the rules were not explicitly discussed in my presence, from the students’ reading and responding to each other’s writing it became clear that there were some rules, especially about topic sentences. He asked students to write a paragraph—“a proper paragraph.” That comment suggested that students had some idea of what their teacher expected of a proper paragraph. There were some characteristics of a natural process mode of instruction as well with generally positive feedback from peers and an opportunity to revise and rework the writing after receiving this feedback, before getting feedback from the teacher. Nonetheless, overall Robert’s instructional mode had more characteristics of a presentational mode than the natural process mode.
Instructional Focus and the Role of the Teacher

In addition to their common mode of instruction, these four teachers also emphasized similar foci in their writing instruction. Throughout the data collection, surveys, interviews, observations, and student work revealed a focus on form and language mechanics in writing instruction in these classrooms. Models and modeling, which were prevalent in the surveys, were also mainstays of instruction in these fourth grade classrooms. Most often teachers used a single model of a particular writing type and expected students to write their essays following the pattern established by the model. As interpreted by these four teachers, modeling was what teachers did when they introduced students to a particular writing type. The result was a model for students to refer to or recall. Only Robert, in a follow-up interview, talked about having students examine a piece of published writing. He described having his students work through an article to look at how the author put together a “well written, clearly stated paragraph” because he was not satisfied with their topic sentences. It wasn’t clear to me how this article was related to the instruction I had observed, but Robert hoped that isolating and picking out the different elements that comprised paragraphs in that article would transfer into student writing. During the time periods (Robert referred to it as a “three day article”) spent analyzing this model, students did not write. Robert hoped to see the impact in students’ writing when they returned to writing after completing the article. There was no evidence in any of the data of teachers presenting multiple examples of a writing type, including student written and published pieces, for students to analyze to determine essential elements or effective strategies.
In three of the classrooms the teachers gave specific directions for the number of paragraphs to be included in each piece of writing and detailed what information should be included in each paragraph. None of the teachers indicated that they taught students how to paragraph information, instead they told students what information should be in which paragraph. That way when students moved on to the next piece of information they would know it must be time for a new paragraph. It was not clear whether students would know how to determine the content of each paragraph or when to begin a new paragraph if left to decide for themselves.

The focus on language conventions was prominent in all four of the classrooms I studied. Reminders and comments about spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and indentation were regularly interspersed into writing instruction. Students were clearly concerned with conventions and frequently asked about whether they should be attending to spelling and punctuation. (The teachers always responded that they should and in some instances referred students to reference materials.) In interviews with the teachers, language conventions were frequent worries of teachers and all of the teachers commented about errors in the papers they provided to me. Teachers had a variety of ways to teach language conventions and described resources not specific to writing instruction such as sentences for students to correct (commonly referred to as daily oral language), worksheets from the Houghton Mifflin textbook, and resources and worksheets from other sources.

The other foci of instruction (appendix G), as described in chapter two, were much less prevalent in the classrooms of teachers in this study. Both Alison and Rebecca had some use of scales, defining criteria for students to include in their writing. Their
district-wide writing program provides scoring guides to evaluate student writing. Students had access to the criteria in the guides, but the evaluation came after the writing and was completed by the teacher. It was not apparent from my interactions and observations of Tina or Robert that there were scales, in any concrete form, associated with their writing instruction. I did not observe the use of sentence combining, a technique used to increase sentence length and complexity, as an instructional focus in any of the four classrooms nor did any of the teachers report teaching it. The closest type of instruction to sentence combining was the encouragement to add description and replace ordinary words with more descriptive words.

Free Writing as described by Hillocks is closely related to journal writing for the teachers I studied. I did not see the use of journals in the classroom, with the exception of Robert’s class where students wrote their assigned writing in a booklet that resembled a journal and that he referred to as a journal. To my knowledge, Robert’s students did not use their journals for free writing on a regular basis. Instead the journals held the exercises assigned during writing workshop time. When I asked the teachers about the use of journals, one teacher told me that since she did not have time to read and give feedback to journal entries on a regular basis, she had decided not to use journals. She clearly felt that if students wrote, it was her responsibility to read and give feedback (which seemed to mean correct) to the writing. Another teacher told me that she didn’t feel like journal writing was “real writing” because it isn’t in the standards. She went on to say that while she valued journal writing, she didn’t think it was broadly valued to “just write down thoughts and things like that.” She did not specify in our interaction who she referred to with that statement—the state, her school and district, the general
public, or other teachers. The teachers were also clear that they did not have students do writing without prompts. They pointed out that students like prompts and that some students have trouble writing without a prompt. These comments reinforce the image of teacher as the one who directs learning, provides topics and assignments, answers questions, and evaluates products.

Inquiry, developing strategies using data as the basis for writing, was a rare occurrence in these classrooms based on the information I collected. Alison described a project with her advanced students (when other students were grouped with other teachers) where they came up with a problem and solution as an extension of a story they had read, and were writing a skit based on the problem and solution to perform for their classmates. Students wrote collaboratively to compose the skit. It wasn’t clear whether Alison provided a form/format for the writing. Tina described a research paper that her students wrote about Martin Luther King. For this project she gave students a packet of titles, pictures and information and they watched a movie, read a couple of books, and did a simulation (of racism). They had to write three paragraphs. The first paragraph was to be about Martin Luther King as a person, the second paragraph was to be about his dream and how it would change the world, and the third paragraph was for the students to describe the dream they themselves had for kids. Tina directed students through the process with brainstorming sheets and very specific criteria. Both Alison’s and Tina’s projects have the potential to be described as inquiry, but Tina’s leaves little room for student decision-making and with Alison’s it is not clear whether students had a model to follow. Based on other writing she described, I would expect Alison to have provided some kind of model for skit writing to the students. It was also not clear in any
of the classrooms how often projects like this took place and if students were given increasing levels of responsibility for decisions about how to structure the content and form of their writing. Again, teachers maintained a teacher-directed mode of instruction like that frequently represented in archetypal images of teaching.

Teacher Beliefs About Writing

Writing is a complex act involving the ability to get words on a page, planning and organization, the generation and elaboration of ideas, knowledge of audiences and purposes of writing, developing style and voice through word choice and sentence variety, knowledge of structures and formats for writing, and attention to and knowledge of the conventions of written English. This complexity requires instruction that acknowledges the demands and intricacies of composition.

Hillocks’ (1986) analysis and Sadoski’s (1997) study of writing instruction found that the instructional mode that had the greatest effect on student writing was what they referred to as the environmental mode. Within this mode opportunities for students to work through and solve the problems of representing ideas clearly in writing together rather than following a predetermined model allows for understanding beyond rote memorization of a particular format. The mode associated with the least effect on student writing was the presentational mode, characterized by teacher-directed discussions, exercises, and activities that often imitate a pattern or follow rules that have been previously discussed. These modes contrast sharply in the degree of interaction among students and in the kinds of thinking about writing students are asked to do.
The teachers in this study may not have consciously chosen to teach in a presentational mode, but it is likely the mode of instruction that they think is expected. It is the mode of instruction portrayed on television, in the movies, and in photographs, and is probably the way these teachers were taught. This “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975) pushes teachers toward the familiar, especially in areas of the curriculum where they may not feel as confident or successful as teachers. In addition, the presentational teaching mode offers teachers control: control of the curriculum, control of student interactions, and control of time and materials. This mode keeps teaching neat and orderly and keeps the classroom looking like the teacher is in charge of the students and the learning. Students work quietly and independently, knowing how to fill in the graphic organizers or what to write in each paragraph. Uncertainty, on the teacher’s part and the students’ part, is minimized. The presentational mode takes away the ambiguity associated with inquiry and the risks teachers may feel when outcomes are uncertain. It has a long history in education and is strongly acculturated in the teaching profession.

The complexities that students face in learning to write are matched by the complexities that teachers face in learning to teach writing effectively. None of the teachers in this study had a class in teaching writing as part of their credential program. All of the teachers had experienced professional development focused on writing. Some of that professional development was described as strategies to develop vocabulary or ideas for the presentation of completed writing. The teachers in this study depended on the state standards and curriculum that they gathered from different sources to guide their instruction. Neither the curriculum nor the standards, however, helped them find an inquiry focus or showed them ways to use scales with their students in productive ways.
Despite new research about writing instruction and its impact, teachers are often more familiar with writing prescriptions and instructional practices based on their own experiences as students (Kennedy, 1998). Instead of trying out different aspects of instruction, the teachers incorporated foci that fit into their instructional mode of operation. They selected activities, exercises and assignments that allowed them to direct instruction and the students to follow along easily. The teachers replicated instructional practices that had been successful (in terms of what teaching and learning look like to them) and incorporated what they knew how to teach. When it comes to evaluating writing, surface features (spelling, grammar, indentation) are much less ambiguous than rhetorical effectiveness. One teacher told me that she was not worried about the content, she was more concerned that students were following the guidelines for punctuation and using quotation marks correctly. The teachers want to feel successful and feel that their students are successful. This happens when students follow models correctly and when all students produce a similar product.

Some previous studies (Valdez, 1999; Matsumura, et al., 2002; Needles & Knapp, 1994) and commonsense understanding about teaching suggest that teaching in suburban or more affluent settings is often more innovative and less focused on skills than teaching in urban or less affluent settings with more diverse student populations. This study leads to a different conclusion. Even in a suburban setting, with a large percentage of students who speak and write standard English, have college educated parents, and financial resources to support learning, writing instruction was primarily presentational, had all students produce a similar product, and was focused on form and correctness. Tina did not appear to stand out as different from her colleagues at her school. She mentioned
that some writing assignments she described had come from other fourth grade teachers at her site and that fourth grade teachers frequently spent their common lunch period coming to consensus and working out the details of writing assignments for their classes. Tina’s instructional practices also did not stand out as different from those of Alison or Rebecca, both of whom taught in urban settings in schools that struggled with low test scores and that had diverse and significantly more economically challenged student populations. Robert implemented the most innovative instructional approach, still somewhat presentational in nature, in an urban setting characterized by low test scores and by an economically challenged and diverse student population. While student writing in all four classes reflects students’ varying command of standard English, the instruction appears not to have been the determining factor in the differences.

Teachers recognize the complexities of writing, but in an attempt to tame them, often simplify the tasks for their students. In the cases of these teachers, they spent considerable time and energy helping their students learn to write correctly. The interactions of cultural and technical influences on instruction, as well as the impact of the political dimension, serve to define a narrow and limited view of writing. This view, while played out in the ways writing instruction was implemented in the classroom, at times conflicted with what teachers said they valued about writing.

Conflicts and Contradictions

Defining Writing in Fourth Grade Classrooms

Teachers were asked in interviews how they defined writing in their classrooms. Their responses indicated their awareness that in many ways writing in their classrooms
is not defined by them. Tina defined writing in her classroom as meeting the standards. Rebecca began by blurting out, “state mandates,” and breaking into laughter. Alison seemed confused by the question and ended up describing various writing activities such as brainstorming and creating organizational structures. Robert articulated his definition by saying that writing is communicating thoughts in an organized manner to the point that it is clearly understood by the reader. He went on to say that it is important that writers are capable of using standard English when they are writing.

From these definitions, both Tina and Rebecca make it clear that state requirements, through the standards and testing, define writing for them in their classrooms. Although Robert did not refer to the standards or testing, his words echo those found in the standards, “Students write clear, coherent sentences and paragraphs” (Writing Strategies 1.0), “select a focus, an organizational structure” (Organization and Focus 1.1), “student writing demonstrates a command of standard American English” (Writing Applications 2.0). Alison found that articulating her own definition of writing was an impossible task, falling back instead to describing what happens during writing instruction in her classroom as the definition. None of these teachers apply a definition at odds with the requirements they feel obligated to follow. Rebecca made it clear that she doesn’t define writing in her classroom when she explained that she felt that writing had lost its definition. She said that in order for students to love writing and to own it, they needed to find things they wanted to write about. She did not seem to notice that she did not encourage students to choose topics or write without predetermined structures during writing instruction in her classroom.
Goals for Fourth Grade Student Writers

During interviews, the teachers were also asked what they wanted their students to able to do in terms of their writing when they left fourth grade. Tina answered this question by saying that she wanted her students to be comfortable with their writing and to know that writing is a wonderful skill to have. Rebecca wanted her students to come up with their own ideas and to think independently. Alison wanted her students to like writing. Robert turned back to the standards for part of his answer saying, that he wanted them to know structure, conventions, and the different types of writing. He wanted them to know that there are different types of writing for different situations. But finally, he added, more than anything else he wanted them to be comfortable writing.

The teachers were not explicitly aware of the contradictions between what they wanted for their students as writers and the ways they taught and defined writing in their classrooms. It was not clear what connections teachers saw between having students follow formulas and check their spelling and writing enjoyment and comfort. Rebecca wanted students to think independently and come up with their own ideas, but she provided narrow structures for students to fit their writing into and modeled the “correct” way to do each assigned writing type. Encouragement of ideas and exploration of content did not seem to be part of her teaching. In fact, it was Rebecca who told me that she doesn’t worry about students’ content, she is more concerned about students following the guidelines for language conventions and structure.

Tina wants students to be comfortable with their writing, but it is not clear from talking to her and observing her teaching what makes students comfortable. Does Tina believe that this comfort comes with the structures she provides? How comfortable will
students feel about their writing in settings that do not provide this degree of structure? 
Robert wants his students to be comfortable writing. Even though many fourth grade 
students are not proficient with cursive handwriting, he requires that students do all their 
writing in cursive, even writing not considered “final draft” writing.

All of the teachers expressed frustration with the curricular demands placed on 
them by the state standards and testing as a result of NCLB, with a lack of time, and with 
students who struggle. They knew that not all of their students would achieve the goals 
set for them and they knew that not all of their students were being challenged. Each of 
these teachers spent time after school hours tutoring students, yet still felt that they had 
students they couldn’t help enough. When asked what changes they would make to their 
writing instruction if they didn’t have the pressures of the STAR test, both Alison and 
Rebecca said they wouldn’t change their instruction. They both felt that the district-wide 
curriculum offered them guidance and structure, something they both felt they needed. 
None of the teachers felt that writing was their strongest curricular area of expertise. 
When I asked what made writing hard to teach Alison described the many more elements 
involved in teaching writing than in teaching reading and that she felt a lack of control. 
Rebecca tried to describe the challenges of teaching writing and finally, in a phone call to 
me early the morning after her interview, decided it was because writing is not consistent 
throughout the English-speaking world. She also said that teachers grade and evaluate 
writing differently and language rules change, not staying the same over time. There are 
clearly many factors that impact the decisions that teachers make about writing 
instruction, and some of them are not obvious to the teachers making the decisions and 
others are beyond their control.
What Student Writing Says About Writing Instruction

The student writing collected provided only a glimpse into how students respond to writing instruction and put that instruction into use in their classroom writing assignments. The samples of writing across classrooms encompassed different assignments at varying points in the instruction of a particular writing type and did not, therefore, offer a fair comparison across classrooms. Their most striking feature appears when student writing is compared within a particular assignment within the same classroom. When reading the first paper in a class set I might notice how the student organized the writing, the use of particular words to describe something, or an interesting personal connection. As I continued through the papers, however, I would begin to notice many similarities—down to the particular quotes used to support an idea in the essay or a particular phrase used to describe something. There are individual differences in students’ ability to follow the format, apply conventions, and craft grammatically correct sentences, but essay after essay reveals that students understand that the goal of writing is to follow their teacher’s directions.

The content of the writing is also similar from paper to paper. The emphasis on form limited the focus and development of content. What becomes apparent is that the students learned whatever the teacher told them was important to say in these essays. Students did not express individual points of view or risk saying anything new. Writing, as demonstrated in the student writing samples I collected, is not a tool for thinking, a way of exploring a topic and developing ideas, or a mode of expressing individual ideas or points of view. Writing in these classrooms is a process of following directions,
learning specific organizational formats to convey an agreed upon idea, and practicing
the language conventions enumerated in the standards.
Chapter Seven:
Effective Writing Instruction: Looking Forward

Conclusion

The writing instruction in these four classrooms demonstrates the ways a lack of pedagogical knowledge about teaching writing combines with the pressures and constraints of high stakes accountability to redefine writing as a set of skills to be memorized and acted on routinely rather than as a complex process with multiple purposes and a variety of potential audiences. Instructional practices are determined, not by the needs and abilities of students, but by teachers’ perceptions of what writing should look like based on their own experiences as students, their view of the role of the teacher in the classroom, what they understand about writing outcomes in terms of accountability to local, state and federal entities, and what they have heard or been told about student writing at their grade level.

In light of these practices it is not surprising that student writing remains a concern as students progress through school, into postsecondary education and/or into the workforce. Students who learn that writing is an exercise to be completed without regard to meaning, purpose, or audience have not learned to write with clarity and to develop ideas or pay attention to the necessity of making adjustments in the writing to meet the varying demands of writing beyond the K-12 classroom. They have come to see writing as something that teachers in schools assign, tell them the rules to follow, and then evaluate to decide if the rules have been followed adequately. Attention to the
development of ideas, to using writing as a way to think through concepts and problems, or as a way of expressing thoughts, feelings, and points of view has not been a part of their experience with writing instruction in school.

Instructional decisions are not made in isolation or singularly based on a particular curricular program or a straightforward reading of state standards. Decisions are influenced in multiple and frequently competing ways. Political factors, including the pressure to account for the quality and proficiency of student writing using a single measurement comprised of a general prompt for an unknown audience, push teachers to focus on form and surface features rather than the development of content or attention to the needs of various audiences. Technical factors, including curriculum that either excludes writing in favor of reading or takes writing as a series of ordered steps without regard to content, tell teachers that sophistication of language and rich content are not the focus of writing instruction for students. Cultural factors, including long-held images of what classrooms “look” like and what teachers and students do in those classrooms, imply that teachers need to appear to be in control of orderly classrooms with all students engaged in the same task at the same time. The convergence of political, technical, and cultural factors impacts the decisions that teachers make about writing instruction. Writing instruction, like writing itself, is complex. It will take a multi-faceted approach to change in order to impact instruction in ways that support the development of rich and sophisticated writing from students.

The teachers in this study illustrate the impact of the convergence of political, cultural, and technical influences on instructional decisions. State and Federal mandates related to the No Child Left Behind Act have served to restrict both the time devoted to
writing and writing instruction in fourth grade classrooms and the scope of the writing undertaken in these classrooms. Writing instruction was focused primarily on structure and surface features in only a few writing types, creating a narrow definition of writing. Worries about the correctness of student writing overrode attention to the content or purpose of the writing. Additional pressures related to teacher knowledge about writing and writing instruction combined with beliefs and experiences related to what teachers in classrooms should do and what teaching and learning should look like further confined writing instruction and the writing that students did in their classrooms. The idea that teachers should deliver instruction directly and respond to and correct everything that students write meant that time to consider the needs of individual writers was limited. Curricular materials and school schedules also contributed to narrow definitions of writing with a focus on worksheet driven and formulaic writing instruction and time constraints that limited students’ access to regular and sustained opportunities to write. The mismatch between what constitutes effective writing for adults and outside of school and what children are taught in school is enormous.

I do not claim that these four teachers represent writing instruction in all fourth grade classrooms. However, based on these teachers, conversations with teachers in schools from all over the United States, observations of student writing resulting from classroom assignments, wide reading in the field of writing and writing instruction, and experiences with professional development both in writing and with elementary teachers in general, these teachers are not a rare few. These classrooms offer a glimpse into writing instruction in fourth grade classrooms and help us see the pressures and influences that underlie the teaching of writing.
Implications

Knowing that problems exist and fixing those problems are very different issues. Problems in education do not come with easy solutions. Just as the influences on instructional decisions are many-faceted, solutions must also be many-faceted. Two areas that have tremendous influence over the instructional decisions that teachers make are those dealing with educational policy and those concerning the availability and quality of professional development.

Policy

The idea and intent behind legislation like the No Child Left Behind Act is to ensure that all students have access to rigorous academic preparation and achieve at acceptable levels (as defined by individual states). Unfortunately when translated into practice where high stakes testing and accountability systems apply punishment for not measuring up, instruction narrows to be defined by what testing measures ask for. While tests might focus attention on student writing and writing instruction, the way they are constructed and implemented determines the focus of instruction in the classroom. The fourth grade writing test does have teachers paying attention to writing instruction, but that instruction is geared toward test preparation without acknowledging the many other aspects of writing and writing instruction. Instead of supporting students as they explore language and structures for communicating to a variety of audiences, worries about test results push students to be taught to follow directions as they write to prompts and fill in formulas used to demonstrate proficiency at surface levels.
The testing of writing is problematic. Scoring writing, unlike multiple choice tests, is not about a single correct answer. There are many possible ways students can respond and still exhibit their ability to write. Because machine scoring is not possible, a scorer must score each test individually. This kind of scoring is more labor intensive than the scoring of multiple choice tests and requires extensive scorer training for reliable results. In addition, writing effectively takes time and is not best measured in short testing situations that attempt to have all students respond in similar ways to a common prompt constructed to be accessible to all students regardless of background and experiences and also not offend or pry into any student’s private life. This requirement alone almost certainly guarantees that the writing will be perfunctory and uninspired. Students know that they are writing to be tested rather than writing to an authentic audience that cares what they have to say. The writing is then shipped off—to some unknown scorer—never to be seen again. It is not surprising based on this situation that students tend to score at the basic level in writing.

While there are no easy solutions, there are steps at the policy level that can support instructional change. Attention to the variety and types of writing tested would impact the ways writing is defined in classrooms. The current fourth grade writing test in California tests two different writing types newly introduced in fourth grade writing standards—both of which are tightly tied to reading: summary and response to literature. This means that students are expected to demonstrate proficiency in writing types during the same school year that they are introduced. In addition, because these writing types are based on reading, the resulting writing tests not only test writing skills but reading skills as well.
The selection of a single writing type for this test (that was also made public prior to the test and that stayed consistent over time) and making sure that the writing type has been introduced in the state standards at least a year prior to being tested would allow teachers and students some room for exploration and development of the writing type. If the scoring rewarded originality and thoughtful content, then teachers would also focus on those elements during instruction. Most importantly, more than a single essay prepared for a testing situation must measure student writing ability. Writers exhibit different qualities and abilities through their writing depending on what phase of the writing is involved. Testing situations are generally short, high stress composing situations where students call on skills they can employ quickly. This type of situation is not conducive to thoughtful, original prose. Situations that allow students time to think and plan and then compose and revise are more likely to produce a thoughtful and developed product. If teachers knew that this was the writing outcome that would be rewarded, the focus of their teaching would change.

**Professional Development**

Changes at the policy level would change the focus of what constitutes writing in schools but to enact real and lasting change, teachers need opportunities for professional development in the teaching of writing that goes beyond the characteristics of writing types, form, and conventions. None of the teachers in this study reported having coursework specifically focused on the teaching of writing during their pre-service education. That means that much of what they knew about writing instruction came from the way they learned to write as students. While the state of California requires
elementary teaching candidates to pass a test certifying their qualifications to teach reading (the RICA: Reading Instruction Competence Assessment), there is no such requirement for the teaching of writing. Offering a methods course in the teaching of writing by teachers familiar with research on effective writing instruction would give elementary teachers a stronger foundation on which to build their writing instruction.

Beyond the credentialing process, teachers also need ongoing opportunities not only for learning about writing instruction, but also for examining student writing. It is through the examination of student writing that teachers learn about their students’ strengths and weaknesses as writers. Examining, rather than evaluating or grading student writing helps teachers focus on what students are doing rather than on isolated features of writing. This process offers teachers opportunities to concentrate their attention on what students are saying, how they are saying it, and what structures they utilize. This information can then guide instruction, attending to the individual needs of student writers. Examining student writing can also offer teachers the opportunity to reflect on their teaching practice, discerning which aspects of instruction are having a positive impact on student writing and where instruction needs to be modified to meet students’ instructional needs. In addition, teachers also need opportunities to write themselves—not to make “model” writing for their students, but to experience the writing type and explore the possibilities of audience, purpose, and structure. Teachers who write—not pretending to be fourth graders, but as adults—will experience potential barriers and struggles as they write. This information can then be transmitted to students, writer to writer. Most of all, teachers need opportunities for ongoing, in depth, professional development in writing rather than the occasional workshop designed to
help them teach surface features or structures of writing. Ideally, this professional
development is embedded in their regular work rather than tacked onto long teaching
days or filling precious weekend hours. These changes are not miracle cures and will not
improve the teaching of writing overnight. It will take time, effort, and innovation as
well as the integration of changes from political, cultural, and technical spheres of
influence to improve the teaching of writing in schools and classrooms.

**A Dialogue Between Composition Theories and Classroom Practice**

Theory and practice are intricately intertwined (Bruffee, 1986). When theory is
explicit and intentional it can inform and direct the kinds of practices that enact it. When
practices are employed without attention to the theory they enact, unintended outcomes
can result. The theories that underlie writing instruction and the resulting instructional
practices associated with them, whether implicit or explicit, serve to define writing.
Some theories, like the traditional approach, confine writing to mastery of conventional
forms and correct products. The end-point (the completed written product) is the most
important part of writing in this approach. Other theories broaden definitions of writing
to include processes that writers engage in and their context and social interactions
before, during and after the writing. The traditional approach (see chapter two for more
details) to writing instruction assumes that students only need to master rules (of
grammar, forms, and conventions) to write effectively. This approach still predominates
at least in part because of the influences of the political, cultural, and technical pressures
that teachers experience. Teachers without strong backgrounds in composition and
writing instruction feel pressed to have students look like they know how to produce
good writing. This focus on the way writing looks, from form and structure to grammar
and conventions, means that students and their teachers are not attending to the most
critical component of writing—thinking through what the writer has to say and figuring
out how to compose those thoughts into words on a page. While there are students who
are able to write effectively with this traditional approach to writing instruction, they are
likely students who have, in some other setting or classroom, learned how to generate
and develop ideas and then fit them into the set of rules being taught. But it is clear,
through the laments of those in the workplace, the university, and in K-12 settings, that
many students have only mastered the basic elements of writing—which is exactly what
they have been taught. They are not using writing as an analytic tool, developing
arguments, or clearly articulating thoughts and ideas. Instead, they are filling in formulas
and restating what they believe is expected given the definition of writing they have
experienced.

Narrowly defined writing instruction harms students. First, this “schooled” view
of writing excludes those who either aren’t able to master these decontextualized rules or
who do not see any reason to write empty essays as classroom exercises. Students learn
to see writing as a classroom assignment, usually done in isolation, on which teachers
base decisions about whether or not students have learned what was taught. Students
who see writing as classroom assignments completed in perfunctory ways miss the
advantages that writing offers as a way to think through ideas and solve problems. They
aren’t given the opportunities to articulate their point of view and then reread and
challenge their own thinking. They don’t see that writing can be a powerful source of
information for the writer as well as the reader. They are not developing an analytic
stance or learning to warrant the claims they make. Writing, in all its messy complexity, has the potential to support student thinking and learning well beyond summarizing a piece of text, responding to literature, or writing a story. Writing offers ways to sort through the intangibles of thought, capturing ideas to be reworked, organized, and pondered. It offers opportunities for expression, communication, and reflection, even when it doesn’t follow predetermined formats and in spite of errors of spelling and punctuation. Writing is a forum for exploring and playing with language. It is a place to try out new vocabulary and experiment with the ways words affect those who read the writing. Writing’s usefulness begins with the first thought and continues throughout the process involved in composing a text.

It is the final product, though, that frequently serves to exclude. Writing often operates as a gatekeeper to higher education and high-paying jobs. Access to post secondary education frequently requires that students demonstrate proficiency in writing. While students may gain admittance through formulaic writing, students who write in predictable ways or offer text summary as analysis will struggle at the university. In the university setting (which is also where students gain access to most high-paying jobs) students are expected to produce writing that includes original thought and the development of sophisticated ideas. It appears that those students who are successful with writing at this level exercise their cultural capital, often gained through social and economic status and parent education levels, rather than accessing this knowledge solely through school. Others turn to tutorial help available to those who know where to find it and can afford to pay for it to improve the quality of their writing. Most importantly, through instruction that defines writing narrowly, students are learning that what they
have to say does not matter (Rose, 1995, Shaughnessy, 1976). Without the sophisticated used of written language students are silenced. This silencing serves to reinforce the status quo and limits our understanding of what these students have to offer. Our society is poorer without a multiplicity of voices joining together in the democratic ideals on which this country was founded.

With more than 30 years of research on writing and writing instruction from kindergarten through the university, much has been learned about what constitutes effective writing and the conditions that contribute to it. Multiple studies have pointed out the ineffectiveness of formal grammar instruction (Hillocks, 1986, Smith, Cheville, & Hillocks, 2006) and the fact that students who learn the “rules” of writing cannot necessarily apply them effectively in their own texts. Authentic writing situations and opportunities for substantive feedback on content from peers and teachers have proven to support writers. Time spent producing extended text rather than drill in decontextualized exercises also strengthens the development of student writing. Understanding the purposes for writing and writing for audiences beyond the teacher can contribute to more developed writing from students. There is not a single right way to teach writing, but confining writing instruction to narrowly defined parameters cripples writers. Students learn that they are not good at writing and go to great lengths to avoid the frustrations they experience with writing.

While there are multiple theories at work in composition, many of those theories are not enacted in instructional practice. A fragmented assortment of pieces from different theories can be uncovered in approaches to teaching writing in K-12 settings. Examples of isolated worksheet activities can be found interwoven in lessons that appear
to be focused on a workshop approach to composition. A single model representing a particular writing type stands alongside directions that call students to consider potential audiences and purposes without acknowledging the apparent contradictions. The underlying theories are not acknowledged or made explicit or contrasted with competing theories. Instead they are implicit and piecemeal as though any part of one theory can interact with a piece of another without compromising the resulting teaching and learning. Teachers who do not have an understanding of the assumptions and premises of the theoretical underpinnings of the activities they select are often unaware of the ways these choices construct their instruction and the ways students understand writing.

It is time academics and practitioners to come together to explore, debate, and construct theories of composition in ways that support the development of thoughtful and sophisticated writing. Teachers, particularly in K-12 settings, make decisions about writing instruction without knowing or understanding the current theories being put forth and debated about writing. They are dependent on many uninformed sources that pull together activities and exercises without regard to the theory that defines them or the writing that is produced. Additionally, because K-12 practitioners are not contributing to the development of theories about writing instruction, theories are constructed mostly based on adult learners in university classrooms without considering the role that the theory may play with young students in elementary and secondary classrooms. Too often writing instruction for children is based on assumptions about what adults perceive that students are not able to do rather than considering variations in what analysis and thoughtfulness looks like as it develops in children’s writing. Focusing instruction on simplistic constructions restricts younger students’ chances to develop their writing. It
also wastes opportunities for learning, beginning as early as kindergarten. These opportunities could result in the development of writing as students continue to refine and expand their writing abilities as they progress from grade to grade. Teachers who teach students of all ages and their instructional practices need to inform the ideas put forth by composition theorists. In turn the theories needs to inform the practical implementation by teachers. It is the integration of theory and practice that will result in instructional practices that define writing in ways that help students compose thoughtful, well-developed and sophisticated writing. The field of composition needs to include the voices of students of all ages and teachers who teach those students. It is simply too late to wait until students arrive at high school or college to begin to expect thoughtful, well-developed writing. The complexities of writing are the very qualities that make writing a powerful resource in learning, one that is tremendously underutilized in schools today.
## Appendix A: Survey

### Survey: Elementary Writing Instruction

#### Background information

1. Total number of years teaching
   - 0-5
   - 6-10
   - 11-15
   - 16-20
   - More than 20

2. Type of credential held
   - Emergency
   - Preliminary
   - Multiple Subject Clear
   - Single subject: ____________________
   - Clad

3. Highest degree held
   - BA or BS
   - MA or MS
   - EdD
   - PhD

4. Do you speak a language in addition to English? Yes ___ No ___ If yes, what language(s): ________________________________

5. Current grade level
   ________________________________

6. Grade levels taught
   ________________________________

7. School name
   ________________________________

8. District name
   ________________________________

9. Supplementary Authorizations (please specify)
   ________________________________

10. Major emphasis of study
    ________________________________

11. Have you participated in professional development in the area of writing? ________________________________

All survey data will remain anonymous. If you are willing to consider participation in the interview and/or observation phases of the study, please provide contact information below.

Name: ________________________________

Phone: ________________________________

Address: ________________________________

Email: ________________________________
Elementary Writing Instruction

12. What types of writing do children do in your classroom?

13. What types of writing behaviors do your fourth grade students typically exhibit? Can these behaviors be generalized or are they specific to individuals?

14. What types of writing instruction do you provide students? Does this vary for individuals?

15. What resources do you draw on to teach writing?

16. What do teachers need to know to teach writing?

17. What is your role in teaching writing? Please explain.

18. Teachers need to write in order to teach writing.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree
   Please explain your answer.

19. Students need opportunities to share their writing with others.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree
   Please explain your answer.

20. Has your writing instruction changed in the last three years?
   - Significantly
   - Somewhat
   - Minimal
   - Not at all
   Please explain your answer.

21. In your classroom how much time do students write every day?
   - More than 2 hours
   - 1.5-2 hours
   - 1-1.5 hours
   - .5-1 hour
   - less than .5 hour

22. How long do you typically allow from the beginning to the end of a writing product?
   - Two or more weeks
   - 1-2 weeks
   - about a week
   - less than a week
   - one writing period
   Does the length of time vary from assignment to assignment? Please explain.

23. Is there anything else you would like me to know about writing instruction in your classroom?
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview Question Guide

Part I: Questions will be concentrated on the teachers’ experience with writing.

- How did you learn to write?
  1. How old were you?
  2. What was hard for you?
  3. What was easy for you?
  4. What kind of writing did you do as a child/student?
- What was writing instruction like for you in school—especially at the elementary level?
  1. Do you remember writing at any particular grade level more than others?
- What did you learn about teaching writing in your credential program?
  1. Do you use any of what you learned in your instruction today?
- Describe your professional development experiences in the area of writing—what have you applied to your teaching based on those experiences?
  1. Which experiences were most useful?
  2. Least useful?
  3. What do you use in your day-to-day teaching?
- How would you describe yourself as a writer?
Interview Question Guide

Part II: Questions focused on teacher’s classroom experience

- What do you want students to be able to do as writers when they leave your class?
- How do you define writing in the classroom?
- What are your greatest struggles with teaching writing?
- What are your greatest successes with teaching writing?
- What adaptations do you make for students differing abilities?
- What impact has the STAR writing assessment had on writing instruction in your classroom?

Part III: Questions focused on the lesson observed

- What do you call this lesson?
- What do you want your students to learn from this lesson?
- How does the lesson I observed fit into other lessons you teach in writing?
- Why did you decide to teach this particular lesson?
- What worked in this lesson?
- What was the least effective part of this lesson?
- What did you notice about students during the lesson?
- What will you do next?
- How do you decide what to include in writing lessons?
- What other kinds of writing lessons will you provide?
### Grade Four

English-Language Arts Content Standards.

### Writing

#### 1.0 Writing Strategies

Students write clear, coherent sentences and paragraphs that develop a central idea. Their writing shows they consider the audience and purpose. Students progress through the stages of the writing process (e.g., prewriting, drafting, revising, editing successive versions).

#### Organization and Focus

1.1 Select a focus, an organizational structure, and a point of view based upon purpose, audience, length, and format requirements.

1.2 Create multiple-paragraph compositions:
   - a  Provide an introductory paragraph.
   - b  Establish and support a central idea with a topic sentence at or near the beginning of the first paragraph.
   - c  Include supporting paragraphs with simple facts, details, and explanations.
   - d  Conclude with a paragraph that summarizes the points.
   - e  Use correct indentation.

1.3 Use traditional structures for conveying information (e.g., chronological order, cause and effect, similarity and difference, posing and answering a question).

#### Penmanship

1.4 Write fluidly and legibly in cursive or joined italic.

#### Research and Technology

1.5 Quote or paraphrase information sources, citing them appropriately.
1.6 Locate information in reference texts by using organizational features (e.g., prefaces, appendices).
1.7 Use various reference materials (e.g., dictionary, thesaurus, card catalog, encyclopedia, online information) as an aid to writing.
1.8 Understand the organization of almanacs, newspapers, and periodicals and how to use those print materials.
1.9 Demonstrate basic keyboarding skills and familiarity with computer terminology (e.g., cursor, software, memory, disk drive, hard drive).

#### Evaluation and Revision
1.10 Edit and revise selected drafts to improve coherence and progression by adding, deleting, consolidating, and rearranging text.

2.0 Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics)

Students write compositions that describe and explain familiar objects, events, and experiences. Student writing demonstrates a command of standard American English and the drafting, research, and organizational strategies outlined in Writing Standard 1.0.

Using the writing strategies of grade four outlined in Writing Standard 1.0, students:

2.1 Write narratives:
   a. Relate ideas, observations, or recollections of an event or experience.
   b. Provide a context to enable the reader to imagine the world of the event or experience.
   c. Use concrete sensory details.
   d. Provide insight into why the selected event or experience is memorable.

2.2 Write responses to literature:
   a. Demonstrate an understanding of the literary work.
   b. Support judgments through references to both the text and prior knowledge.

2.3 Write information reports:
   a. Frame a central question about an issue or situation.
   b. Include facts and details for focus.
   c. Draw from more than one source of information (e.g., speakers, books, newspapers, other media sources).

2.4 Write summaries that contain the main ideas of the reading selection and the most significant details.

Written and Oral English Language Conventions

The standards for written and oral English language conventions have been placed between those for writing and for listening and speaking because these conventions are essential to both sets of skills.

1.0 Written and Oral English Language Conventions

Students write and speak with a command of standard English conventions appropriate to this grade level.

Sentence Structure
1.1 Use simple and compound sentences in writing and speaking.
1.2 Combine short, related sentences with appositives, participial phrases,
adjectives, ad-verbs, and prepositional phrases.

**Grammar**
1.3 Identify and use regular and irregular verbs, adverbs, prepositions, and coordinating conjunctions in writing and speaking.

**Punctuation**
1.4 Use parentheses, commas in direct quotations, and apostrophes in the possessive case of nouns and in contractions.
1.5 Use underlining, quotation marks, or italics to identify titles of documents.

**Capitalization**
1.6 Capitalize names of magazines, newspapers, works of art, musical compositions, organizations, and the first word in quotations when appropriate.

**Spelling**
1.7 Spell correctly roots, inflections, suffixes and prefixes, and syllable constructions.
Appendix D: STAR Writing Prompt

Grade Four Narrative Writing Task: Administered on March 1 and 2, 2005

Narrative Writing Task

Directions:
- In this writing test, you will respond to the writing task on the following page.
- You will have time to plan, write, and proofread.
- Only what you write on the lined pages in this booklet will be scored.
- Use only a No. 2 pencil to write your narrative.

Scoring:
Your writing will be scored on how well you
- include a beginning, a middle, and an end
- use details
- use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization

Read the following writing task. You must write a narrative about this topic.

Writing a Narrative

Imagine that you are able to spend a day with anyone you want. Write a story about what happens during that day.

When you write about this experience, remember
- to include a beginning, a middle, and an end;
- to use details to describe the experience; and
- to use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.
Summary of an Article Writing Task

Directions:
- Read the information article on the following page.
- As you read, you may mark the article or make notes. Marks and notes will not be scored.
- After reading the article, write a summary of what you have read. You will have time to read, plan, write, and proofread.
- You may reread or go back to the article at any time during the test.
- Only what you write on the lined pages in this booklet will be scored.

Scoring:
Your writing will be scored on how well you:
- state the main ideas of the article;
- identify the most important details that support the main ideas;
- use your own words in writing the summary; and
- use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

Kiting

Most kites today are made of plastic or paper, but in China as many as three thousand years ago, kites were made of bamboo and silk. Over time, kites became popular in other places, including the United States, Europe, and Australia, for scientific studies, transportation, and entertainment.

Americans have used kites to conduct scientific experiments. Benjamin Franklin, a famous scientist, inventor, and founding father of our country, used a kite to find out more about lightning. His scientific experiment, on a stormy day in June of 1752, led to the development of many terms we use today when we speak of electricity. As a result of Franklin’s work on electricity, others were able to add to what he had discovered. Michael Faraday built the electric motor, and Thomas Edison invented the light bulb, the phonograph, and a small box for viewing moving films. None of these inventions would have been possible without Franklin’s discovery.

Kites were also used to study the atmosphere during the 18th century. In the 1790’s, box kites, with scientific instruments bound to them, were sent high into the sky. There, they were able to measure wind speed, temperature, atmospheric pressure, and the moisture in the air.

Alexander Graham Bell, an American scientist and inventor, wanted to fly. He was convinced that kites could be used to carry people. In 1907, he actually built kites
that were big enough to lift human beings into the air. His work eventually led to the development of gear that made flight safer, speedier, and easier to control.

Kites have always been used for entertainment. Many people simply enjoy flying their colorful kites. In Japan, however, Mr. Katsutaka Murooka sends his kites, complete with digital video cameras, to take photos from 90 to 120 feet up in the sky. These photos are displayed in a small, dome-shaped building that serves as the Miniature Portable Museum of Wind Energy, the smallest museum devoted to kiting. Using this method of photography, Mr. Murooka has been able to take safe and inexpensive photos of many different things, including volcanoes, the ocean, and sporting events.

Today, people enjoy power kiting, that is, being transported by kites as they take part in outdoor activities such as kite sailing, kite buggying, and kite jumping. In kite sailing, kites are stacked and used to sail on water, making travel speedy and smooth. Kite buggying, one of the most popular forms of power kiting, is done by stacking kites and using them to pull a small go-cart across places such as beaches, pavement, or dry lake beds. Buggying is safe and easy to learn. In kite jumping, a pilot lifts himself off the ground for a short period of time. As with any sport, training and safety are important.

Over the years, kite flying has resulted in great scientific discoveries. Kites have also provided us with outdoor fun and entertainment. The next time you see a kite flying, remember just how valuable they have been in the past and how important they are today.

Writing the Summary:
Write a summary of the article. Use the following lined pages.

Remember that your writing will be scored on how well you:
- state the main ideas of the article;
- identify the most important details that support the main ideas;
- use your own words in writing the summary; and
- use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.
Appendix E: STAR Writing Scoring Rubric

2006 Grade Four Scoring Rubric

4—The writing:
  • Clearly address all of the writing task.
  • Demonstrates a clear understanding of purpose.
  • Maintains a consistent point of view, focus, and organizational structure, including paragraphing when appropriate.
  • Includes a clearly presented central idea with relevant facts, details, and/or explanations.
  • Includes sentence variety.
  • Contains few, if any, errors in the conventions of the English language (grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling). These errors do not interfere with the reader’s understanding of the writing.

Narrative Writing:
  • Provides a thoroughly developed sequence of significant events to relate ideas, observations, and/or memories.
  • Includes vivid descriptive language and sensory details that enable the reader to imagine the events or experiences.

Summary Writing:
  • Summarizes text with clear identification of the main ideas and the most significant details, in student’s own words.

Response to literature Writing:
  • Demonstrates a clear understanding of the literary work.
  • Provides effective support for judgments through specific references to text and/or prior knowledge.

3—The writing:
  • Addresses most of the writing task.
  • Demonstrates a general understanding of purpose.
  • Maintains a mostly consistent point of view, focus, and organizational structure, including paragraphing when appropriate.
  • Presents a central idea with mostly relevant facts, details and/or explanations.
  • Includes some sentence variety.
  • Contains some errors in the conventions of the English language (grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling). These errors do not interfere with the reader’s understanding of the writing.

Narrative Writing:
  • Provides an adequately developed sequence of significant events to relate ideas, observations, and/or memories.
  • Includes some descriptive language and sensory details that enable the reader to imagine the events or experiences.

Summary Writing:
  • Summarizes text with the main ideas and important details, generally in the student’s own words.

Response to literature Writing:
  • Demonstrates an understanding of the literary work.
  • Provides some support for judgments through references to text and/or prior knowledge.
Appendix F: Instructional Modes

Instructional Modes (Hillocks, 1986)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presentational</th>
<th>Natural Process</th>
<th>Environmental</th>
<th>Individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Relatively clear and specific objectives</td>
<td>• Generalized objectives</td>
<td>• Clear and specific objectives</td>
<td>• Students receive instruction through tutorials, programme d material of some kind, or a combinatio n of the two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lecture and teacher-led discussion dealing with concepts to be learned and applied</td>
<td>• Free writing about whatever interests the students, either as a journal or as a way of exploring a subject</td>
<td>• Materials and problems selected to engage students with each other in specifiable processes important to some particular aspect of writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The study of models and other materials which explain and illustrate the concept</td>
<td>• Writing for audiences of peers</td>
<td>• Generally positive feedback from peers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Specific assignments or exercised which generally involve imitating a pattern or following rules that have been previously discussed</td>
<td>• Generally positive feedback from peers</td>
<td>• Opportunities to revise and rework writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Feedback following the writing, coming primarily from teachers</td>
<td>• High levels of interaction among students</td>
<td>• Activities, such as small-group problem-centered discussions, conducive to high levels of peer interaction concerning specific tasks</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G: Focus of Instruction

**Instructional Focus (Hillocks, 1986)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Grammar and Mechanics</strong>—traditional school grammar such as identifying a noun as the name of a person, place or thing that usually includes identifying several (usually eight) parts of speech, their functions in sentences, certain types of phrases or clauses, three kinds of sentences (simple, compound, and complex), etc. Mechanics refer to correctness, which includes the use of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sentence Combining</strong>—concern with developing the length and complexity (also described as maturity) of students’ sentences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Models</strong>—usually means examining “models of excellence” in order to recognize them and imitate their features.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scales</strong>—involving students in the use of criteria (which must be manifest in some concrete form, not only in the mind of the teacher) which they apply to their own writing, to their peers’ writing, or to writing supplied by the teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Free Writing</strong>—asking students to write about whatever they are interested in, topics are not prescribed and the writing is not usually graded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inquiry</strong>—when students are presented with or must find data that they must then develop skills or strategies for dealing with the data in order to say or write something about it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


National Commission on Writing (2004). Writing: A ticket to work…or a ticket out. College Entrance Examination Board.


