

NEGOTIATING WRITING INSTRUCTION IN A TESTING CLIMATE : A CASE
STUDY OF A NOVICE TEACHER

by

Ronessa D. McDonald, B.A.

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Committee Members:

Rebecca L. Jackson, Chair

Eric W. Leake

Nancy A. Wilson

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to all the students I taught in my twenty-four years in the classroom. May each of you have learned something about writing that you have taken with you into your academic and professional lives.

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I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

At 22 years old, I stand in front of a class of Seniors in high school. They look like me and my friends, so I try hard to be the adult, talk to them in a stern voice and explain that we'll be reading the standard Senior English fare – *Beowulf* and *The Canterbury Tales* and *Hamlet* and "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." They look bored. They sit in rows in alphabetical order and chit chat with each other, friends since middle school. Louis, an eighteen-year-old who looks like a grown man with five-o'clock shadow, says that he'd rather read *Playboy*. The others think that's hilarious, but I ignore it and go on that we'll be analyzing each piece, writing about conflict and characterization and theme. I'm faking it and think that I'm a fraud, wonder how I have ended up talking about literature and writing to a bunch of eighteen-year-olds who are now talking about the merits of the fiction in *Playboy*. They're using the affected language of literary critics, discussing style and form and meaning. They provide no details so I know they haven't actually *read* any of the fiction, but they know the language of literary discourse so I'm excited, thinking about all the great discussions we'll have this year, discussions about great British literature and their written response to it.

Eventually the bell rings, ending that first class period. As everyone scrambles to pack up notebooks and pens, I remind them to start working on their "Who Am I" essays, due at the end of the week. Judging by their silence as they file out of class, they don't care if I know who they are. They do care about graduating, though, and Senior English is a required course, so they do what I ask. I assign reading tasks and writing tasks, never thinking much about what they know and don't know or what they need to learn. By January we have settled into a routine. On Monday, I hand out a vocabulary list and assign a reading to go along with it. On Tuesday, we discuss the reading, which actually involves me telling

the students what I think the reading means and them agreeing with me. Most of the time. Louis, the School Board member's son, makes it a point to disagree with me when it's something he really cares about. He doesn't see the "Wife of Bath's Tale" as an early piece of feminist literature as I do. This opposition causes some tension in the classroom. I'm the teacher but Louis is popular, and since this is high school, popularity wins. I don't engage the students in any kind of critical thinking, just allow Louis to provide his commentary and ignore the fact that the rest of the class aligns their thinking with his. I have forgotten about their first-day discussion of style, form, and meaning and don't harness that knowledge or energy in any serious way. I don't know to do those things, haven't learned them in any classes and am not introspective enough yet to reflect on what works and what doesn't. Instead, I simply concede Louis's points to keep the peace. By Wednesday we move on to writing a literature response, typically five paragraphs regurgitating what I had said on Tuesday. Louis is the only one who writes anything original and I write comments on his paper like, "Interesting thought" or "Evidence??" I don't want to challenge him too much and risk the wrath of his father the School Board member, though, so he usually gets an A on his writing. Thursday is catch-up day to take care of anyone who has been absent during the week and Friday is vocab test day. Nice, neat, linear. Week after week.

My classroom's walls include the requisite motivational posters alongside those offering writing advice like the one that admonishes students to "never use the passive voice" or "never use contractions in writing." I don't question the advice just like I don't question Louis or anyone else in class. I'm 22 years old and I don't know anything about formative assessment, about standards, or about composition pedagogy. And I don't realize that I'm *assigning* reading and writing but I'm definitely not *teaching* reading and writing.

My undergraduate English courses prepared me to read literature and expected me to write essays, but certainly didn't prepare me to *teach* anything, especially not writing. In fact, I had no writing courses in my undergraduate English program because, like many students with even a modicum of writing ability, I tested out of First Year Writing (what we called Freshman Composition back then).

It seems logical that in order to be a middle or high school English teacher, you should have to take some courses in writing pedagogy. But you didn't. Even today, while some pedagogy courses are required, they typically deal with reading rather than writing. In the school district where I work as an English Language Arts Curriculum Coordinator and in neighboring districts, over half of the English Language Arts teachers in grades 6 through 12 took only one or two courses in writing pedagogy, and a fourth of them, like me, *never* had a course in how to teach composition.¹ Yet they must teach writing and in Texas, like in most states, their students must pass some kind of high-stakes writing test.

Back in 1972 Donald Murray implored the field of composition to teach writing as a process rather than a product. 1972. Yet here it is, 2017, and the teachers I see, well-meaning and hardworking, focus more intently on product than anything else. They definitely *talk* about process, giving their students the seven steps, or the five steps, or the eleven steps, whatever they've deemed the appropriate number. But, like me in that first year, they don't encourage thinking, trying on new ideas and casting off those that don't work, or grappling with form or genre. They don't give students the time to generate ideas or encourage them to share their writing or seek feedback from real audiences. They don't show students the power of revision after carefully considering purpose and they certainly don't discuss the recursive nature of writing and revision. Instead, they use the words of process but value

¹ These statistics come from an online survey I conducted of secondary English Language Arts teachers in area school districts.

product. I'm not surprised this is the case. Cultural lag is notoriously common in education, so it's *not* shocking that middle and high school English teachers are still clinging to what has become known as the "Current-traditional model" of teaching and its emphasis on correctness. A year before Murray gave his talk on process, Janet Emig published her seminal study, "The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders" in which she concluded that the processes actual students used is almost nothing like the structured and linear process lined out in composition books. In 1971, Emig illuminated the contradictions between what we were teaching as process and what actual writers do. Yet, 46 years later – almost half a century! – middle and high school English teachers still instruct students to follow a prescribed, inflexible set of steps in order to compose a written text.

In 1986, about fifteen years after Murray and Emig began what would become known as the "process movement," I sat in my own senior English class taught by Rose McDermott, one of those venerable institutions of the high school. In class, she was Mrs. McDermott, but outside of school we seniors called her Rose, a mononym that, in a paradoxical way, conveyed respect. We did anything and everything Rose asked, without question. And what she asked was for an outline with every essay, five and no more than five paragraphs, and a thesis statement conspicuously placed at the end of the first. So what if we didn't have three examples to serve as body paragraphs? Just repeat what had already been said. So what if our reasoning wasn't sound? It didn't matter as long as we followed the formula. Process? Definitely prescribed: create an outline, write a draft, trade papers with a classmate who would circle any misspelled words or comma splices, make corrections, and rewrite. The end product looked almost exactly like the first draft, save for a couple of words. So four years later, as I stood in front of that Senior class and told them all that we would be reading the classics of British lit and dutifully writing about them – in five

paragraphs no doubt – with no writing classes in between, who could blame me for not knowing about process versus product?

In March of 1991, as I lug home stacks of five-paragraph essays over the Romantic poets, I think about how much of my Spring Break will be devoted to grading those essays. It's depressing, not only because it's my first Spring Break after college and I'm going to be stuck working, but also because I know that on my students' papers I'm making the same comments over and over and yet my students' writing is not improving. Louis is still challenging my literary interpretations (how I wish I could go back and say, "Yes! Let's talk about the literature! Your ideas intrigue me and now let's hear from everyone else, too!"), but he is also still lacking evidence for his assertions. The students who didn't develop their ideas in August still don't, and those who have disconnected ideas with no progression still do not make any effort to connect their thinking from one sentence to another. I make a mental note to talk to my department chair about what I'm doing wrong.

My department chair, a veteran English teacher and fantastic writing teacher, suggests I enroll in the New Jersey Writing Project's Summer Institute. I don't know much about NJWP, but I learn that the summer institute takes up six weeks of precious time off, so I decide against it. I'm young, just one year out of college and newly married, and I don't want to spend my summer in a writing institute. I do, however, want to improve, so instead of NJWP, I start researching. The nearest Half-Price Books is in a renovated house with worn hardwood floors that creak with every step. Like all bibliophiles, I could lose time in here so I focus on my task: writing instruction. The choices are sparse, mostly books on publishing advice, but there is a small section that seems to offer what I need and I choose three books: *Inside Out* by Kirby, Liner, and Vinz; *Beat Not the Poor Desk* by Ponsot and Deen; and *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers* by Erika Lindemann. All three titles still sit on my

bookshelf, remembrances of that summer when I decide that if I want to see progress in my students – progress they deserve and that I owe them– then I would have to teach myself. My undergraduate courses hadn't prepared me, but I want to know my craft. I want the Louis's in my classroom to do more than argue with me, I want them to actually *learn* something. I don't kid myself—I know I am no Jaime Escalante in *Stand and Deliver* and I don't expect my students to address me as “O Captain, My Captain” like they do in *Dead Poets Society*, but I do want them to respect me and my knowledge. So, I spend those long summer days planning for a more purposeful school year.

From the books I bought I learn that Kenneth Burke argues that all people are influenced by rhetoric, persuaded by how people use language to shape attitudes. I learn that James Kinneavy delineates separate aims for writing. From Erika Lindemann I learn that we must not be “trapped by tradition,” but that “we must understand the changing purposes people have for using language so that we can teach intelligently the arts of rhetoric our culture now practices”(55). I want to teach intelligently so I fervently annotate the books, grapple with the material, and digest all the guidance I can. I study these three books more intently than any I ever did in college, and I know now that's because I cared deeply about the outcome. I wish I could say I realized then that when someone has an ardent interest in a subject then she will work much harder at it. It seems so obvious, but like most learning, it's only obvious after the fact and that summer, when I was barely older than my students, I could only process one little chunk of new learning at a time.

I also wish I could say that when school started in the Fall, I was a changed teacher who suddenly understood the connection between reading and writing and recognized that there is more than one writing process and that it – writing process – isn't neat and linear. That students need models to show them the complexities of text structures or that they

need invention strategies to help them get started. I wish I could say I understood the value of imitation exercises to teach how sentence parts work, or especially the power of community in a writing class, so that sharing and workshopping is safe and therefore productive. I wish I could say all these things, but I can't. My understanding happened slowly, over the years, one set of students at a time.

Because I was dedicated to teaching and truly loved what I did for a living, I heeded my research and began experimenting. I started writing all the papers I assigned my students, and in that way, paid close attention to my own writing process. As I wrote with them, the writing community in my classroom strengthened; as students saw how I struggled, they too felt free to take more risks. As we read published essays, we tried our own hands at copying the structure, and then eventually at combining several structures. As my own writing improved, my students' writing improved. Their sentences now progressed more fluidly from one idea to another, they used a variety of syntax structures purposefully and strategically, and most importantly, they thought about their ideas before they began writing and reflected on their writing process after they had finished.

Eventually I was able to structure my classes to scaffold writing instruction from the beginning of the school year. No more simply assigning writing, scheduling a peer edit day, and expecting a polished draft a few days later. Instead, I carefully chose readings that would serve as strong models and we worked together to generate ideas in response to the readings. Peer edit days became very guided, with me asking pointed questions about the ideas and structure of the essays. Conventions and mechanics became secondary, with me giving grammar mini-lessons only when I noticed the need for them. My feedback was specific and direct, responding to the strength of their development and evidence. Most importantly, I made sure students debriefed their writing, not only on the day they turned in

a piece (answering a series of questions, one of which was always, “What did you learn about writing from doing this assignment?”) but also on the day I handed back their papers (so they could reflect on my comments). I would later read the works of David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky, George Hillocks, Jr., and Kathy Yancy to better understand what I was learning intuitively.

As I think about that time early in my career, I question why I had to figure all those things out on my own. My undergraduate courses did not provide any composition pedagogy (and certainly no composition theory) and neither my school nor district provided any professional development to help me with the demands of teaching writing.

Now, over twenty-five years after I first stood in front of that Senior class, I am an English Language Arts Curriculum Coordinator for a fast-growing school district. I work closely with middle and high school English teachers and it is evident that teacher-preparation programs still lack courses dedicated to writing pedagogy. I see this in my day-to-day work with teachers, especially new teachers, who are trying to negotiate many demands as they enter the profession: managing student behavior, learning new curriculum, navigating technology, communicating with parents, and facing the pressure of high-stakes testing. Because they are under-prepared to teach writing and have little time to learn, they often turn to mechanistic instruction largely focused on grammar and conventions, probably because those elements of writing are more easily quantified and therefore more easily taught than recursive writing practices.

As Curriculum Coordinator, one of my responsibilities is to create and provide professional development that fulfills a clear need in my district. I know the need for writing pedagogy exists because I see it in my classroom observations and in my district’s writing score data. Most veteran teachers eventually learn, through research and experimentation like

I did, what works in writing instruction. But the intervening years between the time a teacher is considered a novice and a veteran mean hundreds of students have suffered mediocre (at best) writing pedagogy. Given the astonishing teacher turnover rate, many novice teachers never turn into veteran teachers, potentially multiplying the number of students who lack a strong and effective writing teacher.² So my interest, both as someone who is passionate about teaching English and also whose job it is to help new teachers, lies in figuring out how novice secondary English Language Arts teachers go about teaching writing – what theory or theories are they operating from? What are their backgrounds and experiences in pedagogy and in learning to write themselves? How are they implementing their (limited) knowledge in their classrooms? Ultimately, how do they come to know themselves as writing teachers? By knowing the answers to these questions—or least knowing some answers—school districts like mine can plan appropriate professional development, learning that can have a profound impact on the teachers themselves and by extension, on countless middle and high school students. In seeking to learn about new teachers’ experiences, I use a case study approach to focus specifically on these research questions:

- How does a novice teacher approach writing instruction in the secondary English Language Arts classroom?
- How do the contexts in which she teaches influence her pedagogy?
- What resources does she draw upon to negotiate the demands of writing instruction and writing assessment?
- What roles can and should school districts play in order to help with those demands?

² According to the “Public School Teacher Attrition and Mobility in the First Five Years” study, by Gray and Taie, 17% of teachers leave the profession in the first five years.

- What are the implications of this case study for writing theory and pedagogy, as well as future research?

These questions have important implications for school districts. In Texas particularly but increasingly in the rest of the country as a result of the Common Core State Standards, secondary English teachers must prepare their students for high-stakes writing tests. In Texas, these tests are given in the fourth, seventh, ninth, and tenth grades. The scores on these tests become part of a larger state accountability system that has an enormous bearing on school district ratings. These ratings impact the real estate market, funding, and reputation of the district, which then can attract or deter the best teacher candidates. Though many people (myself included) disagree with the current emphasis on high-stakes standardized tests, we cannot ignore their impact. My ultimate goal, then, is to know how to help teachers, particularly those in my school district, effectively teach writing in this kind of environment.

Overall Approach

In order to investigate these questions, I have focused on one particular novice teacher during her first year and a half of teaching. Because she works in the school district for which I am the district curriculum coordinator, I have had to be especially cognizant of the power dynamic between the two of us. From the outset, I tried to make sure that she understood my role as researcher did not conflict with my role as colleague. Even though I am neither her supervisor nor her official evaluator, I am a representative of the institution for which she works (not to mention several years older than she is), so early on I adopted Thomas Newkirk's notion of "default positions" in empirical research as outlined in his article "Seduction and Betrayal in Qualitative Research." These positions include the

agreement to raise issues when they occur; the opportunity for the teacher to respond to the interpretation of problem situations; and the responsibility to intervene when teaching practices seem ineffective (13-14). As I will outline in the Chapter III, Methodology and Data Collection, these default positions proved helpful and useful during the course of the study.

Ultimately, through my study of one case of a novice teacher, I have found what I feared I would: a writing pedagogy based on a narrow definition of expository writing driven by one high-stakes test. Though we cannot generalize from one case, this case mirrors what I observe in English Language Arts classrooms daily and has huge implications for practice and policy, both in my school district and in the field of teacher preparation.

As this opening chapter illustrates, navigating the difficulty of writing instruction is not a new problem. My own experience as a young teacher and as a district curriculum coordinator has framed my thinking on the importance of professional learning regarding composition pedagogy. In the following chapters, I begin with a review of the limited research surrounding writing pedagogy and novice teachers as well as a discussion of the context of writing pedagogy in a high-stakes test environment. Then, in Chapter III I define case study as a methodology and discuss my choice, explaining why the in-depth look at one young teacher can help us know how early-career teachers understand writing instruction. In Chapter IV I share and discuss my findings based on the interviews, observations, and artifact analysis of the young teacher, Hannah. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of implications of the case, noting areas that warrant further investigation.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Undoubtedly, the topic of secondary writing instruction is enormous, so to narrow the focus for my particular research questions, I have centered my attention on secondary English Language Arts pedagogy (which by necessity entails theory), teacher preparation, and policy regarding the standardized testing environment. The three concepts are of course intimately related and they all inform my research because in order to understand the moves teachers make regarding writing instruction, I must situate those moves into what we already know about writing instruction in the standardized testing environment.

The most natural place to start is the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). Arguably the most well-known and influential organization in secondary English Language Arts, the NCTE publishes guidelines and policy briefs in order to argue current issues in the field of literacy. In its guideline statement “NCTE Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing,” the organization lays out its theoretical and pedagogical principles, both of which guide secondary English Language Arts programs in districts with strong curriculums. Beginning with, “Everyone has the capacity to write, writing can be taught, and teachers can help students become better writers,” the organization argues that there is “ample empirical evidence that anyone can get better at writing, and that what teachers do makes a difference in how much students are capable of achieving as writers.” This is an important point, one that beginning teachers must believe in order to even begin thinking about pedagogy. That this concept must be spelled out as the first principle in the NCTE guidelines says much about the state of secondary English Language Arts education, but we see this concept shared by some giants in the field. Peter Elbow, in the introduction to *Everyone Can Write: Essays Toward a Hopeful Theory of Writing and Teaching Writing*, devotes considerable space arguing that “as teachers we can empower our students [and]. . .help them like to write” (xv).

Furthermore, Elbow's entire book is predicated on the idea that, indeed, everyone has the capacity to write.

The NCTE Beliefs Guidelines continue with a discussion of writing as a process and as a rhetorical act. In each case, the document outlines implications for teaching. Regarding process, NCTE argues that teachers must understand the relationship between finished writing (product) and the action of writers and must know multiple strategies for approaching the problems writers face during composing. Adding to this conversation are Joyce Armstrong Carroll and Edward E. Wilson, whose *Acts of Teaching: How to Teach Writing* has been a staple in the field of secondary English Language Arts education since its first edition in 1993. The book provides a seamless synthesis, marrying writing process theory with pedagogical practice. Right in Chapter 1, under the heading, "Overview of Writing as a Process," Carroll and Wilson write, "[C]lassrooms exist where writing is taught without any real understanding of the process or its recursive nature. Despite knowledge of the terms prewriting, writing, rewriting, and editing, some teachers still misunderstand these ongoing and sometimes simultaneous acts" (3). They continue, "What distinguishes teachers who have been trained in teaching writing as a process from those who know the terms but don't understand the concepts behind the terms is that the former writes with and stays with the students every step of the way; the latter assigns, collects, and corrects" (3). Reflecting on the narrative in Chapter I, I, too, was one of those latter teachers who simply assigned, collected, and corrected writing. The unfortunate reality is that all these years later, we still have multitudes of teachers who do not understand writing as a process, even though our national organization focuses on that very paradigm.

Though composition as a field has had a long history with process, with theorists and practitioners such as Maxine Hairston, Janet Emig, Sondra Perle, and Gary A. Olson

debating its merits and limits (Vandenberg, Hum and Clary-Lemon 3), secondary English Language Arts teachers, who by necessity are dependent on the theories of others, must understand the relationship between process and product.

The reason it is so crucial for secondary ELA teachers to understand this relationship is precisely because of the high-stakes testing environment. In Texas, standardized tests always involve a product and teachers must know how to negotiate writing instruction with what their students must ultimately produce. Texas, of course, is not the only state that must deal with this reality. In a 2012 study in Tennessee, teacher-researcher Hunter Brimi interviewed five high school English teachers about their writing instruction in terms of the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program's (TCAP) Writing Assessment. Brimi's goal was to gauge their writing instruction and to find out how that instruction was informed and affected by the TCAP Writing Assessment. What he found is dismal, but not surprising: most teachers used a formulaic, current-traditional approach to teaching composition and all focused on revision as their only nod to process.

In another policy brief, "How Standardized Tests Shape —and Limit—Student Learning," NCTE warns of the practice of focusing on product at the expense of process. Arguing that one of the effects of standardized tests is a narrowing of the curriculum, NCTE elaborates that "standardized tests . . . limit the type of writing students do. . . . These tests encourage teachers to emphasize a test-based approach that focuses on the application of a fixed set of skills, which means that students learn little about processes of composing and rhetorical dimensions such as audiences and purposes for writing" (2). Brimi's participants have fallen into that trap of focusing on a "fixed set of skills," but they are certainly not alone. In a similar case study, Vicky McQuitty sought to analyze and understand how one teacher learned to teach writing "within and through the emergent, nested, interacting

systems of teacher education and the school where [the participant] took her first teaching job” (358). McQuitty found that the teacher’s understanding of writing instruction emerged as she interacted with a multitude of systems. One of those interactions was with the emphasis on “timed, prompt-based writing and standard essay forms” (370) demanded by the state’s standardized writing assessment. In the lessons the teacher presented in preparation for the writing assessment, she “presented writing as formulaic and left little room for students to make decisions about their essays” (375). In this case, the teacher also spent part of the school year in active, student-centered instruction and writing workshops and when she was forced by her district to adopt a more formulaic approach, she knew that it contrasted greatly with the workshop approach. Ultimately, this teacher was able to reconcile the two approaches, but she had to specifically work against the policies set forth by her school district. McQuitty’s case mirrors my case in two particular ways: both study a novice teacher and both teachers face the pressure of a standardized test that seems to require a formulaic approach to writing. The difference, though, is context: Elle, the participant in McQuitty’s case, is from the northeastern United States (her exact location is not given). Likewise, Brimi’s participants are from Tennessee. There has been little or no research (none that I can find) on early-career teachers in Texas. The difference is significant because Texas, as one of the few states not to adhere to the Common Core State Standards, writes its own curriculum standards and creates its own testing and educational policy.

In a review of the research concerning pre-service teachers’ preparation to teach writing, Denise N. Morgan and Kristine E. Pytash discuss several studies over the last twenty years that deal with the process/product conundrum for English Language Arts teachers. One study specifically finds that teachers who work in states that have writing assessments are influenced by those assessments to privilege product over process, but several others

find that there are plenty of teachers who understand and find value in process. It is notable that in the latter group, almost all of the participants are elementary teachers and in most cases, there are no standardized writing assessments at the elementary level. These findings suggest that it is the writing assessments themselves that influence teacher perceptions about writing process. Since most all secondary ELA teachers must find a way to reconcile standardized writing assessments with writing process, this is important information. One of the most recent studies to investigate the compromise English teachers must make between standardized test preparation and authentic writing instruction was conducted by Shannon M. Pella. Writing in *Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education* in the Spring 2015 issue, Pella attempts to (among other research questions) answer how the high-stakes testing climate shaped the teaching of two middle school teachers working in a Common Core state. Like Brimi and McQuitty, Pella found that teachers have a difficult time separating a standardized approach and a more authentic, rhetorical approach to writing instruction. Pella's teacher participants, however, experienced considerable conflict between the two approaches and worked hard to resolve the disconnect, ultimately "significantly [reshaping] their writing pedagogy to encourage their students to think more critically and independently about writing" (21). Though the two teacher participants in Pella's study made gains in writing pedagogy, they were not able to completely reconcile their critical thinking paradigm with a standardized approach, leaving questions about how best to marry the two pedagogies.

It is no secret that beginning English Language Arts teachers do not have the necessary pedagogical background to teach writing. In 2006, George Hillocks claimed that the field has amassed sufficient knowledge about how to teach writing, but that the knowledge "is apparently not an important part of what beginning English teachers have

learned” (qtd. in Smagorinsky, Wilson, and Moore 286). Hillocks goes on to blame American students’ poor showing on standardized writing assessments on this lack of pedagogical knowledge. The article in which this quotation appears is a longitudinal case study that follows a novice teacher from preservice to inservice status. Peter Smagorinsky and his co-researchers find that their participant, a high-school teacher whom they studied for two years, struggles to teach grammar and writing, likely because she lacks a “strong pedagogical foundation for entering the classroom” (286). The researchers point out that this absence includes a foundation for teaching reading as well as writing, but that writing pedagogy appears more lacking. In fact, in 2001 Robert Tremmel similarly argued that teacher preparation programs pay little attention to writing pedagogy and instead focus almost solely on reading and literature. The results of a survey I conducted of secondary English Language Arts teachers in two New Braunfels, Texas school districts confirm the same information: almost 40 percent of respondents had taken only one or two courses in writing pedagogy and another third had not taken any courses solely devoted to writing pedagogy. The same is true for Hannah, the teacher in my case. Though she graduated from a Tier I university, she had no coursework in teaching writing. As I describe in Chapter IV, Hannah’s lack of pre-service preparation resulted in a hodgepodge of disconnected instructional strategies shaped by an environment that stresses test preparation instead of writing as a rhetorical act.

III. METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

Since my goal in this study is to better understand the influences that shape one teacher's writing instruction, I needed a qualitative method of investigation. Qualitative research, as Stake defines it, "relies primarily on human perception and understanding" (11) and those who do qualitative research "want to improve how things work" (14). Indeed, my ultimate goal and hope is that I can improve the way in which my school district develops and supports new teachers coming into our profession. Knowing how Hannah³, the teacher in my case, thinks about, performs, and reflects upon writing instruction can provide a way into interrogating my district's current systems of teacher development.

To find my way into Hannah's thinking, I have used a case study approach, informed by an overall definition of qualitative research laid out by Creswell, worth quoting here in its entirety:

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (44)

As Creswell notes in the quotation above, qualitative research begins with assumptions and in this case, I start with some things I know from my work in the curriculum department of

³ Hannah is not her real name. I have used pseudonyms throughout the paper.

our school district: writing instruction is largely prescribed and formulaic; teachers come into the field with little in the way of writing pedagogy or theory; and reading is privileged over writing in English Language Arts classes. My intent with the case study is to know what *Hannah* is thinking and doing about writing instruction and to ascribe her individual thinking to the whole. In my choice of case study, I again draw upon Creswell's notion of case study as its own methodology in which "the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system. . .through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of observation" (97). By choosing one teacher and her classroom instruction as my case, I have opted for a deep, rather than a broad, look into the experience of negotiating writing pedagogy. I've chosen this *particular* teacher, Hannah, for a number of reasons, both practical and purposeful:

1. Hannah was one of only two first-year teachers in my district when I began the study.
2. Hannah had done her student teaching in my school district, so she and I already had a working relationship.
3. Because I had observed Hannah while student teaching, I knew that she had a very good handle on classroom management, so I could focus my research intently on pedagogy. Unlike many first-year teachers, Hannah does not need help with the fundamentals of running a classroom.

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

I briefly considered using two cases (and two teachers), but the other first-year teacher in the district was having a difficult time adjusting to the demands of teaching. As the curriculum coordinator for the school district, my job dictated that I intervene to quite an extent, too much for me to be comfortable with my co-position as researcher and colleague. With Hannah, however, though she and I were both aware that I am representative of the institution for which she works, we were able to forge a reciprocal relationship. I met with her early on to discuss the study and its implications for the both of us, explaining that she would be providing me with research and I would provide her with practical advice, teaching ideas, and teaching materials whenever appropriate. It was during this first meeting that I explained to Hannah the notions of Thomas Newkirk's "default positions" in empirical research. Newkirk suggests that researchers agree to raise issues when they occur; to give an opportunity for the teacher to respond to the interpretation of problem situations; and to intervene when teaching practices seem ineffective (13-14). I tried to assure Hannah that my first responsibility was to her and her teaching practices. In our school district, curriculum coordinators are support personnel and not evaluators, though that nuance can often be lost on teachers, especially those new to a district and certainly those new to a profession. So, even though I do not conduct formal evaluations that become part of a teacher's record, I am a representative of Central Office (capital letters intentional). As such, teachers are sometimes apprehensive and uneasy about my presence in their classrooms. Knowing this, I discussed at length my role in the school district and as a researcher with Hannah. I did not want her to feel, even for a moment, any kind of pressure to be a research participant just because I work in the district's central office. Hannah's welcoming demeanor and questioning attitude throughout the process conveyed her

willingness to participate. I tried to be ever vigilant for signs that she may be uncomfortable in continuing, but I did not ever have that sense. Instead, toward the end of the study, Hannah seemed to conflate my roles as researcher and curriculum coordinator, indicating that she was actually more comfortable with my role as curriculum coordinator. As we sat down to begin our final interview, she spied my list of questions and asked to see them before we began. One of the questions, which I will explain in more detail in Chapter IV, asked about her experience with AVID, a program the district uses to help struggling students find success in challenging courses. In a lowered voice, Hannah said, “Before you start recording [as a researcher], I should tell you that I haven’t really been using the AVID strategies – they just kind of sent us to training and then let it go at that.” Clearly, Hannah saw my position as curriculum coordinator as dependable, one that could be trusted with unflattering information about our school district. Conversely, she saw the researcher role as one that might necessitate that she temper information. Paradoxically, though I had (I thought) thoroughly explained my role as a reciprocal researcher, Hannah voiced concern that information she would share with me as researcher would be ill-received and she might be in some kind of trouble. She willingly shared the information with the curriculum coordinator me, the role that could actually make things difficult for her. Though I welcome the fact that Hannah felt little to no professional pressure, it is discomfoting to know that I may have deceived her, however unintentionally, about my role as researcher. In the end, though, the actual research was not compromised and the reciprocal relationship between us was not diluted because Hannah saw herself as a co-interpreter of data⁴, which I will explore more thoroughly in Chapter IV.

⁴ John W. Creswell, in *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (2013), discusses the importance of focusing on the meaning that participants make of the research issue. Likewise, in “Seduction and Betrayal in Qualitative Research,” Thomas Newkirk argues that participants

Participant and Location

Hannah teaches seventh grade English Language Arts in a suburban middle school on the outskirts of San Antonio, Texas, a campus that achieved the “Met Standard” rating by the Texas Education Agency in 2016. Additionally, the school earned a distinction in the “Student Progress” category, meaning that its students achieved a higher growth rate, based on a comparison between 2015 and 2016 STAAR scores, than demographically similar middle school campuses. The distinction report is one way schools know whether their programs are working because rather than using raw scores, which typically yield results that follow socio-economic status, the distinction report is based on a comparison of like districts. Thus, if a school has a high number of students on free and reduced lunch, it is compared to a school with a high number of such students. There are seven distinction categories: Science, Mathematics, English Language Arts, Social Studies, Student Progress, Closing Performance Gaps, and Post-Secondary Readiness. Notably, Hannah’s school has never earned in a distinction in English Language Arts⁵. Demographically, the school is majority white, but Hispanic students make up just over a third of the student population. There are fewer than 25 African-American students in a school of around 1,000 students and the percentage of economically disadvantaged students (as measured by the number of students on free and reduced lunch) hovers around 20%. Hannah’s students reflect a similar demographic pattern: in the 2015-16 school year, she had 124 students, 19% of whom were economically disadvantaged; she had only 3 African-American students; and 42% of her students were Hispanic. The majority by only a few percentage points (52%) were white.

should be granted rights of “co-interpretation” wherein they are offered the “opportunity to offer counterinterpretations or provide mitigating information” (13) regarding research.

⁵ Accountability data, including Summary Reports and Distinction Reports, can be found for all Texas school districts and campuses by visiting the Texas Education Agency Accountability Rating System site, which can be accessed at <https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/perfreport/account/>.

Noting demographic data is important because as a number of researchers have pointed out, economic status is the greatest determiner of academic achievement.⁶ Since over 80% of Hannah's classes were not economically disadvantaged, it follows that they should be high academic achievers. This matters because in my investigation of how Hannah came to understand writing instruction and came to know herself as a writing teacher, she and I could focus primarily on the research issue and not on very real and important educational concerns such as struggling readers, high mobility, and low parental involvement, issues that often accompany high poverty rates.

Hannah herself is a white, middle-class second-year teacher (though a first-year teacher at the beginning of the study) who graduated from a Tier I University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Interdisciplinary Studies, with a focus on Middle Grades (4-8) in Language Arts/Social Studies. When the study began, she was 22 years old, so approximately a decade older than her students. As do most 22-year-olds, she looks very young, but her demeanor in the classroom is strong and no-nonsense, so she has few discipline problems that sometimes plague new, young teachers. That no-nonsense demeanor belies a passion that she has for teaching and for her students. Growing up as the daughter of two teachers, Hannah knew early on what her career choice would be, saying that when she was three, she “bossed all her stuffed animals around and wanted to teach them lessons.” Eventually, the interest in teaching led Hannah to choose English over social studies as her field because, as she explained, there was so much more room for autonomy. In our first interview, Hannah said, “There’s a different kind of creativity you have as an English teacher with poetry, with short stories, with novels; social studies is more black and white for me. I really wanted to do English because there’s freedom and it’s very creative

⁶ For a sampling of research on the correlation between economic status and academic achievement, see Coley 4; and Palady 36-37.

and I love the interpreting literature and I love reading and I just wanted to cultivate a love for reading in these kids. So English was the place to do it.” Hannah’s discussion of her choosing English as a teaching field supports the assumptions I had going into the study: her interest lay totally in reading and in literature. She did not mention writing at all.

Data Sources and Analysis Procedures

As most qualitative researchers do, I have gathered multiple forms of data rather than rely on a single data source, though I have relied on a single case. Over a fourteen month period, I conducted five field observations in Hannah’s seventh grade English Language Arts classroom. During each observation, I typed teacher and student interactions and behaviors as a running log. Afterward, I made summary notes along the lines of “ ‘After the Fact’ Notes” as defined by Ann Blakeslee and Cathy Fleischer in *Becoming a Writing Researcher*. Blakeslee and Fleischer acknowledge that notes written after an observation “have the potential to lose some of the immediacy of [the] observations” (115), but I found that trying to make descriptive and reflective notes during the observations themselves caused me to lose sight of the rich interactions happening in class. Instead, I recorded my reflections soon after each observation. Though my intention was to be a nonparticipant observer, in two of the field observations I became a participant. Because I was wearing a very conspicuous district ID badge (the same one all teachers in the school wear), students could easily identify me as a district employee. Since the school has a long history of administrator observers, students were not fazed by my presence and in two different instances, asked me for help with their work. In the spirit of reciprocity and as a student advocate, I answered the students’ questions. While I interacted with the students, I made a mental note about

their questions and how they related to my research questions, incorporating those ideas into my reflective notes post observation.

In addition to the five field observations, I conducted two interviews with Hannah, one at the end of her first year of teaching and one in the middle of her second year. My goal in this spacing was to track any changes in her thinking between her first and second year, a time that is typically rife with new learning in any profession. I used an informal interview structure, defined by Blakeslee and Fleischer as planned but flexible (132). I did type preliminary questions, but I wanted to be free to ask follow-up questions in order to help me understand Hannah's thinking about her teaching. Moreover, since Hannah and I are colleagues, an informal interview structure seemed more natural and conversational, extending the reciprocal relationship she and I had forged. I used the voice recorder function on my smartphone to record our interviews and subsequently transcribed each. To analyze the interviews, I used a coding system to find commonalities and draw out themes. First, I read the two interviews to find specific references to specific to reading instruction and writing instruction. Noting that there was much discussion about writing (mainly because my questions directed the conversation in that way), I then coded the interviews for mentions of test-writing versus what we may think of as more organic and authentic writing. Peter Smagorinsky, in his case study of an early-career teacher, called these two categories "Toward Agency" and "Toward Control" (271). I found that Hannah's talk about writing almost exclusively focused on control. Once I coded the interviews, I applied the same codes to my summary notes of the observations, looking for patterns. Again, almost all of the classroom interactions that dealt with composition tended toward test writing. Finally, I collected a number of teaching documents in order to analyze them as artifacts. Specifically, I analyzed a Power Point presentation titled "The Writing Process"; two

handouts intended for students as reminders of what to look for when revising and editing; a handout of elaboration techniques; and a small booklet outlining the steps of the writing process, intended a reference document for students. As I had done with the interviews and the field observations, I coded the documents, but this time I separated the bits of information into units of bulleted information, and then classified the units according to theme. My goal was to see what kind of writing advice Hannah felt compelled to pass on to her students, as evidenced by the artifacts from her classroom. I found that Hannah's writing advice fell into four categories:

1. **Directives (D):** Instructions on the steps to take in order to write a composition. I categorized a bullet as a Directive only if it was an imperative sentence.
2. **Composition Advice (CA):** Advice about the practicalities of writing at the composition or paragraph level. These include questions for the writer and phrases to instruct the writer on how the composition should look or be comprised.
3. **Word Advice (WA):** Like Composition Advice, these bullets include advice about the practicalities of writing, but at the word or sentence level.
4. **Invention Schemes (IS):** These bullets include information about how to generate ideas, mostly by using graphic organizers.

My hope in using field observations, interviews, and artifact analysis was to triangulate the data from all three tools, interpreting the patterns that emerged, and developing naturalistic generalizations as described by Creswell. In the following chapter, I present my findings, telling the story of the young teacher, Hannah, and how she approached writing instruction and negotiated the demands of writing assessment. In telling Hannah's story, I assume Schaafsma and Vinz's assertion that "stories make it possible to explore territories filled with tensions, conflicts, and competing forces" (47). I know that

Hannah's story, like all stories, is useful because it is part of "the chain of communication about teaching and learning" as described by Dyson (18).

IV. HANNAH, HER CLASSROOM, AND WRITING INSTRUCTION

In this chapter, I present Hannah's story chronologically by field observation, except for observation five, which I pair with number three because those two classroom visits were remarkably similar. My intent here is to let Hannah's story unfold from her earliest days in the classroom until she had been teaching for a year and a half, noting the progression of her thinking toward writing instruction. As I narrate the classroom observations, I weave in analysis and emerging themes, noting the interconnecting concepts in Hannah's discourse, her classroom practices, and her teaching documents.

To set the context for the classroom observations and document analysis, it is useful to consider not only the mandates from the state of Texas, but also from the school district. It is important to remember, of course, that as curriculum coordinator, I am representative of the larger institution, so I (and my curriculum team) are responsible for communicating expectations of campus English departments.

In Hannah's case, she is part of an eight-member team of middle school English teachers, all of whom (except Hannah) are veterans, not only of the profession, but also of the school. Her department chair, Coach Mall, was also Hannah's cooperating teacher when she did her student teaching, the year before the current project began. Notably, Coach Mall works diligently to abide by district guidelines regarding curriculum expectations, frequently calling my office to seek advice and to invite me to join department meetings so I can share the district vision and expectations with his team of teachers. My department is housed in a building we call Support Services, and that name is intentional; whereas most districts have a *Central Office*, our district wants to foreground the concept of support rather than a centralized hub of authority.

When I came into my position as curriculum coordinator, I made a number of decisions that were intended to shape the context of writing instruction in our district. First, my team and I instituted a K-12 writing portfolio system. Our students, beginning in kindergarten, keep their writing in a portfolio that travels with them throughout their school years. Our curriculum, as outlined in curriculum unit maps written and published by my office, requires that students regularly reflect on their writing and that teachers use the writing portfolio submissions as formative assessments. Second, we hold twice-a-year grade-level meetings in order to share best practices based on research. During this project and before (during her student teaching year), Hannah attended four such meetings. In each case, Hannah participated with her colleagues around the district in activities designed to foster reflective writing practices, encourage the use of professional texts as writing models, and understand our writing standards as both genre-focused and rhetoric-focused.

This writing standards Texas teachers must follow are outlined in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The English Language Arts TEKS, are divided into different strands of skill statements (Students will. . .). In sum, there are 27 different strands of learning, fourteen of which have to do with reading; eight with writing; four with research; and one with speaking and listening. Notably, the state of Texas privileges reading over writing in the number of standards that are dedicated to each skill. Moreover, the state standards do little to integrate reading and writing, conveying the idea that the two are completely separate processes. In our district, however, the curriculum department publishes curriculum documents and designs professional learning activities that fully integrate the two processes, illustrating that one is consumption (reading) and one is production (writing). It is in this context that Hannah is teaching: two seemingly competing forces, the state standards and the district curriculum department. In reality, my curriculum team fully

supports the state standards in an integrated way, but early-career teachers often have difficulty understanding the dichotomous relationship between the two.

Classroom Observation One: Surface-Level Writing

Hannah Jenkins stands at the door of her classroom, arms akimbo as she greets her seventh-grade students with directive shouts. “Get started on your warm-up!” and “You’ve got something to do!” she says over the din of hallway noise. Her students, typical middle schoolers, amble into the classroom and pay little attention to Ms. Jenkins or her admonitions. They chat and dance around, share smartphone videos and text messages, but they do not get started on their warm up. When the bell rings on this Friday afternoon only six weeks into her first year of teaching, Hannah closes the classroom door and the students begin to settle in. The classroom is roomy and pleasant, with colorful walls full of posters about the writing process, great books to read, parts of speech, parts of a story, “comma causers” (subordinate conjunctions), and coordinating conjunctions. The posters are standard fare for an English Language Arts teacher and I find it interesting that Hannah has chosen these particular posters. Since Hannah does not have a degree in English, but instead was an education major who has a generalist teaching certificate (allowing her to teach Language Arts or Social Studies in grades four through eight), I wonder how she knows which posters will have instructional relevance. She tells me in an interview that she wanted to teach English because there’s freedom and creativity, but also admits that, in her words, she “honestly didn’t know how to teach writing” when she began her student teaching. But now, in October of her first year of teaching, she has decorated her classroom with common markers of English Language Arts education, posters that clearly communicate teaching as transmission.

The “warm-up” that students are supposed to be working on is a grammar exercise that also indicates that, at least at this point in the school year, knowledge is “objective and static and capable of being handed down intact from one person to another” (Smagorinsky, *Teaching English by Design* 7). Hannah calls the exercise a “DOL,” which stands for Daily Oral Language. Students are to correct the mistakes in three sentences that are part of a longer series the class has worked on all week. Each sentence contains three or four grammar and usage errors and the idea is that students will learn correct usage by finding the errors in these sentences.

Notably, the curriculum department in the school district has advised against using DOLs as part of language arts instruction because the exercise is isolated from any meaningful writing instruction, involves no critical thinking, and essentially amounts to teaching proofreading rather than composing. But, as Hannah tells me our first interview, she relies on her English department colleagues and especially the Campus Instructional Coach for lesson ideas and on this day, as most days during this first six weeks of school, Hannah begins with a DOL. Notably, there is a disconnect between what Hannah does in the classroom and what she has been told doesn’t work, depending on lore and local English department culture rather than institutional (in the form of the district curriculum department) authority. From my position, this is not surprising. I find that often, even though I enjoy credibility among the English teachers in my district, the proximity of local culture easily outweighs the researched-based curriculum decisions coming out of my office.

Once students begin to work on the grammar exercise the class is silent for about ninety seconds. Hannah uses the time to take attendance and when she’s finished, she punctuates the quiet with, “Two minutes!” but this warning creates a buzz in the classroom, students now taking the opportunity to talk with those sitting closest. I listen in on the

conversations to see if anyone is talking about the grammar exercise, but the students within hearing distance are all discussing something other than classwork – the dance. These seventh graders are attending their first middle school dance tonight (at this school, sixth graders are not allowed to attend the dances). In our after-class debrief, Hannah tells me that the students have been hyped up all day in anticipation and she was worried that many girls in her seventh period, the class I was observing, would be absent, leaving school early to make hair and nail appointments.

The discussion reminds me that teaching middle school is a tricky business, with teachers and curriculum competing against a host of social forces that have enormous influence on 12- and 13-year-old students. Hannah tries her best to reconcile the academic and the social by playing up to the students' interests. At 23 years old, her youth helps her navigate the social world of her seventh graders. On this day in October, one student, a tall, gregarious boy who sits in the front row, asks Ms. Jenkins if she's going to do "the Whip," an apparent reference to the dance craze that has been spreading among the middle school set. In our follow-up meeting, I learn that the day before Hannah did "the Whip" for her class as a reward for good behavior and this particular boy had been absent. It strikes me that the students had to have been discussing their teacher's dance moves, more evidence that their interests lie squarely in the social realm and not in the academic realm. This is not surprising.

Researchers know that adolescence is a time of emotional turmoil and that middle school students are at a higher risk of negative affect than older or younger students (Larson and Ham 130). Though she does not articulate, either in interviews or in our debrief sessions, that she understands the affective learning domain as defined by Benjamin Bloom and updated by Anderson and Krathwohl, Hannah's interaction with her students indicates

that she understands the conflict her students are facing and knows that she must meet it head-on. She tells me that she wants to be consistent with her students, not a teacher who wants to be “cool and fun at the beginning and then try to get strict” but rather one who “wanted to come in with a strict but loving presence.” And she is indeed strict; her control of the classroom is evident even at this early stage of the school year. Her students, though animated about tonight’s dance, are not unruly, disruptive, or defiant. They heed her warning to finish the grammar exercise in the next two minutes, and even though some of them don’t quite finish, Hannah declares the warm-up time over and announces to the class, “Time’s up. Let’s go over it!” She pulls a paper off the desk one of the girls in the class and places it on the document camera, displaying the work for the entire class to see. She spends the next several minutes going over the grammar mistakes on the paper, with students following along and correcting their own papers. There is no discussion of how grammar works or why the errors are in fact mistakes. The entire process takes two minutes. At this point, Hannah’s students are at the concrete, factual level of cognitive knowledge and there is no pedagogical attempt to move them toward a higher level of cognitive processes.

After the class finishes correcting their sentences, Hannah projects her computer monitor and students become excited when they see the game “Kahoots” flashing on the screen. “Kahoots” is one of many digital quiz applications that allow a teacher to project quiz questions and students to answer via an electronic device. The class’s responses are also projected in a bar-graph format, allowing for immediate formative assessment. The game is familiar to students and many immediately pull out their cell phones and start logging in to the code that is projected onto the screen. Hannah asks if any students do not have a device so she can pair students who need to share. As the students log in, their names project so the entire class can see. Some students use their real names, but some also input things like

“Poo,” “Quarterback,” and “YoMama.” Hannah ignores the names, another indication that she understands well the affective domain of her students. Giving attention to the silliness would likely fuel more, so despite the warning on the screen that “silly names will be disqualified,” Hannah says nothing. After about three minutes, most students have logged in, but there are various students who cannot get in to the site. Two have never played and they are confused, but Hannah does not stop the class to give instructions, instead telling the other students to explain. Three students cannot find the app on their cell phones, so Hannah tries to help them individually, but when they still cannot log in, she tells them to just watch the screen. One of the boys with no device and no partner throws his head back in apparent frustration and decides to read his library book instead of play the game. The classroom is a bit disorderly during the interim, while Hannah is trying to get everyone logged in to the system, but it does not devolve into chaos. With most of the class ready, Hannah starts the quiz game. Students are to read the question on the screen and then use their phones to click on the correct answer. When time’s up, the correct answer shows on the screen. Hannah explains that if they cheer between each question, they’ll never finish, so they have to “silently cheer.” She asks for a demonstration and all students wave their hands wildly through the air but make no sound.

Once the quiz begins, I see that the topic is “the writing process.” There is no introduction or any context, so Hannah has not attempted to activate prior knowledge, even though the students have worked on and have been talking about “the writing process.” Later, in my debrief after the observation, Hannah shows me a Power Point presentation she had given as a lecture earlier in the week and I learn that the quiz assesses the material from that presentation. The first quiz question is “What is the name of the step in which you brainstorm?” The answer is “prewriting,” which most students choose correctly if gauging

by the loud cheers. Next question: “Which step includes fixing errors?” Answer: Editing. Despite the admonition to cheer silently, the students cannot contain their excitement when they answer correctly. Hannah stops the quiz at this point to talk about CUPS and ARMS, the acronyms the students had worked on earlier in the week as heuristics to help them remember revising and editing concepts. Hannah calls on students to remind the class what CUPS and ARMS stand for. The first student, Shayla, doesn’t remember. The second student, Pamela, thinks she knows but she takes a few seconds to think and Hannah answers for her: Capitalization, Usage, Punctuation, Spelling and Add, Remove, Move, and Substitute. The heuristics match those on one of the posters on the wall, match slides on the earlier Power Point presentation, and match handouts that Hannah has given as part of her instruction.

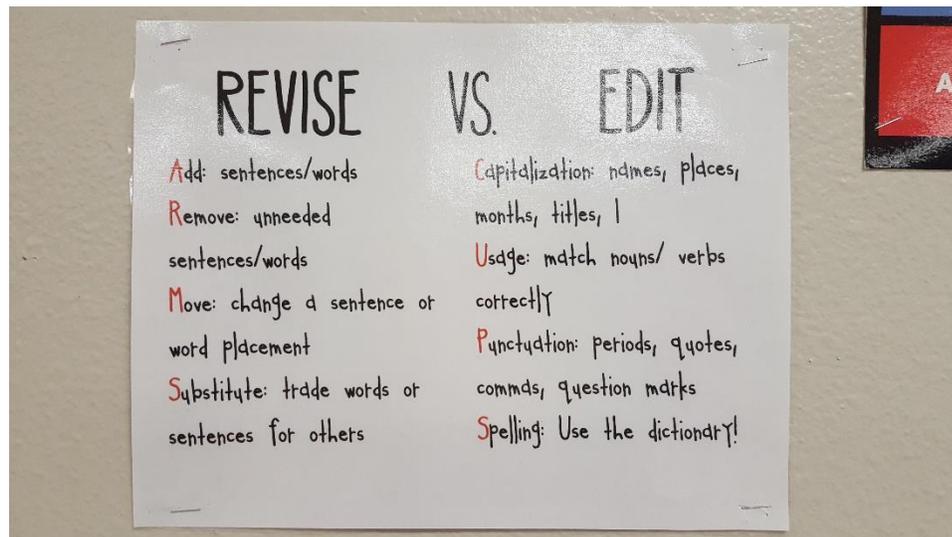


Fig. 1. CUPS and ARMS Poster

The attention given to these acronyms indicate they are extremely important in this classroom. Even though the revising and editing advice seems to be a normative practice, there is no discussion beyond the reminder. Students are interested in answering quiz questions correctly, but they do not ask any questions and Hannah does not provide any

explanation. Again, only six weeks into her first year of teaching, the theory of teaching and learning that is operating in this classroom is one of transmission rather than one of construction. As described by Smagorinsky, constructed knowledge “comes as part of a transaction among a variety of factors” (*Teaching English by Design* 10) including a reading of the codes of the discipline and a contextual and situational understanding of the concepts. In this case, because Hannah provides no discussion and no explanation, students have little opportunity to create any kind of cognitive connections. Instead, they see knowledge and hear knowledge entirely transmitted by the teacher.

The final quiz question is, “What is another name for a sloppy copy?” The correct answer is “Rough Draft.” With that, the quiz is over and the class moves on to the next activity with no transition. With the quiz, Hannah seems to be reinforcing what she sees as the most important elements of writing and is reinforcing that writing is a linear, step-by-step process with no room for individual difference.

The class spends the remaining class time, about 35 minutes, working on brainstorming for a personal narrative. Earlier, on the writing process quiz, Hannah included a question about brainstorming, asking when it occurred. The answer on the screen was “pre-writing” and now, students are to prewrite by creating a web diagram. In this classroom, there is a conflation of brainstorming and pre-writing, with Hannah using the terms interchangeably and not acknowledging that pre-writing can take multiple forms. She begins by directing the students to get out their prompt, highlighter, paper, and pen and reminds them that today is “brainstorming and prewriting day.” Hannah asks Marco, a small boy in the middle of the room, to read aloud the prompt. As he does, Hannah marks up the prompt, motioning for students to do the same.

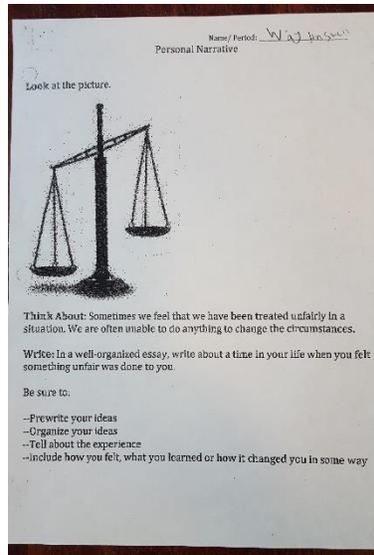


Fig. 2. Narrative Prompt

First, Hannah crosses out the “Think About” statement on the top of the paper. Students do the same and Hannah asks, “Why are we crossing this out?” A chorus of five or six students sings out, “Because it will lead us astray!” I note that “astray” is not typical vocabulary for middle school students and know that they have heard this from their teacher. Next, Hannah highlights what she calls “key words” in the “Write” directive on the paper: life and unfair. She then tells the students she is going to create a web and students should follow along. In the middle of the page, Hannah draws a circle and writes the word “Unfair.” She then draws three lines coming out of the middle circle and says, “These will become your body paragraphs.” As a model, Hannah fills in the space next to her lines with examples of times she has been treated unfairly: when she tried to bake a cake but didn’t have all the ingredients and her mother was upset; when she made a bad grade on test in high school but hadn’t been prepared by the teacher; and when Mr. Jones, the principal of this school, made her give a demonstration of “Snapchat” to the faculty just because she was the youngest staff member. The students all find this last example hilarious and I know that Hannah is trying to meet their interests and keep them engaged. As Hannah finishes her web, she tells the

students how she felt unfairly targeted in each of the situations and tells students to get started on their own web brainstorming sheets. Hannah walks around the class to watch and I do, too, noticing that some students are furiously writing while others are stuck. One student's examples are exactly like Hannah's except for the most minute of details: instead of a cake, he was baking a pie; the bad grade was on a quiz and not a test; and his parents made him explain "Snapchat" to his aunt and uncle. After about ten minutes of pre-writing time, I survey the class and note that two students are raising their hand, three students are writing, one student is trying to talk to her neighbor about the writing but Hannah shushes her, and 18 students are looking around. Hannah is walking around the room, looking at the prewriting of particular students. Hannah stops at one boy's desk to read over his work; he is apparently proud of his "hook" and asks Hannah to show it to the class. "No," Hannah tells him, "But it's good, though." One minute later, Hannah again shows her pre-writing web to the class, but I note that she does not show them how she has moved from the brainstorming stage to the composing stage. Nor does she talk about composing. Instead, she says, "Okay, trade with your partner and read your partner's hook. Give feedback." By this time, it is 3:51 and class – and the school day – ends at 3:55. Instead of trading papers, students start to pack up and Hannah tells them, "Don't forget your hook, your setting and your lesson learned. You need to write your hook." Realizing she's fighting a losing battle, though, Hannah allows them to put everything away and turns her attention to tonight's dance. "Y'all have fun tonight! Don't do anything I wouldn't do. . . like the Whip!" The class roars with laughter and right then the bell rings, a signal that the weekend has begun.

One of the most notable elements of the classroom instruction on this day is Hannah's focus on the testing aspect of writing. The prompt handout she used is a replica of the state's 7th grade STAAR Writing prompt format: a "Think About" statement followed by

a “Write” directive. Also included are the reminders to 1) prewrite ideas; 2) organize ideas; 3) tell about the experience; and 4) include how you felt, what you learned or how it changed you in some way. Hannah had her students cross out the “Think About” statement and her admonition that the statement would lead students astray speaks to the fear teachers have about these prompts – that the thinking involved has the potential to lead students to write about something not directly related to the prompt. This fear, of course, directly counters the notion that the product of composition *is thinking visible*. In this case, the “Think About” statement said, “Sometimes we feel that we have been treated unfairly in a situation. We are often unable to do anything to change the circumstances.” The statement’s purpose is to get students to consider the implications of what Hannah has termed “key words” in the prompt – life and unfair. Yet Hannah, drawing on the advice of her colleagues, has directed her students to ignore the thinking stage of the writing process, arguably the most critical element of the process. Drawing upon Vygotsky’s stages of intellectual development, Joyce Armstrong Carroll and Edward Wilson, architects of The New Jersey Writing Project, call this pre-writing stage a “messy, creative stage [when] students plumb their minds to find or to focus ideas.” (245). They describe the pre-writing stage in this way:

Huge heaps of thought splay across papers, lists superimpose other lists, doodles and drawings hug the pages, fragments pile upon other fragments in an effort to hold ephemeral thought so it doesn’t slip away. Writers are unconcerned about conventions – ideas rule. Blueprinting, for example, yields an imprecise drawing of a place with labels that may or may not mean anything to anyone else—students label some rooms by function, others by association. Some rooms contain furniture or things; some hold the names or initials of people. Writing may be scrawled or abbreviated. The blueprint

heaps memories—unsorted, stacked on the page—a virtual stockpile of images and glimmerings from the past—a treasure trove to draw from when writing. (245)

In Hannah’s classroom, though, students have not been given the opportunity nor been encouraged to gather their thoughts in any kind of messy, creative way. Instead, they have jumped right into an organized, linear collection of ideas that most of them (the eighteen I counted who could not think of anything to write down on their web) could not complete. The student who copied Hannah’s ideas nearly verbatim is likely operating at his developmental level as defined by Vygotsky, but Hannah, as a novice teacher, does not recognize the need to work with him in order to pull him across his zone of proximal development (in Carroll and Wilson 250). From my observations of new teachers, the failure to recognize the student’s need is not atypical. Later, in our after-class debrief, I ask Hannah what her goals were in this lesson. She says that she just wanted her students to have plenty to write about and she knew she needed to model for them how to pre-write. I asked her how she knew that and her response was, “Well, I would need someone to help me, so I figured they would, too. Some of them don’t, though; some students can just go right to writing without my help.” This comment mirrors something Hannah tells me during our first formal interview, recorded in May at the end of her first year of teaching. When asked about her expectations about writing when she came into the profession, Hannah responds that she “honestly didn’t know what to expect” and that it’s been “trial and error. . . because some kids really love to write and are great at it, they want to do it. I’ll just give them a topic and they’ll write and some of them, it’s like pulling teeth trying to get them to write a sentence.” With no writing pedagogy or writing theory courses, Hannah does not see – probably cannot see at this stage in her career – that she is not giving her students ample

opportunity to think about their writing and to go through the necessary process of “messy creativity” as Carroll and Wilson call it (245).

An even more striking element from the day’s lesson is the writing assignment itself. As noted earlier, the prompt was a replica of a STAAR 7th grade personal narrative writing prompt. However, two weeks prior to the field observation date, in September 2015, the Texas Education Agency announced that due to time constraints enacted by the state legislature, the 7th grade STAAR Writing test would no longer include two writing prompts. Instead, students would write only one essay and it would be an expository writing prompt. The implications were enormous: 7th grade students would no longer have to prepare for two different aims of writing and could now focus only on expository test writing. The curriculum department of the school district communicated this news to all 7th grade English Language Arts teachers with the caution that this development didn’t mean that the district would abandon personal writing. We – as curriculum coordinator, it was my responsibility to relay the information – reiterated that strong writing instruction is the goal, not “test-prep,” and that personal writing is a cornerstone of effective writing instruction. Drawing upon Jerome Bruner’s ideas regarding the power of narrative knowledge, the curriculum department was concerned that 7th grade teachers would no longer use personal narrative as an effective vehicle for teaching. In Hannah’s classroom on this day, she clearly had not abandoned personal narratives, but rather than use the personal as a way into engaging and thoughtful composition, she focused only on the steps to prepare for the STAAR test: cross out the “Think About” statement, highlight key words on the prompt, and brainstorm by creating a web diagram. These steps happened even though there would no longer be this kind of prompt on the writing test. When I mention this to Hannah after class, it is apparent to me that she doesn’t realize what I mean. I explain that having her students focus only on

the steps to prepare them for a personal narrative essay on the writing test isn't necessary since they would no longer be facing that kind of prompt on the STAAR test. I give her some alternatives for personal narrative writing, explaining that she could have her students respond to the stories they are reading – they could write about a similar conflict or a kind of friend they have who resembles a character in their novels. Hannah listens to my advice but says she would need to talk to Coach Mall, the department chair, because he is usually the one who creates the lesson plans. As a first-year teacher, Hannah is very dependent on the context in which she teaches. Coach Mall, who is not only her department chair but also was her cooperating teacher during her internship semester, holds considerable sway over Hannah's teaching decisions. Thus, he shapes her teaching more considerably than does the larger institution (the school district), of which I am representative.

As we finish up our after-class debrief, I ask Hannah if I can have a copy of the Power Point presentation she referred to during the class period, the one she had presented earlier in the week. In investigating how Hannah, as a novice teacher, approaches writing instruction (one of my research questions), I knew it would be useful to analyze her teaching documents. Since the Power Point presentation is one that she created rather than one she chose from another teacher or from a ready-made resource, the document could provide insights into her thinking about writing instruction. The purpose of the presentation was to introduce her students to the concept of using a process for writing and to identify the steps students were to take when writing. Her classes were about to write their first personal narrative essays when she shared the presentation and she referred to it several times during my first classroom observation. The questions on the "Kahoots" quiz, described earlier, came from the information on this Power Point presentation. The document itself is a fifteen-slide presentation that Hannah showed to her class in September. I analyzed the

document by seeing each bullet point as a unit and then coding the units according to the patterns that emerged. Ultimately, I coded each bullet of information into these categories, repeated here:

5. **Directives (D)**: Instructions on the steps to take in order to write a composition. I categorized a bullet as a Directive only if it was an imperative sentence.
6. **Composition Advice (CA)**: Advice about the practicalities of writing at the composition or paragraph level. These include questions for the writer and phrases to instruct the writer on how the composition should look or be comprised.
7. **Word Advice (WA)**: Like Composition Advice, these bullets include advice about the practicalities of writing, but at the word or sentence level.
8. **Invention Schemes (IS)**: These bullets include information about how to generate ideas, mostly by using graphic organizers.

If a bullet seemed to fit into two categories, I chose to place it into the category where it worked best thematically; for example, the bullet “Circle the capital letter at the beginning of each sentence in GREEN” is a Directive, but thematically it fits more fully into Word Advice.

What I found was striking. On the fifteen slides were 64 pieces of bulleted information. Of those 64, I coded eight as Directives, eight as Composition Advice, five as Invention Schemes, and forty-three as Word Advice. Clearly, then, Hannah has placed the importance on Word Advice. Fully 67% of the information on the PowerPoint presentation had to do with how students should deal with words and sentences, focusing on such things as transitions, using a variety of sentences, and checking for spelling and punctuation errors. The intended message from teacher to student is obvious: your composition depends on choosing the right words and having correct sentences. It’s important to note that in some

sense, writing is about words and correctness. But most compositionists would argue that those elements are a tiny part of writing; part of product, definitely, instead of process. In fact, in glossing the important issues of thirteen leaders in the field of Composition (people like Victor Villanueva, Howard Tinberg, Kathy Yancey and Doug Hesse just to name a few), Deborah Coxwell-Teague and Ronald Lunsford state outright that “first-year composition does not focus on grammar” (348). Instead, as the theories and syllabi of the thirteen compositionists represented in their book *First-Year Composition: From Theory to Practice* show, “conventions must be a part of the understanding of rhetorical situation, genre, and discourse” (349). In Hannah’s case, though, the Word Advice on the Power Point presentation is isolated, not part of a larger understanding toward purpose. Moreover, the information on the slides truly dealing with process is minute: five bullets about invention schemes. Yet, if they cannot generate ideas, students will not have words and sentences to correct. Furthermore, the bullets about advice at the composition or paragraph level, where ideas take shape, are also subjugated. Finally, the directive bullets (numbering eight), convey the notion that each piece of writing follows a set of prescriptive steps. First, students read the prompt. This of course implies that all writing is in response to a prompt, which does not allow for generative writing. Second, students are directed to identify the audience and purpose. Coming directly after the directive to read the prompt, this second directive is out of place. If students must read a prompt, the audience and purpose are decided for them. The final two directives, copy onto final draft paper in your best handwriting and make sure it fits inside the black box, again indicate that all writing is for a test situation (the “black box” is the 26-line writing paper for the STAAR writing test) or is only handwritten, negating digital options, presentations, and the like. As a first-year writing teacher in her first weeks in the classroom, Hannah values surface-level writing elements over deep, thought-

provoking writing instruction, as evidenced by her teaching artifacts and her classroom practices.

Classroom Observation Two: Narrow Understanding of Writing Conditions

Five months later, I visit Hannah's classroom again, this time one week before the 7th grade STAAR Writing test. Rather than a formal field observation, this visit is part of a bigger tour of classrooms that I am making of all secondary English Language Arts classes in our district. My purpose is to provide a kind of moral support for our ELA teachers. Because the state accountability system rewards campuses that score well on STAAR tests, teachers whose students must take these tests feel strong pressure to have high test scores, so I want to reassure teachers that they have worked hard and their students are prepared. My message to ELA teachers, not only on this day but in our meetings and through communication from my office, is that the best test preparation is strong pedagogy. My mantra is always, "Do the right things in class and the test will take care of itself." On this day, at the end of March, Hannah's class is playing a review game when I walk in. Her students, without exception, are all engaged in her questioning, listening intently and animatedly yelling out responses to her questions. She asks, "What happens if we add too much personal experience?" Several students shout, "It becomes a personal essay!" As noted earlier, on this year's STAAR Writing test, 7th grade students will no longer be required to write both an expository essay and a personal narrative as they have had to in the past; instead, the personal narrative has been dropped and students will respond only to an expository prompt. With this line of questioning, Hannah is reinforcing the idea that expository writing does not contain personal experience. I note that at an earlier district meeting of 7th grade English Language Arts teachers, we had a lengthy discussion about the

use of personal experience and personal details in expository writing, explaining that depending on how the personal is used, it can be quite effective. I and my curriculum department colleagues showed examples of high-scoring expository student essays (scored by Pearson under the direction of the Texas Education Agency) that did indeed contain personal examples and details. Our message was that rhetorical situation should guide student writers, not pre-conceived notions about the kinds of details and examples students should and should not include. During that meeting, the district's 7th grade English Language Arts teachers were reluctant to accept that students could use the personal pronoun "I" or give personal examples, even after we had showed them high-scoring essays that included both. Now, one week before the 7th grade STAAR Writing test, Hannah's advice to her students challenges the district guidance. The next question of the review game continues the theme of expository writing rules. Hannah asks, "What can we add to expository essays to add details?" Then, in a back-and-forth exchange, Hannah offers three options with the students shouting back each time: Reasons? No! Main idea? No! Thesis? No! After this third "No!" Hannah reminds students of their elaboration technique handout. The techniques listed on the handout, shown below, include techniques that are dependent on rhetorical situation. For example, next to "Quotations" is the sentence, "Words of an expert validate your point" and next to "Visuals" is "Charts and graphs convey a lot of information in a little space." Both examples are appropriate for some rhetorical situations, but certainly not for the 26-line STAAR Writing composition. Students do not have access to outside sources in order to find quotations nor do they have the technical capability to create a chart or graph. Moreover, drawing a chart or graph on the one page allowed for the composition would be out of the question because it would take up too much space. A third example on

the elaboration technique handout is “Reasons,” which Hannah has just ruled out as an option during the review game.

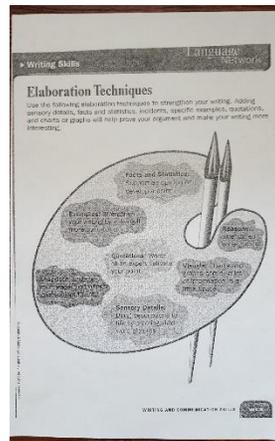


Fig. 3. Elaboration Techniques Handout

So, as revealed by this classroom review game, Hannah does not have a complete understanding of rhetorical situation and how the moves that writers make are dependent on it. Her lack of understanding is not surprising given that she has had no coursework in composition theory or composition pedagogy. Instead, she depends on curriculum resources from various sources; in this case, the elaboration techniques handout is from a student workbook published by McDougall-Littell from which Hannah has made copies. The resource is not a district-adopted resource, however. The district uses Prentice Hall as its English Language Arts textbook and curriculum materials, but like most teachers, Hannah chooses from a variety of resources when deciding what to use in her classroom. The implication of picking and choosing from several different resources is that, lacking an awareness or understanding of composition theory and pedagogy, the materials often conflict and do not lead to appropriate scaffolding. In our first interview, conducted at the end of her first year of teaching, Hannah tells me that one of the things she would do differently the next year is that she would incorporate another resource: “One of my

students actually showed me this little mini foldable book where they broke down each step of the writing process. And they had it on their desk every time we wrote essays and I was like, that's a great tool, I think there are some kids that are really visual and who would like to have something like that so that was an idea that I had seen." When I ask where the student got the booklet, I learn that the resource came from a writing tutor the school had hired to help with students who were in danger of not passing the 7th grade STAAR Writing test. Hannah's desire to incorporate this resource shows her willingness to help her students, but it also reveals a dependence on all manner of sources—in this case, an outside writing tutor (whom she does not know); in the earlier case, a student workbook that is not part of the school's official curriculum.

Classroom Observations Three and Five: Reading Privileged over Writing

In April 2016, near the end of Hannah's first year of teaching, I visit her classroom once again. Notably, her students have already taken the 7th grade STAAR Writing test but in another two weeks, they must take the 7th grade STAAR Reading test. On this day, a beautiful Spring Thursday before a three-day-weekend, Hannah's students are surprisingly calm and on-task throughout the class period, a testament to Hannah's strong grasp of classroom management. The day's lesson revolves around what Hannah has written on the whiteboard as the "Big Question": Why is it important to picture scenes from reading? The objective for the day is written as "SWBAT: illustrate examples of tone, mood, flashback, and foreshadowing." It takes me a few minutes to figure out that "SWBAT" means "students will be able to. . ." and when I do, I realize that this class period will be focused on reading, not writing. Our district, though, takes a fully integrated reading and writing approach, recognizing and valuing writing's ability to both cause and reinforce learning

(Emig, “Writing as a Mode of Learning”). This expectation to use writing to teach other content and skills is communicated through our professional development and curriculum documents. On this day in April, though, Hannah’s posted agenda does not specifically indicate that the students will have any writing activities. Composing, however, takes many forms and as I observe the class I realize that the students will be literally illustrating their perceptions of the day’s reading material. In an activity they began the day before, called “Stop, Drop, and Draw,” the students are to draw a picture of a scene in the story they read in class. After today’s multiple-choice quiz over the story’s plot details, Hannah gives students five minutes to finish up yesterday’s drawing of whatever scene they’ve deemed most important to the story. When the five minutes are up, students turn in their papers and the class is on to the next activity, reading a new story out loud. In the final twenty minutes of class, students take turns reading from the textbook and there is no discussion and no writing. In our after-class debrief, I decidedly take on one of Newkirk’s “default positions” to intervene when teaching practices seem ineffective. I discuss with Hannah the necessity to use writing to make cognitive connections and explain how she could have expanded her existing lesson plans to include writing. First, she could have included a written component to her “Stop, Drop, and Draw” activity, requiring students to explain in writing how their symbolic representation was an important element in the story. This critical step, which was missing from Hannah’s class activity, would have helped students show, in Emig’s terms, “systematic connections and relationships” (“Writing as a mode of Learning” 12). Second, a more effective assessment than the multiple-choice quiz over plot details would have been a constructed response in which students wrote about their understanding of the story. This way, students would have demonstrated their analysis and synthesis of tone, mood, flashback, and foreshadowing, all elements that Hannah had articulated as goals for the day’s

lesson. Hannah takes careful notes as we discuss this advice and tells me that she was focusing more on reading now that the writing test was over. I remind her that writing can help her teach reading, that they are connected processes—consumption and production—and she says, “Yes, I know. But sometimes I just feel like I don’t have enough time to teach both, so now that we’re getting ready for the reading test, I need to really focus more on reading.”

This same focus on reading with no attention to writing is apparent in my fifth and final visit to Hannah’s classroom, so I am including a gloss of this visit here, out of chronological order. As their lesson, the class reads aloud Act II of *A Christmas Carol*. During the read-aloud, Hannah stops periodically to explain what words mean or to ask clarifying questions about the plot. When they are finished with Act II, students have questions to answer about plot and theme, so they spend the remainder of the class working silently on that activity. I note that on this day, the December following my third classroom observation eight months before, Hannah’s students again do not use writing to construct meaning for themselves. The questions they must answer are all at the factual or conceptual knowledge level of Bloom’s revised taxonomy.

Classroom Observation Four: Prescriptive Writing

Near the end of September in 2016, Hannah has been teaching for a full year. She has attended summer training in AVID, a program whose goal is to help traditionally under-represented students be more prepared for post-secondary education. The week-long professional development focuses on rigorous teaching strategies and the importance of scaffolding instruction to help students make strong cognitive connections. Though the training does not spend time teaching about educational theory, Vygotsky’s zone of proximal

development and Bruner's description of scaffolding are at the center of AVID's program. In addition, by this time Hannah has also attended training on a new district resource called *Writing Coach*. *Writing Coach* is a print and computer-based writing curriculum that uses a rhetorical approach to writing, with students learning about the connections between audience, purpose, and message and about the recursive nature of writing, revising, and editing. By this time in September, each English Language Arts classroom teacher has received a class set of *Writing Coach* books, a Teacher's Edition with abundant editorial content about how to teach writing with a rhetorical focus, and the aforementioned training in how to best use the program.

When I call to set up this classroom observation, Hannah tells me that she wants me to come on September 20th because she will be focusing on the writing process. I ask her if she will be using *Writing Coach* on that day, too, but she says no, she has a Power Point presentation planned. I think back to our first classroom observation and the Power Point Hannah had used then and wonder how much it will have changed in one year. When I enter her classroom on our agreed-upon day, her students are filing into class and the day's agenda is projected from Hannah's computer onto the whiteboard:

- Warm up: 10 minutes of SSR (silent, sustained reading)
- Have two different colored highlighters on your desk
- Writing Process notes booklet
- Analyze Expository Essay

During the ten minutes of silent reading, Hannah takes care of housekeeping duties like attendance and passing out papers. One of the handouts students receive is a sheet of paper folded into eighths to make a small booklet. It is the same writing process booklet that Hannah had mentioned in our interview the previous May. At that time, she said one of her

students had received the booklet from a writing tutor and she was looking forward to adding the resource to her repertoire of writing tools. Now, she is indeed about to introduce the booklet to her students.

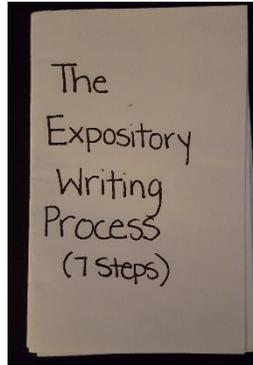


Fig. 4. Writing Process Booklet

The introduction comes in the form of a Power Point presentation. Hannah tells her class to follow along and fill in the blanks—she goes through her slides and talks through the information in the booklet. On each page, Hannah has written directives but has left out key words. Rather than a Cloze-reading exercise wherein students must infer the missing words, this is a copying exercise in that students are to duplicate the missing words from what they see on the screen. Hannah directs the exercise by going through the screens and noting the information she wants to highlight.

“We’re going to learn the steps of the writing process, okay? We’ve talked about writing process, we wrote our diagnostic expository essay, remember? So we’ve written an essay before, but now we’re going to kind of backtrack. We’re going to look at, what are the steps I need to take to get through that essay, okay?” Hannah directs everyone to write their name on the booklet, saying that it will be a very important resource and they will not want to lose it. This is a very large class—32 students—and all are on task.

“Step one,” Hannah says as her students look on, pens in hand ready to fill in their blanks, “we get our prompt. So understand—I put in bold what you’re filling in— understand the **prompt**. You have to understand what the prompt is asking us. Then, **cross out** unimportant information. Remember we did that on our last essay? We read that cute little story and crossed out the information from the prompt we didn’t need?”

The students dutifully follow along as Hannah goes through all seven steps on the booklet. No students ask questions or ask for help. The seven steps, each with multiple sub-steps are:

- 1) Understand the prompt; Cross out unimportant information; Highlight the prompt; purpose = explain
- 2) Brainstorm good ideas; Make a web diagram; Graphic organizer
- 3) Create a plan and thesis statement; Subject/Opinion/Reason/Reason = Thesis
- 4) Outline; Intro/Reason #1/Example/Reason #2/Detail/Conclusion
- 5) Rough draft; Use framework to help you; “Write with your heart.”
- 6) Revise and Edit; ARMS/CUPS; “Write with your head.”
- 7) Final draft; Check handwriting; Must fit in box; Read through one last time.

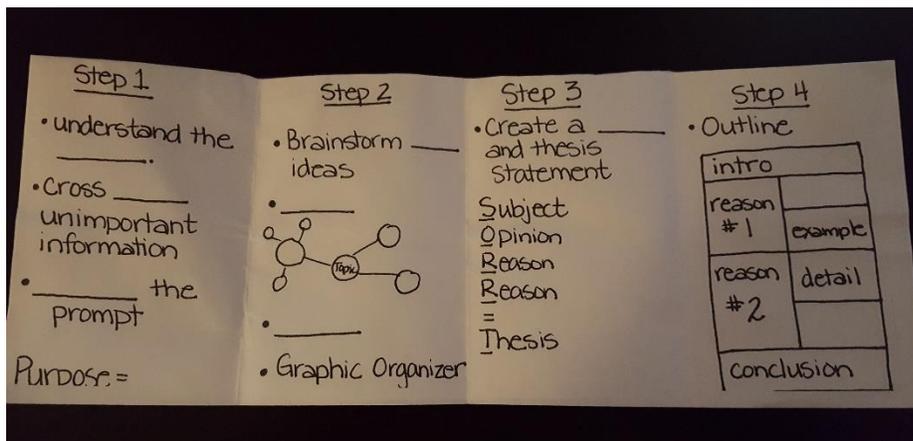


Fig. 5. Text of Writing Process Booklet

As I did with the Power Point presentation from a year earlier, I analyzed the writing process booklet as a teaching artifact. Using the same coding scheme, I found that while the percentage of Directives has increased tremendously, there is much less attention to Word Advice. The table below shows a comparison between the writing process Power Point presentation in the first weeks of Hannah’s teaching career and the writing process booklet she handed out in her second year.

Table 1. Codes and Frequency Comparison

Category	Frequency in Power Point	Frequency in Booklet
Directive	8 (13%)	12 (60%)
Composition Advice	8 (13%)	3 (15%)
Word Advice	43 (67%)	3 (15%)
Invention Schemes	5 (8%)	2 (10%)

Of the twelve directives in the writing process booklet, four of them are specifically directed toward STAAR-test writing: Understand the prompt; Cross out unimportant information; Highlight the prompt; and Must write in the box. Moreover, in her teaching about the writing process booklet, Hannah’s explanations and examples reference test writing. Two elements of the writing process booklet, however, indicate that in her second year Hannah has moved more toward an understanding of writing as a way of constructing knowledge. Her inclusion of “Write with your heart” and “Write with your head” appears to recognize student agency in a way that the remaining directives do not. Three months later, though, as Hannah and I discuss writing instruction in our final interview, she does not articulate an understanding of student agency or of constructed knowledge. When I ask her how her approach to writing instruction has changed from her first year of teaching, she says, “We do a lot more revising and editing now and talking about how when we get those revising and editing passages on our final or on the STAAR test, we should treat that like it’s a rough draft. We need to go back and we better revise and edit because those are all the questions,

and how do you make them better?” So Hannah’s reference point is the standardized writing test, not revision as a recursive practice. She goes on, “But I think the biggest difference, honestly, was that we stopped and spent multiple days just talking about the writing process period. We didn’t actually write, we just talked about what happens at each step. What are the things that happen at each step to improve my writing before, during, after. . . I realized that last year, my students didn’t go through the writing process. I mean, I taught them, but it was like in day. So I saw them skipping a lot of steps.” Finally, Hannah brings up the writing process booklet that has been, gauging by the number of times she has mentioned it in our conversations, an important artifact in her classroom. She tells me, “We made a little foldable book that with each step and what it actually looked like and what it should include and that’s been a really helpful tool. Every time we write I tell them, pull out that booklet and I make sure we go through each step.” Hannah’s discussion of the writing process belies an understanding that her students, every time they write, undergo a process of thinking, generating trial text, recursive revising, and committing text to paper. That each student may approach this process differently does not occur to Hannah, who, still early in her career, sees writing as a neat, linear progression that has little connection to cognitive processes.

When I began this project, I set out to discover how Hannah approached writing instruction, how the contexts in which she teaches influence her pedagogy, what resources she draws upon, and what roles school districts—represented most specifically by people like me, in a curriculum coordinator position—play in order to help teachers with the demands of writing instruction. We may not be able to generalize from one case, but we can draw meaning from it and the meaning to be had from Hannah’s experience extends to

meaning for school districts, for teacher preparation programs, and even for the field of composition studies.

Foremost, Hannah's experience as a novice teacher shows that in a standardized testing environment, on-demand writing defined by the tested genre (in this case, a 26-line expository composition) becomes the only writing pedagogy. Though Hannah was able to articulate the narrowness of such a focus, she was not able to reconcile the conflict between a standardized approach and a more authentic, rhetorical approach to writing instruction. In our last interview, Hannah told me, "In my teaching in the back of my head, it's I have to get them ready for this test. Which is right, but then I'm also like, I also want to make sure they're able to write, period. Not just because of the STAAR expository writing essay." Yet in Hannah's classroom instruction and activities, every essay is in response to a STAAR-like prompt and every final draft is written on a facsimile of the 26-line test paper. This narrow focus persists even though the district Hannah teaches in encourages both a rhetorical and genre approach. It's important to note that the Texas curriculum standards for secondary English Language Arts similarly demand a rhetorical and genre approach, as does the *Writing Coach* program, which is the district-sponsored and purchased curriculum. As part of this two-pronged approach all three sources (district curriculum, state standards, and the *Writing Coach* program) require writing instruction that teaches students to consider audience and purpose in order to plan effective writing moves, but also to teach students the features of different genres of writing. In order to meet these goals, composition pedagogy in secondary English Language Arts classrooms should follow what we know from the field of composition studies. As described by Doug Hesse, in a piece called "We Know What Works in Teaching Composition," the best writing courses (and in the context of the piece, "best" means most effective) include these practices, as informed by decades of writing research:

- Students have ample opportunities to write. Professors expect them to write frequently and extensively, and we demand and reward serious effort.
- Professors carefully sequence writing tasks. The idea is progressively to expand on students' existing abilities and experiences.
- Professors coach the process. We offer strategies and advice, encouragement and critique, formative and summative assessments.
- Courses provide instruction and practice on all aspects of writing. Attend to the form and conventions of specific genres? Yes. Talk about creativity, invention (how to generate ideas), grammar, and style? Certainly, but also discuss things like logic and accuracy in writing, and how to fit a piece to various audience needs and expectations.
- Courses use readings not only as context and source materials (which is vital in the academic and civic spheres) but also as models—and not only static models of form but also as maps to be decoded as to how their writers might have proceeded, why, and to what effect.
- Professors teach key concepts about writing in order to help students consolidate and transfer skills from one writing occasion to the next. But we recognize that declarative knowledge is made significant only through practice and performance (see Bullet No. 1).
- Student writing and student writers are the course's focus. Everything else serves those ends.

Of course, the practices described by Hesse are particular to college composition courses, but the underlying pedagogical concepts are not unique to post-secondary education. In Hannah's classroom, none of these practices were in play in the five times I visited her classroom, nor does she talk about these practices or create teaching materials that indicate she is aware of them. Instead, her entire understanding of writing comes from the narrow expectations of the 7th grade STAAR writing test. Hannah's emphasis on the writing process indicates that she knows the language of composition pedagogy, but her insistence that the process is a prescribed, delineated set of steps underscores an incomplete understanding of cognitive processes. And this incomplete understanding has further implications. Because she doesn't truly grasp how writing is a way of learning or how scaffolding can help students move away from their zones of proximal development (see Emig, Bruner, and Vygotsky), Hannah does not know how, as Hesse describes in the above set of practices, to sequence writing activities or to coach the writing process.

V. CONCLUSION: NOW WHAT?

I very firmly want to iterate that I do not fault Hannah for this lack of understanding. Like a third of the secondary English Language Arts teachers in the New Braunfels area that I surveyed, she has come into the profession with no coursework in composition theory or composition pedagogy. This experience mirrors that of early-career teachers described by Morgan and Pytash, Smagorinsky (in “Teaching Grammar and Writing: A Beginning Teacher’s Dilemma”) and Sharp. As noted by Smagorinsky, literature courses are privileged over writing courses in undergraduate English teacher preparation programs, and in Hannah’s case, even then she has only taken two literature courses. Since she holds a middle-grades teaching certificate, her coursework has not given her the deep content knowledge that is necessary for secondary English Language Arts. My project does not purport to research teacher preparation programs and how they should be amended, but some promising work is currently taking place in the state of Texas. In March 2017, all Texas principals with first-year-teachers on their campuses received a survey from the Texas Education Agency. The purpose of the survey is to collect data on the performance of first-year teachers and the effectiveness of educator preparation programs in preparing teachers to succeed in the classroom. This work by the Texas Education Agency is a good first step in assessing the programs that serve pre-service teachers, but specific programs have a role in assessing their programs as well. Knowing the role that writing plays in English Language Arts curriculum, both as a content in and of itself and as a mode of learning, programs that certify secondary English Language Arts teachers must ensure they include composition theory and composition pedagogy as required courses.

Taking one or two courses in composition theory or composition pedagogy would not be sufficient, of course. New teachers need support once they enter their classrooms.

The most critical element of Hannah’s experience for me is a very practical one: my school district—and here I will generalize and will say all districts—must do a better job understanding the testing climate and context that completely shapes inexperienced teachers’ understanding of all elements of writing—instruction, composition, process, and product. Though I have focused here only on one teacher, as part of my job I have observed many, many English Language Arts classrooms. Each one, if it is a STAAR-tested grade level, has the same kind of attention to on-demand test writing, but not until I looked deeply into Hannah’s experience did I realize how ubiquitous the focus really is. Hannah’s context, including her colleagues such as the English department chair, the writing tutor, and even her campus instructional coach, all shape her understanding of writing pedagogy. The district’s resources, including material resources like *Writing Coach* as well as training resources and curriculum documents, do little to outweigh the advice Hannah receives from her campus colleagues. Part of the reason is certainly because Hannah has much more access, and more immediate access, to her colleagues. But this is good information for someone in my position. By understanding the influences on Hannah’s pedagogy, I can, as a representative of my school district, be much more deliberate in developing professional learning opportunities and in writing curriculum documents that recognize and even confront new teachers’ incomplete understanding of composition theory and pedagogy.

As a field, composition studies has been primarily focused on writing at the post-secondary level. With only a few notable exceptions such as Janet Emig’s “The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders,” research and scholarship regarding theory and pedagogy do not typically include secondary English Language Arts. Yet secondary ELA teachers face many of the same issues that post-secondary teachers of writing face, especially those who are tasked with teaching developmental writing courses. There are some researchers who are

actively bridging the divide between secondary and post-secondary research in English Language Arts. Peter Smagorinsky and Robert Tremmel, to name two, are active in the field of English Education and frequently write about matters in both realms. More research that spans secondary and post-secondary composition issues is necessary so that secondary English Language Arts departments will benefit from the scholarship coming out of composition studies.

Though I began observing Hannah in the Fall of 2015, in many ways I started this project in 1990, when I was 22 years old, facing that classroom full of Seniors and wondering why their writing didn't improve just because I marked all over their essays, correcting their misspelled words and misplaced commas. I think about all those students who sat in my classroom in those years as I had to figure out, for myself, a strong writing pedagogy. I'm determined that the young teachers in my district won't have to take years to learn that writing is a way to construct knowledge and that it doesn't have to fit onto a 26-line box handed out by the state of Texas.

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