

---

Process Writing in the Classrooms of Eleven Fifth-Grade Teachers with Different Orientations to Teaching and Learning

Author(s): Marjorie Y. Lipson, James Mosenthal, Patricia Daniels, Haley Woodside-Jiron

Source: *The Elementary School Journal*, Vol. 101, No. 2 (Nov., 2000), pp. 209-231

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1002343>

Accessed: 18/08/2010 10:23

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=ucpress>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



The University of Chicago Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Elementary School Journal*.

# Process Writing in the Classrooms of Eleven Fifth-Grade Teachers with Different Orientations to Teaching and Learning

Marjorie Y. Lipson  
James Mosenthal  
Patricia Daniels

*University of Vermont*

Haley Woodside-Jiron

*State University of New York at Albany*

## Abstract

In this study we examined process approaches to writing in the classrooms of 11 teachers with 4 orientations to teaching and learning. Using observational and interview data, student work samples, and classroom artifacts, 11 case composites were generated of fifth-grade teachers who used process writing approaches and were members of 4 belief clusters. Cross-case analysis was conducted using 6 dimensions of writing instruction. All teachers engaged students in the recursive steps of process writing, but there was significant variability in other aspects of their writing programs. Epistemological beliefs about teaching and learning were highly predictive of the type of writing instruction, but these were mediated by experience and context. Of the 11 teachers, 6 took a procedural approach to the teaching of writing, and the other 5 used a workshop approach. None of the 6 "procedural" teachers used peer conferencing, and even teacher-directed writing conferences were peripheral to the writing programs of 4 of these 6 teachers. In contrast, 4 of the 5 workshop teachers used both teacher-led and peer conferences as a central part of their writing programs. These conferences were also different. Whereas 5 of the 6 procedural teachers focused almost exclusively on mechanics, all 5 of the other teachers focused their conference talk on effective writing—selecting appropriate words, writing effective leads, and so on. Other aspects of the writing programs varied as well. The amount and duration of sustained writing time, student control over ideas, and ownership of the editorial process differed across the 11 classrooms.

## Writing in Schools

Starting in the late 1970s, attacks on the role of writing in both elementary and secondary schools (Applebee, 1991; Britton, 1975; Graves, 1978; Murray, 1980) prompted a radical revision in ideas about classroom writing and the appropriate way to teach students to write. Generally, conventional

approaches to writing were criticized for focusing too strongly on the products versus the process of writing (Murray, 1980) and for neglecting to develop in students either a sense of ownership or a sense of purpose and audience. In his synthesis of this research, Fulwiler (1987, p. 7) concluded that "transactional (or informational or communicative) writing dominates the curriculum, while there is little or no evidence of expressive (or personal) writing." His analysis also suggested that students rarely wrote for authentic audiences or purposes.

These criticisms led to revised ideas about the nature of writing and about appropriate types of instruction, ideas that are currently embraced by many teachers. In the literature and among teachers, there appears to be an unquestioning use of the term "writing process" or "process writing" to characterize writing and writing instruction. In our original study of writing instructional practices statewide (Lipson, Mosenthal, & Mekkelsen, 1995), we were struck by the unanimity with which teachers said that they taught "writing process." We did not doubt these assertions. Instead, what was clear was that different teachers had adopted and adapted writing process instruction in different ways. What we questioned was the meaning of the idea of writing process and writing instruction to teachers and to educators in general. For this reason, we chose to study the meaning and use of process writing across a variety of epistemological stances or orientations to teaching and learning.

### Defining Writing Process

Contemporary conceptions of writing tend to be characterized by a focus on process but attend as well to the uses and development of writing (Dyson & Freedman, 1991). Like most prevailing models of the writing process, Flower and Hayes's (1981) cognitive process model of writing depicts the processes of planning, drafting, and revising as conditioned by the writing task and the writer's prior knowledge relevant

to the task. Most important, these processes function recursively, responsive to writers' monitoring of what they want to accomplish and how well they are accomplishing it. Thus, at any moment during writing, a writer may replan, redraft, and revise with consequences for what is written. In effect, Flower and Hayes presented a model of writing-as-thinking that has proven powerful as a way of characterizing writing—and therefore what needs to be taught (see Cunningham & Allington, 1999).

This dynamic and interactive description of writing as a process is substantially different from earlier ideas that tended to privilege the teaching of skills at the sentence and paragraph level and focused evaluation on the final product alone. From this different description arise several critical components of writing. First, these contemporary views acknowledge the primacy of purpose and audience. Authors write for specific purposes, but, according to Brannon (1985, p. 19), "the dominant motive for writing is self-expression; communicative and aesthetic abilities depend on the nurturing of the expressive capacity." This purpose is a literary one and is discussed frequently in the writing literature. There are other purposes for writing, however, especially in schools. Both Atwell (1990) and Fulwiler (1980, 1987) have emphasized the use of writing as a "tool for thought," in which people write to unearth their own understandings and feelings. Journals of all types are frequently used for this purpose. In her longitudinal research, Bright (1995) found that the intermediate teachers she studied emphasized these two purposes but others as well. At times students also wrote for enjoyment, to communicate using a particular form (e.g., to learn to write in a certain genre), to prepare for future school purposes, and to remember or explain something (pp. 43–48). Interestingly, Bright also found that students in some classrooms wrote "for the purpose of *practicing the steps in the writing process*" (p. 50, emphasis added). She noted that this suggested that,

for some teachers, "teaching the writing process is as important as writing *as* a process" (p. 50). The audience, then, can clearly be oneself (Atwell, 1990; Murray, 1980) as well as others. In addition, Langer and Applebee (1987) noted that in schools, the teacher served as an audience for writing during instructional dialogue and evaluation.

In older views of writing, particularly as it unfolded in schools, concern for ownership was virtually nonexistent. Topic selection and idea generation were the domain of the teacher. Editing and revision were relatively rare because the only writing under discussion was the final product, when it was too late for any alterations or reconsideration. Although ownership is central to authentic writing and authorship, these aspects of writing and the writing process worked against the grain of most traditional elementary classrooms. As Applebee (1991, p. 554) has argued, "In writing, opportunities for ownership occur when topics call for students to explore their own experiences and opinions or to elaborate upon a point of view." The extent to which these opportunities are available in elementary classrooms may determine the extent to which teachers are able to translate newer views of writing and writing process into practice.

The interaction of use, development, and processes of writing captures the complexity of writing and the difficulty of teaching it. Consequently, writing *instruction* is complex, demanding teachers who are astute observers of children's writing and who are capable of making instructional decisions responsive to writing issues that children are grappling with as they write (Dyson & Freedman, 1991).

#### Implications for Writing Instruction in the Intermediate Grades

The writing process is anything but linear when conceived as a cognitive process. Instructional approaches that assign sequential planning, drafting, and revising stages miss the point of the cognitive model

of writing. Cognitive models depict writing as a thinking, problem-solving process that is masked, not learned, when approached as an instructional formula.

This is not to say that the teaching of writing must proceed in a laissez-faire manner. The pedagogy that came out of the work of Calkins (1994) and Graves (1983) described a writing workshop in which children wrote with some control over what to write about and how to write it. This contrasts with more structured models of writing instruction that, traditionally, emphasized spelling, grammar, and textual organization (e.g., paragraphing). It can be argued that in the writing workshop the art of teaching writing is realized in the conferencing between teachers and students. As students write, teachers circulate among them and guide the writing depending on the issues with which a student is struggling (e.g., content, the mode, strategies for proceeding, self-evaluation, editing). The interaction necessary in this approach led Calkins (1994, p. 223) to assert that "teacher-student and peer conferences are at the heart of teaching writing. Through them students learn to interact with their own writing." Florio-Ruane and Lensmire (1989) explained writing as the use of higher-order thinking skills in meaningful, social writing situations. They referred to the highly interactive character of conferencing in the writing workshop as providing writing scaffolds and stressed the need to embed the writing process in meaningful contexts for students (e.g., a personal narrative or pen pal letter). Similarly, Raphael and Hiebert (1996) pointed to the need for choice and purpose in writing in order to establish authenticity and meaningfulness for students. This kind of teaching requires the ability to listen to students read and talk about their writing and to respond as opposed to directing or imposing a direction for continued writing (Heard, 1989).

As Fulwiler (1987, p. 37) noted, "Knowledge of the writing process can influence a teacher's pedagogy in two distinct, yet re-

lated ways." First, a teacher who understands contemporary perspectives on writing will make assignments that promote a view of writing "as involving various actions which take place over time and shows them how to gain some control over the actions" (p. 38). Thus, teachers will expect students to make multiple drafts and will interact differently with students during each draft depending on what is required to move a student and a piece along. Teachers' knowledge of the writing process should also influence their use of writing as a vehicle for helping students to understand ideas (Atwell, 1990).

There is a balance to be struck between the didactic telling of information and the absence of information about how to write well. Instruction should focus on helping developing authors become more accomplished writers as opposed to creating a series of excellent written products. "If a piece of writing gets better but the writer has learned nothing that will help him or her another day on another piece, then the conference was a waste of everyone's time" (Calkins, 1994, p. 228).

Many authors have noted that there is a role for explicit instruction about writing throughout the process. Calkins (1994), for example, suggested that minilessons should be used to convey to students important information about writing strategies and skills. Similarly, Graves (1994, p. xvi) remarked about his own early work and that of others: "We've learned much more about the essentials of teaching writing and how to use our time more effectively. Readers of my earlier book will find *A Fresh Look at Writing* more assertive: although listening to children is still the heart of the book, I think we now know better when to step in, when to teach, and when to expect more of our students. . . . We've learned that, right from the start, teachers need to teach more." The goal of engaging children in the writing process is to help them gain control over the types of recursive activity characteristic of mature authors. From a pedagogical per-

spective, children must learn to ask questions about their writing.

This is clearly not easy to accomplish, and teachers have received uneven professional development in the teaching of writing. In the northeastern United States, the tradition of process writing evolved early, and many teachers began in the early 1980s to take advantage of courses and workshops. Often, whole school districts committed to professional development in writing instruction. Thus, many teachers in Vermont espouse the framework of process writing and writers' workshop. As might be expected, however, their knowledge and expertise vary, and many confess that they missed important professional development in this area. Even when teachers receive equivalent professional development, their own beliefs and perspectives affect their instructional decision making (O'Brien & Norton, 1991; Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, & Lloyd, 1991).

In the present study we examined teachers' commitment to the writing process and the fidelity of their instructional program to contemporary perspectives on writing discussed above. In addition, we attempted to align teachers' approaches to writing instruction with their beliefs or orientations to teaching and learning generally (see Mosenthal, Lipson, Mekkelsen, Daniels, & Woodside-Jiron, 1996).

## Method

We used a case study and cross-case analysis to describe instructional practice, examine variability among teachers with a similar orientation to teaching, and look for similarities and differences among teachers with different orientations. The data for this investigation were collected as part of a much larger longitudinal study of teachers' implementation of a statewide portfolio assessment mandate. The original purpose of the larger investigation was to examine fifth-grade teachers' perspectives on a state-imposed system for the portfolio assessment of writing at grade 5 (Vermont As-

essment Program, or VAP; see Abruscato, 1993; and Hewitt, 1993). We have reported on the main research questions of this study elsewhere (see Daniels, Woodside-Jiron, & Lipson, 1996; and Mosenthal, Mekkelsen, & Woodside-Jiron, 1997, for further information).

As one component of this larger investigation, we followed 12 teachers, representing four orientations to teaching and learning, as they negotiated the first year of implementation. Of these 12 teachers, 11 stated that they used a process approach to writing, and it is these 11 teachers who are the focus of the present investigation. For the purposes of this study, a process approach is defined as a writing program or instruction that involves a recursive cycle of planning, drafting or composing, revising, proofreading or editing, and publishing. During the 1994–1995 school year we spent approximately 10 full days with each teacher, observing in her classroom and interviewing her about her teaching and assessment beliefs and practices.

### Participants

The 11 teachers who constitute the subjects for this study were drawn from a much larger sample of teachers who responded to a survey distributed to all grade 5 teachers in the state during spring 1994. Using a mailing list from the state department of education, approximately 500 surveys were distributed. However, not all people listed were practicing grade 5 teachers, and there was some redundancy on the list. A total of 177 grade 5 teachers responded to this first survey (a 40% return rate for targeted respondents). The survey contained items designed to determine teachers' knowledge about, and commitment to, a newly implemented statewide assessment program. In addition, the survey contained Likert scale items focused on teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning. These items allowed us to examine teachers' beliefs from four perspectives. Two of these scales had to do with views of learning—behaviorist and in-

teractive. Teachers expressed their attachment to beliefs associated with each scale. For example, teachers were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with statements such as: "(teachers should) use privileges, prizes, and rewards to motivate students" (behaviorist item) or "(teachers should) encourage students to participate in assessment and evaluation" (interactionist item). Two additional scales addressed views of classroom organization and orientation to teaching—child centered or systems—such as "(teachers should) make decisions about the curriculum based on each student's abilities and interests" or "(teachers should) require all students to take part in every activity." This aspect of the study has been presented elsewhere (Lipson, Mosenthal, & Woodside-Jiron, 1999), so we describe the method and resulting groups only briefly.

Teachers whose responses to the survey were similar across the four belief scales were grouped by means of a cluster analysis, testing the strength of linkage among all four survey-based belief scale scores. Because previous research suggested that many teachers hold multiple, and sometimes competing, beliefs about both teaching and learning (Lipson & Goldhaber, 1993; O'Brien & Norton, 1991; Richardson et al., 1991), teachers received scores on all four scales (see Lipson et al., 1999, for further details about the belief scales and their development). Three-, four-, and five-cluster solutions were tested. This clustering procedure grouped teachers based on the similarity of their profiles on all four belief scale scores. The most stable and discriminating solution resulted in four groups, or clusters, of teachers (see Table 1).

The pattern of teachers' responses on the four belief scales was significantly different across the four groups. These differences led us to characterize the four groups as curricularist, inquiry, polytheoretic, and minimalist. To summarize, curricularist teachers had reasonably high (but not the

TABLE 1. Teacher Demographic Data and Summary of Group Scale Scores

Group/Teacher	Years Teaching	Degree/Year	Group Scale Scores
Curriculum-oriented (41% of respondents <sup>a</sup> ):			High scores on behaviorist and systems scales; lowest scores on interactionist and child-centered scales
Joyce	1	B.S., 1988	
Maura	20	B.S., 1971	
Robin	15	B.S. + , 1975	
Chloe	16	M.A., 1978	
Shannon	20	B.S., 1956; M.A., 1960; M.Ed., 1973	
Inquiry-process (19% of respondents):			Highest scores on interactionist and child-centered scales; high systems scores
Dana	12	B.A. + , 1982;	
Eve	20	M.Ed., 1993	
		B.S. + , 1974; M.Ed. in progress	
Polytheoretic (21% of respondents):			Highest scores on behaviorist and systems scales; also high scores on all scales
Pam	11	B.S., 1951	
Jesse	32	B.S., 1960	
Linda	27	B.S., 1964;	
		B.S. + 20, 1992	
Minimalist (18% of respondents):			Low to moderate scores on all four scales; no strong response to any one perspective
Leslie	9	B.S., 1978	

<sup>a</sup>These figures reflect teachers' responses on a statewide survey. Percentages show the proportion of respondents assigned to each cluster.

highest) scores on both behaviorist and systems scales. Perhaps more important, they also had the lowest mean scores on both the interactionist and child-centered scales. Teachers in this group tended to identify classroom organization and established curriculum as central to their beliefs about teaching and learning.

Inquiry teachers, in contrast, had the highest mean scores on interactionist and child-centered scales and the lowest scores on the behaviorist scale. Interestingly, their scores on the systems scales were similar to those of the curriculum-based teachers. Inquiry teachers were much more likely to assert the importance of student choice and process approaches to teaching and learning than teachers in other clusters.

Polytheoretic teachers tended to have high scores on several scales—even espousing apparently conflicting positions. They had the highest mean scores of any group on both the behaviorist and the systems scales (making them significantly different from their peers). However, they also had high scores on the interactionist scale

and the child-centered scales (making them more similar to inquiry-process teachers on those scales). In short, this group tended to score high on almost all belief scales. In contrast, minimalist teachers tended to have low to moderate scores on all four scales, seeming unwilling to adopt any perspective strongly. As a group, their mean scores were the lowest on the system scale, different from all other groups.

The 11 teachers in our study were selected as a stratified random sample of the larger group of 177, on the basis of their membership in one of the four belief clusters that emerged from the survey responses. The size of these clusters varied considerably, and we chose the 11 teachers<sup>1</sup> proportionate to the size of each cluster in the larger sample of all grade 5 teachers, resulting in the configuration shown in Table 1. In addition to selecting for variation in beliefs and practices, we selected teachers for maximum diversity in terms of their geographic location, school size and configuration, familiarity with the state assessment program, and years of experience.

TABLE 2. Summary of Differences between Curricularist and Inquiry Teachers

Writing Instructional Practices	Curriculum-Oriented Teachers <sup>a</sup>	Inquiry-Oriented Teachers <sup>b</sup>
Environment (quantity, management of sustained writing)	Short, discrete writing periods; few pieces undertaken; limited range of genre; constrained completion time	Lengthy periods of sustained writing; many pieces undertaken; wide range of genre; open-ended or ongoing time frame for writing
Ownership (locus of control for generation of ideas, decisions about editing/revising)	Primary determination of topics and editing is by teacher	Students are primary determinants of writing topic; students self-edit or edit in peer conferences
Instruction (role and nature)	Focus on procedural aspects of writing and/or no explicit language for instruction; little or no explicit instruction; isolated skill instruction not linked to students' own writing	Focus on writing and developing writers' abilities; explicit instruction or minilessons in small groups or individual conferences
Peer/teacher conferencing (function and nature)	Little peer conferencing; infrequent teacher conferences; teacher conferences focus on editing for grammar, usage, and mechanics	Regular peer conferencing; frequent teacher conferences; teacher conferences focus on developing writer effectiveness
Purpose and audience	Consistent focus on learning the stages of the writing process, writing for personal expression, in a particular form or genre; occasional focus on remembering/explaining, discovering own ideas for writing, or writing to communicate with others; rare focus on writing for enjoyment or future school preparation	Consistent focus on writing for personal expression, in a particular form or genre, and to communicate; focus on remembering/explaining, discovering own ideas for writing and for enjoyment; rare focus on writing for future school preparation or learning the stages of the writing process

<sup>a</sup>Curriculum-oriented teachers include the five curricularist teachers (Joyce, Maura, Robin, Chloe, Shannon) and Jesse, a polytheoretic teacher.

<sup>b</sup>Inquiry-oriented teachers include the two inquiry-process teachers (Dana and Eve) and Pam and Linda, two polytheoretic teachers.



As Table 1 clearly reveals, these 11 teachers were experienced. All except Joyce (all names are pseudonyms) had over 10 years experience. Because most completed their undergraduate education before process writing had gained wide acceptance, these teachers did not have access to information about process writing during their initial teacher preparation programs. If they learned about writing process instruction, that happened after they had started teaching. Importantly, only three teachers had completed formal degree programs after 1980: Joyce, Eve, and Dana. We should note that, although these teachers represented a particular perspective, it would be inaccurate to depict them as prototypes for one view or another. They taught in different settings and varied in their abilities to realize instructional plans and ideas. However, each one of the 11 teachers took her job seriously. Although the teachers' enthusiasm for process writing varied, each tried to teach writing consistent with her understanding of the goals of the process approach.

#### Data Sources and Analysis

We drew on several sources of information for the case studies and cross-case analyses. Each teacher wore a miniature microphone throughout 8 days of observation. In this way, we retained a complete record of the teacher's talk. These recordings also contained student responses and interactions with the teachers. During each observation, a researcher took field notes using a procedure of thick description (Geertz, 1973). Time was kept carefully in order to examine how much opportunity students had to engage in various literacy activities. These field notes included transcriptions of instructional exchanges and detailed descriptions of activities and student-student interactions. The data from these observations for each teacher were organized into casebooks. In addition to the transcripts and field notes, the casebooks contained documents that were related to the observations and/or described the contexts for each visit:

summaries of observer reactions/highlights, examples of representative student work, and copies of the state portfolios from these classrooms. We transcribed verbatim extended portions of relevant dialogue from these visits. As well, the casebooks contained the records of many, more casual, exchanges throughout the course of the year.

Lengthy, formal interviews at the beginning and end of the school year provided additional data. Each interview lasted approximately 2 hours. Researchers coded 13 interview items common to the pre- and postinterviews. For this study, seven of those items were examined closely. The focus items included questions about teachers' writing instruction and assessment, students' role in these practices, and teachers' judgments about the quality of written products. Interview responses were broken down by clauses. Each clause was coded according to references to four dimensions: classroom instruction or assessment; features of the writing process, writing workshop, collections of writing, or qualities of the written product; feedback, record keeping, the VAP criteria, or portfolio assessment; and modifications in assessment or instruction and sources of modification. Reliability was calculated for each dimension separately, with percentage agreements of .82, .83, .86, and .84, respectively.

The transcribed interviews, observational field notes, and documents were arranged in chronological order in the casebook. We examined the data, looking for primary patterns, using a content analysis procedure (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Patton, 1990). In doing so, we triangulated data sources. Interview data were examined for consistency with direct observations, and documents were analyzed for additional insights into the characterization of assessment and instructional practices we observed.

Frequent team meetings with the six researchers conducting case studies at the 12 sites provided an opportunity to discuss emerging trends, affirm perceptions, and develop interpretations. In this way, the po-

tential for bias that might arise from a single perspective was minimized. In preparing for the cross-case analyses, we paid particular attention to what teachers said about their own teaching—descriptions of their approach to teaching writing—and to in-depth examinations of the interactions that teachers had with students during writing and language arts periods. Wherever appropriate, we examined student-student interactions about writing as well.

We also searched the observational field notes for information relating to our analytic categories—especially those not directly probed in the interview, for example, classroom environment, ownership, purpose, and audience. Episodes, events, teachers' language, and so on, were summarized, along with the interview data, on a preliminary draft of a cross-case construct table (see Miles & Huberman, 1994). Key components for cross-case analysis followed from research on the writing process and also from the emerging themes of the case studies themselves. We discuss differences along the following dimensions: (1) classroom environment, including quantity of writing, management of writing time, and opportunities for sustained writing; (2) ownership, including the generation of ideas (locus of control—teacher vs. student) and decisions about editing and revision; (3) the role and nature of instruction; (4) the function and nature of teacher and peer conferencing; and (5) purpose and audience. With regard to purpose and audience, we used the categories of response observed by Bright (1995) and looked for evidence that students wrote for the following purposes: for personal expression, to practice a form of writing, to discover one's own ideas, for enjoyment, to prepare for future school tasks, to remember/explain, to communicate, and to learn the stages of the writing process. We give summary data for two teachers: Maura, a curricularist teacher, and Eve, an inquiry teacher (see Appendix). Similar summary tables were created for each of the 11 teachers.

## Results and Discussion

In the classrooms of all 11 teachers, students participated in all phases of the writing process (from brainstorming and selecting a topic through revision and "publishing"). There were, however, striking differences in instructional practice between teachers who were members of different clusters and also some intriguing differences among teachers within the same cluster. The 11 teachers created different contexts for writing, and the nature of instruction varied as well. As we examined writing instruction in these classrooms, the most visible contrasts involved members of the curricularist versus inquiry-process groups. Consequently, we focus our discussion on these groups, including other teachers from the polytheoretic and minimalist groups as they appear similar to the primary members of the group on program dimensions.

### Curricularist Orientation

The responses of the curricularist teachers on the belief scales aligned them most closely with behaviorist ideas ("teach skills in sequential order") and with a focus on establishing strong classroom structures ("require all students to do every activity"). With respect to classroom writing practices, curriculum-oriented teachers reported using writing skills sheets significantly more than the other groups. In contrast, they used writing workshop practices—peer conferences, writer's workshop, and minilessons—less frequently than the other groups (see Fig. 1).

#### *Classroom environment for writing.*

Curricularist teachers tended to move students through all phases of the writing process rigidly and as a whole class. They also tended to maintain more highly articulated periods in their daily schedule and control over topic selection (see Table 2). This was true for four of the five teachers in the group: Maura, Robin, Chloe, and Shannon. In each of these classrooms, writing periods were always or often separated from other subjects. There were clear signals to start and stop writing time that were unrelated

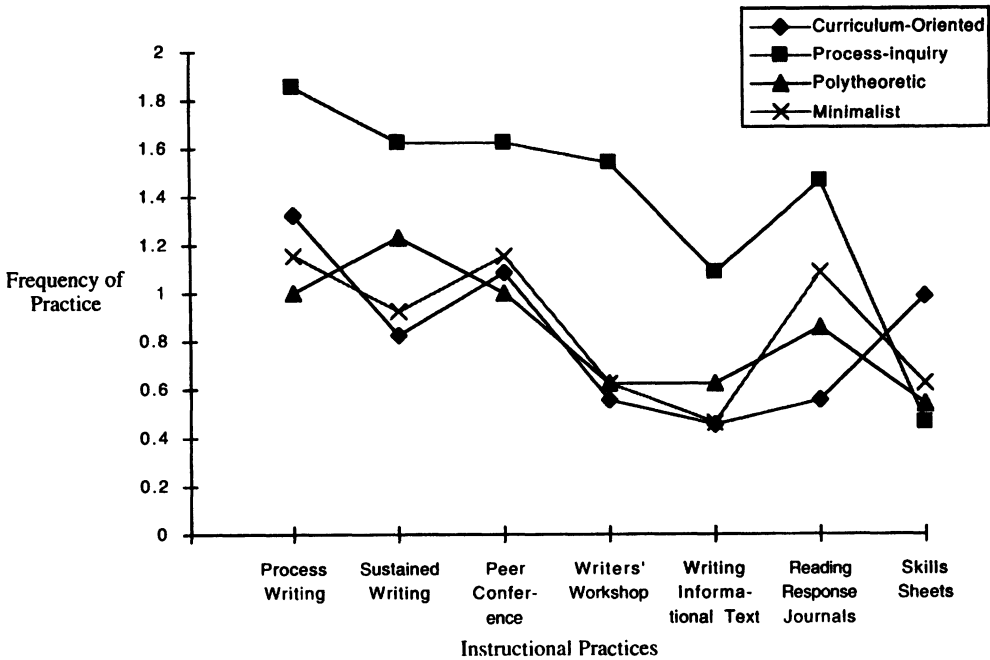


FIG. 1.—Instructional practices of teachers in four beliefs clusters

to students' engagement or their involvement in the writing process. Writing time was usually relatively short (less than 50 minutes), and teachers expected students to complete writing projects within prescribed periods. Again, these were often brief—it was not unusual for some writing to be completed in one or two periods. Although some writing projects took longer (e.g., the research report), most entailed short journal-type responses or fictional short stories. The children in both Robin's and Chloe's rooms wrote across an impressive range of genre, including poetry, science reports, and letters as well as fiction.

**Role of instruction.** All five curricularists and also Jesse (a polytheoretic) controlled the "steps" of the writing process. In the classrooms of each of these teachers, all or most pieces moved through all steps of the process, and the teachers appeared to treat the process itself as the object of instruction. This was true especially for Maura, Shannon, Chloe, and Jesse who treated writing and the teaching of writing

as a procedural problem, with their task being to help students move through each of the steps successively. Even Joyce, whose practices were often different from others in the curricularist group, focused more on writing procedures than the writing itself. For example, she was likely to remark to a student, "Wow, you've been editing that for 2 days now," or "That draft seems like it's going really long. Do you have your end in sight?"

There was almost no explicit instruction in curricularists' classrooms. They did not conduct minilessons on topic selection or writing with a powerful voice, nor did they help students improve their writing by pointing out places where additional detail or coherence would be helpful. On the few occasions when the five curricularists or Jesse talked about writing at all, they tended to focus on the procedures for completing a piece (e.g., whether students had completed rough drafts). Alternatively, they attended to the grammar, usage, and mechanics of a piece. Four of the five cur-

ricularists (all but Joyce) and the polytheoretic teacher Jesse regularly assigned isolated work from textbooks or worksheets.

**Ownership.** Perhaps because of curricularist teachers' focus on the procedural aspects of writing, all students in these classrooms wrote on the same topics at the same time (see Table 2). Brainstorming was often a whole-class effort directed by the teacher. An exception was Chloe's classroom, where students had choices within the teacher-designated topic and, as a result, did their own individual brainstorming. Curricularist teachers dictated the topics and the genre for each writing assignment. They were much more likely than other teachers to use story starters, journal prompts, or specific topic assignments. Teachers sometimes let students choose from within a topic (e.g., which animal to investigate in a research report assignment), and they clearly strived to select assignments that would interest students. Indeed, Jesse remarked that she tried for a student-centered approach by selecting journal prompts that would appeal to fifth graders.

Similarly, students had little voice in determining whether and what would be edited. Shannon and Jesse tended to mark students' papers and, as a result, we saw little authentic revision. Final drafts were merely "neat copies" (their words) of the first draft. Both Robin and Maura seemed concerned about not wanting to be too critical of students' work, which created the awkward situation in which they were concerned about the quality of students' work but seemed unable to offer constructive suggestions for improving it. Like her peers, Chloe controlled most of the decisions about editing but, unlike the other curricularists, her students made many decisions about content. However, she rarely spoke to students about the content of their writing—indeed, we observed her do this only when students were stuck. In these cases, she based her suggestions on her familiarity with her students and their lives (she had lived in this

same small town most of her life). With regard to mechanics, however, she typically sat next to each child, holding the student's paper in her hands. As they read the piece aloud together, she marked aspects of grammar, usage, and mechanics that required attention. The student corrected these and made a final copy. Joyce, a curricularist, was an interesting individual case. She shared with her curricularist peers a need for structure and organization and she, too, paid considerable attention to the steps of the process. However, she conducted writing instruction within a workshop framework for much of the year, and students had (initially) considerable control over their own writing. As the year went along, and much to the surprise of her students, Joyce took over more and more of the editing responsibilities, sometimes taking over the editing process as other curricularist teachers did.

**The writing conference.** The writing conference is theoretically important to a process writing program; however, its centrality to these teachers' instruction varied considerably. Although Maura and Chloe, both curricularists, took the idea of conferences seriously because they viewed the writing process as a series of steps, they only occasionally conferred with students individually. These conferences did not appear to serve a central purpose in their writing programs. More often, both teachers circulated around the room, encouraging students with generally supportive remarks such as, "Nice job, keep going" and "You're going right to town," remarks that appeared designed more to monitor on-task behavior than to promote writing development. Among curricularist teachers, the student-teacher conference was either nonexistent or lacked centrality. In two of the classrooms, those of Shannon (a curricularist) and Leslie (the minimalist), there were no significant individual student-teacher conferences across the 8 days of observation, though these teachers occasionally circulated, talking with students. During in-

terviews, Leslie indicated that she conferred with students, but we did not see any of these exchanges. In Jesse's room, the conferences were infrequent and a bit haphazard because sometimes neither the teacher nor the students could locate drafts.

In classrooms where conferences were not central, the purpose and focus of the work were understandably modest. Robin, Chloe, and Jesse used conferences to help students edit grammar, spelling, and punctuation. As Robin remarked (pre-interview), "I do the corrections right there with them rather than just handing it to them here. This is what you need to fix." Typically, each student came to a table in a corner of the room. The teacher had read the student's first draft, and the conference generally entailed the teacher marking the student's writing as they discussed the changes. All three of these teachers tended to make corrections during the conference, and they expected students to incorporate these corrections in their final drafts. Occasionally, a teacher might suggest a better way to say something, but the focus was largely editorial. Maura and Leslie avoided even this much formality. For each of these teachers, the conference occurred during the writing time when each circulated around the room offering supportive remarks such as "good job" or "nice start."

Except for Joyce, no curricularist teacher used peer conferences. Neither did Jesse (a polytheoretic) or Leslie (a minimalist). Although Chloe seemed ready to think about how to implement them, others were adamantly opposed to having peer conferences. Robin, for example, talked about conferences as the place for showing students the "corrections" they would need to make, and she believed that students were not capable of providing each other with useful help. Although these teachers understood that peer conferences were considered desirable, they generally questioned the value of having students confer with each other.

**Purpose and audience.** Although the 11 teachers in our study rarely expressed the

purposes for writing explicitly, either to their students or to us, their comments about good writing and the range of writing types they assigned shed light on the writing purposes they intended to communicate to students (see Table 2). All 11 teachers believed that personal expression was a primary purpose of writing. They thought that students needed to learn to write clearly so that others could understand their thoughts. All teachers were also likely to assign writing for the purpose of providing students with practice in communicating using a particular form. Only Robin and Lesley did not expect students to practice, for example, writing a persuasive essay or a research paper. In terms of the other purposes for writing, however, there was more diversity than commonality across teachers, although teachers' underlying beliefs were evident here as well.

Not surprisingly, the curricularists (and Jesse) were much more likely than other teachers to focus on teaching students particular forms or modes of writing and were also more likely to teach writing as preparation for the future. The most distinctive aspect of this group was that all of them had as a primary purpose of writing instruction: learn the stages of the writing process. Joyce, for example, stated: "I don't grade the writing, I grade the process" (postinterview, p. 13). Earlier, she had asserted that the students "have to become familiar with the writing process and (we are) slowly going through it." No other teachers in the study espoused this purpose.

There were, however, variations within the group. Robin, for example, whose program was among the least reflective of contemporary process writing approaches, nevertheless demonstrated an interest in having students write for a variety of purposes. Actually, her writing instruction was divided into two types and periods of writing. During "writing time" she was one of the five teachers who seemed to have students write in order to learn the stages of the writing process. During this period she

focused on personal expression, preparing for future school experiences, and learning the stages of the writing process. However, during other times of the week, Robin also had students write (not necessarily using the writing process stages) for many other purposes—to discover their own thoughts, ideas, and feelings; to remember and to explain; and to communicate to others. Thus, students had many opportunities to write in diverse ways, but they received little instruction in how to improve their writing.

Among the curricularists, only Chloe's purposes for writing went beyond utilitarian or school-based functions. She encouraged her students to write to communicate with others for authentic purposes, for example, writing to pen pals in Arizona. She also felt strongly that students should write for their own enjoyment, and she provided opportunities and support for them to do so.

The other curricularist teachers appeared to have few purposes for writing other than to encourage acquisition of knowledge about the writing process and to practice forms of writing. Maura, Shannon, and Jesse seemed to have limited awareness of the purposes of writing. They wanted students to use writing for personal expression, to enjoy writing, and improve at it, but their writing programs did not promote commitment to these, or other, purposes.

#### Inquiry-Process/Polytheoretic Orientation

The two inquiry-process teachers' responses to the belief scales indicated that they had strong child-centered ("allow each child as much time as necessary to complete assignments") and interactionist ("provide open-ended activities and materials") views. In terms of their practices, the inquiry teachers reported the use of authentic writing practices more frequently than the other groups and listed skills sheets as the least frequently used (see Fig. 1).

The polytheoretic teachers were enthu-

siasts. They tended to have high scores on all four belief scales. Thus, they were almost as likely as the inquiry-process teachers to report using writer's workshop approaches and materials, but they were also the most likely to report using skills sheets (see Fig. 1). Two of the three polytheoretic teachers are described in this section because of the similarity of many of their practices to those of the inquiry-process teachers.

**Classroom environment for writing.** The approach of the two inquiry-process teachers, Eve and Dana, as well as the polytheoretic teachers, Pam and Linda, was different from the curricularists. For these four teachers, writing process was less linear and more recursive and flexible. Both of the inquiry group teachers provided many more opportunities for students to write, and there were longer, more sustained writing periods. Note that the writing instruction of two of the three polytheoretic teachers also included lengthy and continuous opportunities to write, although writing was somewhat less integral to their overall instructional programs. It will become apparent in the discussion to follow that Pam and Linda (polytheorists) were most similar to the inquiry-process teachers in the conduct of their writing programs, although other features of their instruction were similar to curricularists (i.e., textbook-driven science and social studies, use of isolated skills instruction).

As a result of the more extensive writing opportunity, students in these four classrooms tended to produce both more and more varied writing (although not necessarily more finished pieces) than did those in curricularist classrooms. In all four of these classrooms, some pieces of writing went through many drafts, others none. Children were likely to have several unfinished pieces in their folders. Students wrote a great deal, but only some of that work was brought to final stages. Brainstorming was treated seriously but more flexibly. Sometimes students generated ideas as a whole group; more often they worked individu-

ally. As Linda remarked, "It's not a requirement. For some it slows them down and they lose some of the spark." In general, this characterized the environment for writing among these inquiry/polytheoretic teachers—although they cared about the writing process, they focused more on creating a context for writing.

**Role of instruction.** This distinction between the curricularists' focus on procedural aspects of writing process and the inquiry/polytheoretic teachers' focus on the improvement of writing ability appears critical. Although Eve, Dana, Pam, and Linda were most likely to provide choices and lengthy, open-ended writing opportunities, they were also the most likely to provide explicit instruction (see Table 2). Dana, for example, explained: "We did a thing on leads with the kids because they were just putting us to sleep. Give us an introduction . . . and it was a huge improvement, because they just needed that as instruction. So much of what we choose to do is really driven by the kids. Where are they developmentally? What do they need?" Eve and Dana planned and conducted minilessons frequently. Although these were sometimes directed at the process itself early in the year (e.g., how to generate ideas for writing), these lessons and small-group sessions were always targeted on improved writing later.

Linda and Pam also provided instruction in writing improvement. Linda used whole-group conferences to make features of writing explicit for students. Pam, in contrast, used individual conferences, frequent and often brief, as her primary means of instruction because she believed that the range of students in her classroom was so great that whole-class instruction would rarely be useful. For example, as Pam discussed with one child his response to a penpal letter, she said: "Did you find his letter exciting to read—or just a list of facts? . . . Well, let's make your letter more exciting to read." Next, she listened to another child read her work and remarked, "That's great.

I like the way you included the details and your feelings. . . . It seems like a little bit of an outline helps you." With the next child, Pam asked simply, "How could you fix that?"

Pam was the only teacher among the 11 who taught in an urban setting and whose students were linguistically, racially, and ethnically diverse. When interacting with students she adapted her feedback to students with a wider range of abilities, asking only for an English sentence or two from some students and pressing for greater use of author's craft or independent thinking from others. She used whole-group instruction least of all the teachers.

For polytheorists Pam and Linda, the writing process was strongest during language arts times. Eve and Dana, the two process-inquiry teachers, were the only teachers who appeared to have developed a program that reflected Hillocks's (1986, 1987) notion of inquiry in writing. These teachers looked for naturally occurring opportunities that required students to analyze, justify, explain, or argue using evidence, facts, observations, and so on in their writing. In these two classrooms also there was an exceptional range of written work. In Eve's classroom, for example, during one 3-week period students were writing their own science fiction stories, conducting "I Search" research (Macrorie, 1984), writing speeches from their research, and working on "expertise" projects. The latter were long-term assignments often about quite personal topics (a boy who studied the Navy because his father was in it and who interviewed him for the project; a girl who was researching French language because of her heritage).

Unlike their curricularist counterparts, the inquiry/polytheoretic teachers believed that students learn by doing and by engaging in recursive discussion and revisiting of writing. For example, in response to a question about how she teaches writing, Eve said, "Through discussion . . . having kids experience it first . . . we talk about the pa-

rameters. . . . So, we have them use inquiry to maybe help them on what they write" (pre-interview).

**Ownership.** There was considerable student ownership of writing in these inquiry classrooms (see Table 2). Both Pam and Linda, polytheoretic teachers, often assigned writing topics and/or genre. This differed from the common practice in the classrooms of Eve and Dana, where topic selection was generally student driven.

Both Eve and Dana had complicated writing programs that allowed students to engage in multiple activities simultaneously. Rarely were all students at the same phase or topic in writing. In fact, Dana remarked that she had once had all students move through a writing piece at the same time and found that she had to have conferences with all students at once, which was virtually impossible for her. Although both teachers expected students to take considerable responsibility and control within the writing program, they also imposed some structure. Thus, some writing assignments were required of all students, and both teachers tried to keep track of students who were not bringing their writing to closure.

What distinguished these classrooms was that at least *some* ongoing student-initiated writing was always occurring. This tended to include reader response logs, journals, reaction papers, and folders of in-process writing. Similarly, students were expected to take responsibility for editing and revising their work. With regard to student control over editing and revision, both Eve and Dana kept careful note of the writing goals for each student, and they held students accountable for them. Pam and Linda were more likely to let students take the lead in revision, with much less directive feedback. In the classrooms of Eve, Dana, Pam, and Linda, students worked closely with their peers and with the teacher to generate ideas, improve coherence, and refine writer's craft. There was a strong

ethic of sharing that was especially evident during conferences.

**Writing conference.** Conferences were important to the instruction of Eve, Dana, and Pam. It could be argued that the conferences *were* the instructional program in these classes, because that is where individual students (in some cases small groups) received specific, focused information about writing, writer's craft, and editing/revision (see next section). Student-teacher conferences occurred, if not daily, then in large blocks of time set aside each week. All three teachers kept careful records of conference contacts, and students maintained records of goals and assignments in their own writing folders as well, which helped them and their teacher recall what features of writing were being discussed at any given time.

Both peer and teacher conferences occurred daily in the classrooms of Eve, Dana, and Pam, who valued peer conferences highly. They had taught strategies for conferring with classmates; these peer conferences were formally accounted for in the writing process for major pieces (often peers had to sign off after a conference); the possible focus for the conferences was clearly described; and the teachers expected peer conferences to precede the teacher conferences. Students in all three classes also appeared to take these peer conferences seriously, and conferences generally led to improved written products. Often the writing was much clearer, and students were frequently encouraged to add detail. Indeed, students were occasionally heard to remark to the teacher about a particularly powerful peer conference.

The writing conference was central in Linda's room also, but her procedures were unique. She used a whole-group approach to conferencing that had almost the same effects as the individual conferences other teachers held. Linda used conferences to model her thinking about content and criteria to students. As the year progressed, her students, like those of Eve, Dana, and



Pam, became sophisticated in their ability to evaluate and respond to each others' work.

Conferences that were central to the writing program, as they were for Eve, Dana, Pam, and Linda, tended to be focused instructional sessions. All four teachers used minilessons to introduce new information about writing, and individual instruction occurred during conferences. Students might request a conference or they might be asked to attend a conference, but either way, these meetings had a specific focus that shifted according to the students involved or for a group of students over time.

The conferences were not identical across these teachers. For example, Dana required two conferences for each major written piece—a content conference and an editing conference. Eve's small-group conferences tended to focus on some aspect of writing, such as "using vivid verbs to enhance writing imagery." Pam's conferences were always individual and focused on the particular piece of writing that the student was producing. This may have been especially important in her classroom, because the range of students' performance and facility with English varied greatly. What was striking about these four classrooms, however, was the purposefulness of the conference. A conference was not just a step to be checked off on the writing process folder. Rather, work to improve a piece of writing and to become a better writer occurred, and students began to rethink and replan based on their purpose and audience.

**Purpose and audience.** Like the curricularists, the inquiry/polytheoretic teachers valued personal expression. Eve captured this writing purpose when she was asked to describe what makes a good piece of writing. She said: "I think a good piece of writing has got to be authentic. It's got to come from inside the writer. It's got to be a reflection of the thought process that belongs to that person. I think a good piece of writing has to show the soul" (postinterview).

Similarly, Pam said that "a good writer can decide upon topics to write about, has something to say." She noted that the goal of instruction is to "teach people to be able to express themselves and do it fairly clearly in their writing" (pre-interview), even though she acknowledged that this was also the biggest challenge—"How do you do that?"

Eve and Dana were the most similar in the purposes they espoused and demonstrated through their writing programs. In addition to writing for personal expression, both teachers assigned or encouraged writing for the following purposes: to discover one's own thoughts, ideas, and feelings; for enjoyment; and to remember and explain. Like Robin (a curricularist) and Leslie (the minimalist), Eve and Dana used and taught writing across content areas. They saw writing as central to their science programs, for example, and taught students to use science journals, to take notes, and to write lab reports. Thus, in addition to the narrative writing of personal expression, students in these classrooms wrote persuasive essays, personal responses to readings, personal journals, scientific explanations, descriptions of mathematics concepts, and so on.

Pam and Linda, who were similar in many ways, exhibited different senses of purpose and audience, differences that likely reflected their very different teaching contexts. Pam emphasized more utilitarian communicative functions—for example, to remember, explain, and to communicate to others—in addition to the personal expression and practice of particular forms. She was also concerned that many of her students were not able to communicate well in English. She built a writing program tailored to her students' needs. Linda, like the curricularist Chloe, encouraged students to write to discover their own thoughts/feelings and for enjoyment. Linda also encouraged students to write to communicate to others for authentic purposes; her students wrote letters of protest to the state department of education when they found they

could not include poetry in their portfolios. Finally, like most of the curricularists, Eve, Dana, Pam, and Linda focused students on communicating using a particular form (e.g., persuasive essays).

### A Minimalist View

Minimalist teachers were notable primarily because they had low to moderate scores on all four belief scales. Leslie is a member of the minimalist cluster of teachers, to which 18% of the teachers who responded belonged. Overall, the minimalists reported infrequent use of all practices tracked in Figure 1. They were the least likely to embrace aspects of writing process, but they were also the least likely to report using skills sheets, textbooks, or other commercial materials. In this respect, Leslie's classroom was like those of her minimalist counterparts. She did not use grammar books or English texts, but neither did she exhibit materials that might support process writing.

Even though Leslie's program was much more fully developed than those of her minimalist peers, and both her classroom practice and her interview responses conveyed an appreciation for the value of having children write, there was little evidence of explicit instruction or feedback. There was no content discussion at any time during 8 days of observation, nor did Leslie work with groups of children in writing or in any other subject. Not surprisingly, students wrote for few purposes in Leslie's room. This was one of only two rooms in which students were not directed to practice writing in particular forms or modes. Instead, they wrote for enjoyment, personal expression, and to communicate.

However, the amount of writing in this room was impressive. Some students created sophisticated and lengthy pieces, largely the result of a 45-minute-long writer's workshop that occurred daily. Students were expected to have ongoing writing of their own choice, but a great deal of the work generated was also on teacher-

selected topics or in specified modes (e.g., pen pal letters, learning log entries, writing to a prompt). If students were inclined to become writers by writing, then Leslie's class was the place to be. Again, what distinguished Leslie from other minimalists was her commitment to writer's workshop. In the other minimalist classroom, we observed the same minimal instructional interaction but much less writing occurred.

### Teacher Beliefs and the Writing Process

To make sense of teachers' goals and the different ways process writing was implemented in these classrooms, it is useful to examine teachers' underlying views about teaching and learning. Given contemporary views of epistemology (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997; O'Brien & Norton, 1991; Schommer, 1994), one would expect teachers' ideas about how people learn to influence their instruction. As they organize, plan, and interact with students, their decisions are influenced by underlying assumptions about what teaching and learning generally, and writing in particular, mean.

Thus, the curricularists, whose beliefs about teaching and learning suggested an orientation toward more structured and ordered instruction, were much more likely than other teachers to have all students write at the same time on the same topic and to have students move through the steps of the process in the same order and with the same support. They tended to distrust peer conferences and to worry about the mechanical aspects of writing that they thought students might be missing within a process-focused writing program. Their instructional goals tended to be focused on teaching students the writing process and/or on the finished product itself, and they believed in improving a piece by showing the student via teacher correction what needed to be "fixed."

The more student-centered and interactionist views of the inquiry-process teachers were reflected in their writing programs also. Students in their classrooms rarely

wrote on the same topic or proceeded through the writing process in just the same way. Their focus on inquiry learning was evident in the extensive writing that occurred in interdisciplinary units, in their expectations that students write in a variety of ways and styles, and in their emphasis on conferences and revision. Both Dana and Eve struggled with their own role—wondering if they were making good decisions about what students needed, how to respond to their writing, and how much to intervene and direct. These wonderings reflect their assumptions that students do *not* learn when someone dispenses information; rather, they learn by doing and through self-reflection that is aided by knowledgeable others.

Although Pam and Linda, polytheoretic teachers, created writing programs that closely resembled those of Eve and Dana, their beliefs were somewhat different. The polytheoretics' multiple views on teaching and learning were evident in their writing programs as well. Both Pam and Linda conducted writing programs that were more structured than Eve's and Dana's. Although children were encouraged to write extensively and about self-selected topics, Pam and Linda were much more likely than Eve and Dana to move all students through writing projects at the same time/pace. The most obvious differences were reflected in the purposes for which students wrote in these classrooms and the extent to which writing and the writing process extended beyond the designated writing period. Both Pam and Linda conducted useful and revealing conferences about writing, but these were rarely about writing that occurred outside writing time. In part, this reflects the other epistemological views of these two teachers. To a far greater extent than Eve or Dana, Pam and Linda used textbooks to define the other parts of their curriculum.

These differences in teachers' beliefs may be especially salient with regard to the pedagogy of process approaches because

they may predict how teachers will react as they try new things in their classrooms. All the teachers noted areas of struggle or concern, and their concerns often revolved around conferencing. For example, Robin noted in the November interview, "I find the challenges as maybe . . . like in the conferencing, wanting to do that the best way and I'm not exactly sure . . . I've had a tendency to maybe have it be more teacher dominated in the past. I'm intrigued by . . . student approaches. I guess I'm not convinced of it yet . . . how well it works. Some of the kids just aren't good models for other kids" (pre-interview, p. 16).

Conferencing within the writing workshop may be problematic for reasons Elmore, Peterson, and McCarthey (1996) describe as a constructivist dilemma. Given the student-centeredness of the workshop, the teacher is in the challenging position of providing the student the opportunity to construct meaning in writing without intervening to direct the writing—to take it over. Although Eve's student-centered epistemological views caused her to think differently about the dilemma, she struggled with it also: "What's my role in the classroom as a writing teacher? I prefer to think of myself as a facilitator of their writing. Well, then, what does that mean? How much intervention should I do? At what point do I say, 'This is awful, awful writing; you need to start again'? Is that my role? So, I'm constantly judging that depending on the child" (postinterview).

If one views writing process as a form of student-centered learning, then one should consider Cohen's (1988) argument that such approaches to instruction go against the grain of conservative traditions in American education. Cuban (1993) argues that historically student-centered, progressive reform has led to hybrids of change as some teachers seek to accommodate new ideas into existing practices and norms of schooling. From this perspective, the promotion of student-centered writing, labeled writing process or writing workshop and

expressed most clearly in the work of Calkins (1994), Graves (1983), Heard (1989), and others, is countered by more teacher-centered writing, whether in the form of attention to skills and code or to structured written assignments. In this context, it is not surprising that in all 11 classrooms a focus on students did battle with the formalized content mandated by textbooks and curriculum frameworks. Ten of the 11 teachers assigned topics designed to provide students with practice in a particular mode or form.

## Conclusion

In this article we examined a group of fifth-grade teachers and the hybrids of instruction created in the name of writing process. Although these 11 teachers all taught writing using what they called a "process approach," our yearlong study suggested that they had different interpretations of the process approach, creating very different climates and purposes for writing. It appears that teachers' epistemological beliefs are a critical factor influencing the writing instruction offered by teachers in the intermediate grades, causing them to create programs and structures consistent with their orientations to teaching and learning generally. Of the 11 teachers, six took a procedural approach to the teaching of writing (mostly curricularist teachers). In these classrooms, teachers took particular care that students engaged in each "step" when they were "doing" process writing. Five teachers (including the inquiry teachers Eve and Dana, and the polytheoretic teachers Pam and Linda) taught writing using a workshop approach, with students using the phases of the writing process to produce a variety of written pieces.

A skeptical reading of this news is that writing process is less meaningful than it is formulaic for the majority of the teachers. Change and reform in instructional practice, according to Elmore et al. (1996), have been primarily structural and superficial. However, in the more realistic portrayal of writing process hybrids (Cuban, 1993), we

believe there is acknowledgment of a shared and productive meaning for the concept of writing process. Although the variation was substantial, teachers attempted to generate an approximation of writing process instruction as they understood it.

All teachers promoted a productivity in writing that has not always characterized writing instruction in U.S. elementary classrooms. Children in these rooms *did* write. This sustained writing was, furthermore, celebrated by the teachers themselves. They wanted children to use writing for personal expression—the classrooms of all 11 teachers embodied this purpose for writing. This is no small matter. As many teachers remarked, the motivation to write and the inclination for students to view themselves as writers are relatively new and definitely welcome manifestations of a pedagogy for writing.

The good news here is that writing process is not an empty concept when considering the kind of teaching and learning constructed in classrooms. All teachers in our study viewed writing process as student centered. Some of the teachers had productive writing programs that resided in an otherwise teacher-directed curriculum. To the extent that teachers use drafts, conferences, and other components of writing process instruction, they confer students some autonomy and ownership over what they write.

Process writing as a form of instruction came to these teachers' classrooms as a result of a movement to change writing instruction in schools that originated in the 1980s. Several of the teachers remarked that they had not been prepared to teach writing well. This lack of training appeared to be especially critical for teachers in the curricularist classrooms. Their high need for structure and their belief that learning is teacher directed seemed to keep them from seeking the types of professional development other teachers wanted. Absent some reason to reconsider their beliefs about

teaching and learning, they did not make major changes in their programs.

Still, the writing process approaches we saw, even in their hybrid forms, involved instruction that was more student centered than in the past. Even the teachers with the most procedural programs struggled to give voice to students' writing through using engaging topics or supportive (if unhelpful) feedback. If they are to realize the full potential of process approaches to writing, however, most teachers will need help in (re)examining their practices to incorporate a pedagogy that challenges the epistemological beliefs of so many teachers.

## Appendix

### A Summary of Writing Instructional Practices of Two Teachers

#### Maura: Curriculum Orientation

Maura had been teaching for 20 years. During the summer before we observed in her room, she took a 1-day summer workshop sponsored by the state. This was her only reference to experience with the writing process. Unlike other teachers, Maura did not reference the Vermont writing process or process writing in her initial interview. She described in detail the steps of the writing process. She had not used this type of process approach and viewed the repeated drafting of work as stifling creativity.

#### Environment: (Quantity, Management of Sustained Writing)

Maura's day is divided into 45-minute segments. No matter what is happening in writing, after a 45-minute language arts period, the children move to math. She uses a whole-class approach for all aspects of writing and, in her own words, a "sequential" approach. The class brainstorms, writes topic sentences, receives instruction in paragraphing, and so on. She describes a process by which the students "get ready" for each new writing challenge by mastering earlier steps. Thus, for example, students do not write paragraphs until they can write a good topic sentence, and they do not write longer texts until they have worked on paragraphs.

#### Ownership

##### Generation of ideas (locus of control).

Maura is in firm control of the focus of work. She assigns topics, uses writing prompts, and defines

steps. Everyone writes on the same topic at the same time. Generally there are worksheet prompts or pictures to elicit writing. For example, on one writing assignment she distributed a worksheet/picture of an alien to all students. Students were directed to color the picture, give it a name, write 10 words about it, write a story about it. The "write 10 words" portion was the brainstorming step. Only journal writing is sometimes self-selected, topically. For a few minutes each day children must write in their journals.

**Decisions about editing/revising.** Students have a writing folder at their desks. But Maura collects all students' final copies, along with drafts. She stores these in permanent folders (portfolios) at the back of the room. All student work is completed in a fairly short time, and there are implicit, if not required, due dates for all assigned pieces. Maura is an organized, product-oriented teacher who orchestrates most aspects of the school day. She reads students' first drafts and circles all spelling and usage errors. Students correct those as they do their final (neat) copy. Students have writing folders, but Maura keeps all final work in her own folders.

#### Instruction (Role and Nature)

Maura values organization—she uses the word frequently, and it characterizes her classroom and her instruction. She says she finds teaching writing more difficult than other subjects. "I like the end result" she says, but she finds writing a "slow process." Early in the year she attempted to teach all the state criteria in each piece, resulting in multiple drafts. Maura does not provide explicit instruction in writing, nor is there in-depth discussion of writing or the writing process. Students are assigned writing topics and engage in considerable practice. The teacher's role seems to be to keep students on-task. One exception: research papers—Maura modeled how to outline information.

#### Peer/Teacher Conferencing (Function and Nature)

During individual "walk arounds" Maura offers brief, positive feedback such as "Nice job" or "Good ideas." She says, "I never criticize. Instead of criticism, I ask questions. 'Where could you take this?' 'Where is this going?'" Feedback is largely related to the task rather than to the nature of the writing itself. Maura does not use peer conferencing and generally discourages student conversation during writing periods unless students are doing a group project.

### Purpose and Audience

When Maura discusses "purpose" she typically means the instructional purpose for a piece—that is, certain pieces are assigned to focus on topic sentences; others are vehicles for brainstorming, and so on. Little student work is displayed in the classroom, but Maura does display students' writing on walls outside the classroom, and she is proud of these displays. Students also regularly read their writing aloud to the class.

### Eve: Inquiry-Process Orientation

Eve had been teaching for 20 years. She had extensive experience with process writing, initially through the Vermont Writers Workshop course, and later through peer support with expert teachers involved in the National Writing Project. She was considered an expert middle-level educator who regularly conducted workshops on interdisciplinary teaching for other teachers. She described her own writing instruction this way, "I teach writing in a real process way. I like to think of process."

### Environment (Quantity, Management of Sustained Writing)

Integrated language arts occur during a 1- to 1½-hour block of time called "book club." Much sustained writing goes on at this time. There are also other large blocks of time (e.g., "an inquiry-based block") when students pursue self-selected, self-paced topics of interest. Some finish an "expertise" paper while others are only beginning a new one. Then, there is usually another 1- to 1½-hour block around a science-social studies theme in which students may or may not do extensive writing. Later in the year "expertise" writing was transformed to an "I-Search" project related to the theme

### Ownership

**Generation of ideas (locus of control).** Ownership of ideas for writing varies. At times students do completely self-selected writing (e.g., self-selected "expertise" reports). Other work is defined by teacher-selected themes. However, there is always choice within the topic. Sometimes the whole class brainstorms for topic selection. Students maintain their own list of possible topics and keep unfinished work in a folder for future revision. At no time does everyone write about the same thing, though they all might write on aspects of the same topic (e.g., space-related research reports).

**Decisions about editing/revising.** Eve gives extensive feedback on early drafts. Minilesson conferences are not always voluntary (some-

times she tells students what area they need to address—details, language use, etc.). Although students make the final decision about whether to edit or revise, Eve grades all final drafts. Major projects, especially, are given close scrutiny. Eve notes, however, that students' "decision making is enhanced when they have lots of different facilitators in the room, not just me . . . they are in control of that piece."

### Instruction (Role and Nature)

Extensive explicit instruction occurs during daily minilessons (e.g., leads, vivid language, details, portfolio criteria such as voice and tone). In addition, Eve has conferences every day with some students—individually or in small groups. Finally, during morning meeting and during group sharing, Eve and the students provide feedback and "make public" the strategies and products of their work. All instruction grows out of the students' work—the theme-related projects or the inquiries.

### Peer/Teacher Conferencing (Function and Nature)

There are daily teacher and peer conferences in this room. These conferences serve several purposes—direct instruction, motivation, content revision, or editing for mechanics. For example, Corey asked Adam for a conference, saying he wanted to know if there were any words he could improve—"not like spelling, but to give more detail." During peer conferences, students use several forms and formats they have been taught. Eve confers daily with students for final conferences or to work on specific aspects of their writing.

### Purpose and Audience

Students write for each other, for Eve, and for the larger community. Students discuss their work daily—in dyadic peer conferences and at class meetings. Their writing is also shown to parents in end-of-theme celebrations and author nights. Students write for personal expression, to discover their own thoughts/ideas, for enjoyment, to prepare for future school experiences, to remember and explain, to communicate with others, and to become better writers.

### Note

The research reported in this article was supported by a grant from the Spencer Foundation (No. 9500991).

1. As noted earlier, 12 teachers were selected and followed over the course of the year. Only 11 of those—who espoused a process approach to writing—are the subjects of this study.

## References

- Abruscato, J. (1993). Early results and tentative implications from the Vermont portfolio project. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 74(6), 474–477.
- Applebee, A. (1991). Environments for language teaching and learning: Contemporary issues and future directions. In J. Flood, J. M. Jensen, D. Lapp, & J. R. Squire (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts* (pp. 549–556). New York: Macmillan.
- Atwell, N. (1990). *Coming to know: Writing to learn in the intermediate grades*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Brannon, L. (1985). Toward a theory of composition. In B. McClelland & T. Donovan (Eds.), *Perspectives on research and scholarship in composition* (pp. 6–23). New York: Modern Language Association of America.
- Bright, R. (1995). *Writing instruction in the intermediate grades*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Britton, J. (1975). *The development of writing abilities* (11–18). London: Macmillan.
- Calkins, L. (1994). *The art of teaching writing* (2d ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Cohen, D. (1988). Teaching practice: Plus que ça change. In P. Jackson (Ed.), *Contributing to educational change* (pp. 27–84). Berkeley: McCutchan.
- Cuban, L. (1993). *How teachers taught: Constancy and change in American classrooms 1890–1990*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Cunningham, P. M., & Allington, R. L. (1999). *Classrooms that work: They can all read and write* (2d ed.). New York: Harper Collins.
- Daniels, P., Woodside-Jiron, H., & Lipson, M. Y. (1996, December). *A close look at teacher change: What gets influenced, who changes, and why*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Reading Conference, Charleston, SC.
- Dyson, A. H., & Freedman, S. W. (1991). Writing. In J. Flood, J. M. Jensen, E. Lapp, & J. R. Squire (Eds.), *Handbook of research in the teaching of English language arts* (pp. 754–774). New York: Macmillan.
- Elmore, R. R., Peterson, P. L., & McCarthey, S. J. (1996). *Restructuring in the classroom: Teaching, learning, and school organization*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Florio-Ruane, S., & Lensmire, T. (1989). The role of instruction in learning to write. In J. Brophy (Ed.), *Advances in research on teaching* (Vol. 1, pp. 73–100). Greenwich, CT: JAI.
- Flower, L., & Hayes, J. R. (1981). A cognitive process theory of writing. *College Composition and Communication*, 32(4), 365–387.
- Fulwiler, T. (1980). Journals across the disciplines. *English Journal*, 9, 14–19.
- Fulwiler, T. (1987). *Teaching with writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, Boynton/Cook.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of culture*. New York: Basic.
- Glesne, C., & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Graves, D. H. (1978). *Balance the basics: Let them write*. New York: Ford Foundation.
- Graves, D. H. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Exeter, NH, and London: Heinemann.
- Graves, D. H. (1994). *A fresh look at writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Heard, G. (1989). *For the good of the earth and sun: Teaching poetry*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Hewitt, G. (1993). Vermont's portfolio-based writing assessment program: A brief history. *Teachers and Writers*, 24(5), 167–172.
- Hillocks, G., Jr. (1986). *Research on written composition: New directions for teaching*. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communications Skills and the National Conference on Research in English.
- Hillocks, G., Jr. (1987, May). Synthesis of research on teaching writing. *Educational Leadership*, 44(8), 71–82.
- Hofer, B. K., & Pintrich, P. R. (1997). The development of epistemological theories: Beliefs about knowledge and knowing and their relation to learning. *Review of Educational Research*, 67, 88–140.
- Langer, J., & Applebee, A. (1987). *How writing shapes thinking: A study of teaching and learning*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Lipson, M. Y., & Goldhaber, J. (1993, December). *Teacher beliefs and literacy practices in kindergarten: Competing interests and multiple practices*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Reading Conference, Charleston, SC.
- Lipson, M. Y., Mosenthal, J. H., & Woodside-Jiron, H. (1999). *Capturing the multiple dimensions of teacher beliefs*. Manuscript in preparation, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT.
- Lipson, M. Y., Mosenthal, J. H., & Mekkelsen, J. E. (1995, November). *Change: Teachers as agents, teachers as targets*. Paper presented at

- the annual meeting of the National Reading Conference, New Orleans, LA.
- Macrorie, K. (1984). *Searching writing: A context book*. Portsmouth, NH: Boyton/Cook.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2d ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mosenthal, J. H., Lipson, M. Y., Mekkelsen, J. E., Daniels, P., & Woodside-Jiron, H. (1996). The meaning and use of portfolios in different literacy contexts. In K. Hinchman, D. Leu, & C. Kinzer (Eds.), *Forty-fifth yearbook of the National Reading Conference* (pp. 113–123). Chicago: National Reading Conference.
- Mosenthal, J. H., Mekkelsen, J. E., & Woodside-Jiron, H. (1997, March). *Agents of their own instruction: The teacher's perspective on the influence of the Vermont Assessment Program*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago.
- Murray, D. (1980). Writing as process: How writing finds its own meaning. In T. R. Donovan & B. W. McClelland (Eds.), *Eight approaches to teaching composition* (pp. 3–20). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- O'Brien, K., & Norton, R. (1991). Beliefs, practices and constraints: Influences on teacher decision-making processes. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 18, 29–38.
- Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Raphael, T. E., & Hiebert, E. H. (1996). *Creating an integrated approach to literacy instruction*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace.
- Richardson, V., Anders, P. L., Tidwell, D., & Lloyd, C. V. (1991). The relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices in reading comprehension instruction. *American Educational Research Journal*, 28, 559–586.
- Schommer, M. (1994). An emerging conceptualization of epistemological beliefs and their role in learning. In R. Garner & P. A. Alexander (Eds.), *Beliefs about text and instruction with text* (pp. 25–40). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.