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Writing Workshop and Creativity Despite Standardization: An Exploration of Elementary Teachers' Practices

About the Author(s)

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Keywords

writing workshop, creativity, standards, professional development, National Writing Project, elementary



WRITING WORKSHOP AND CREATIVITY DESPITE STANDARDIZATION: AN EXPLORATION OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' PRACTICES

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Abstract

The focus on formulaic approaches to writing in today's classrooms can be problematic, for it may inadvertently cause the quality of students' writing to decline. The National Writing Project (NWP) provides teachers with professional development to learn how to effectively incorporate evidence-based practices into their writing instruction. The aim of this study was to explore the practices of three elementary teachers who received professional development training from the NWP. The researchers investigated how these teachers navigated the tension between creativity in a workshop approach and accountability for teaching the Common Core writing standards. Findings suggest participants navigated the standardization of writing curriculum in various ways, teachers use of resources and strategies varied, and student engagement was more apparent when given more freedom. Implications for teaching practices in schools and for future research are included.

Keywords:

writing workshop, creativity, standards, professional development, National Writing Project, elementary

Introduction

Writing instruction in America's schools has undergone many stages of reform. Most notably, the introduction of the process approach in the 1980s brought about a collaborative recursive interpretation to classroom writing, which included the writing workshop (Calkins,

1994; Graves, 1983). The writing workshop emerged as a revolutionary concept within the writing process approach, but over time led to various interpretations of how to organize and instruct with the writing process. The instructional approach of the writing process diverged into either a teacher-driven or a student-driven approach. Lucy Calkins (2001), Donald Murray (1996), Donald Graves (1994), and Ralph Fletcher (1993) are often known as the pioneers of the student-centered writing workshop and have written numerous books that have guided professional practice for more than 30 years. The workshop model incorporates ideas from Vygotsky (1962, 1978) regarding the emphasis on learning as a social endeavor, as students construct their own meaning (Kaplan, 2008; Martin, 2004). In today's era of high-stakes testing and Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (NGA/CCSSO, 2010), teachers may feel pressured to adhere to a more structured program in lieu of the workshop approach in order to satisfy district demands rooted in federal mandates such as No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and the CCSS.

The expectations of the CCSS have allowed for some variations among teachers regarding the priorities and progression for implementation in classrooms. The standards outlined in the Common Core provide teachers the topics for instructional plans, yet school districts have freedom within this framework to decide how the standards will be taught (NGA/CCSSO, 2010). Researchers are discovering that maneuvering this paradigm shift can be tricky for educators; "the juxtaposition of teachers' beliefs and histories onto mandates at the school and classroom levels can create tensions that have an impact on their approaches to instruction" (McCarthy et al., 2014, p. 59). However, teachers are now charged with a set of English Language Arts (ELA) standards that they must address in such a manner that will result in high test scores while preserving students' motivation to write.

In many classrooms, evidence-based practices of writing instruction such as student choice, developing a writer's craft, having blocks of time to write, and authentic assessment have abated. Writing instruction often favors strong results on state or district assessments, yet only offers students "formulaic, sterile writing instruction" (Brown et al., 2011, p. 17). Scripted pedagogy that focuses heavily on formulas or frameworks may inadvertently cause the quality of students' writing to decline. The more that students are taught to write for expressing meaning, the more likely they will be prepared to write high quality, meaningful pieces in the future.

The National Writing Project (NWP) is a network of teacher-leaders, kindergarten through university, that provides professional development to teachers across the country. The goal of the NWP is to improve writing instruction and learning in every classroom (National Writing Project, 2001). The Writing Project model supports teachers as they conduct research of evidence-based practices, and also recognizes the expertise of the educator participants. The relationship between university researchers and classroom teachers offers a strong network of perspectives and expertise. Teachers learn from each other as they review best practices and plan to apply new strategies in their classrooms. Participants in the NWP Summer Institute become members of their own writing community during the professional development, learning to approach writing as an iterative process while building a community of writers who provide feedback to one another (Athans, 2019). This workshop approach remains entrenched in current evidence-based practices that are explored through the NWP Summer Institute at each NWP site.

Kelly Gallagher, former co-director of the South Basin Writing Project at California State University, Long Beach, described the ways that the increasing standardization of writing instruction shifted the focus of educators to benchmarks and assessment, rather than the writing process. Gallagher (2015) noted that a prime limitation of implementing the ELA standards has been the separation and emphasis of three big writing genres: narrative, inform and explain, and argument. When educators have narrowed instruction to focus only on these three genres, opportunities for creativity and real-world writing practice have been sacrificed. This is problematic because “in the real world, writing is not artificially separated into specific discourses” (Gallagher, 2015, p. 107). Thus, the aim of this study was to understand how elementary teachers who have participated in professional development from the National Writing Project (NWP) are teaching writing and viewing creativity within writing workshop as they navigate the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The NWP supports the writing workshop approach for writing instruction.

Literature Review

Research on Creativity in the Classroom

Writing workshop can be a space to promote student creativity within the classroom, yet a limited amount of known research on creativity in the classroom has been published. As

Beghetto (2018) explained, creativity, especially divergent thinking, has often been suppressed in classrooms, especially in the following three ways: the tradition of separating creativity from the regular curriculum, pressures of accountability from external mandates, and inherited teaching practices. This may be a contributing factor to why creativity has been steadily declining in America for the past thirty years (Kim, 2021). Kim analyzed 273,441 results from the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT) across the country to investigate how creative thinking has changed over time. The results showed that there has been a continued decline of creativity in U.S. classrooms. The most significant decline of creativity was in grades K-3. At the secondary level, Weinstein, Clark, DiBartolomeo, and Davis (2014) analyzed 354 pieces of artwork and 50 fiction stories that were produced at the high school level between 1990-2011 and discovered that adolescents' creative writing proved to be increasingly formulaic between 1990-2011, with the work in latter publications being indicative of an adherence to realism bound by conventional writing practices. Writing workshop may be one area to facilitate writing instruction beyond these conventional writing practices.

The Role of the Teacher in Writing Workshop

Donald Graves (1984/2013), along with Donald Murray (1996) and Lucy Calkins (1994), have been leaders in the research and exploration of a new experience in writing: one that invited students' voices and strayed from didactic instruction of assigned pieces of writing. One of the greatest shifts that took place during the process approach was the role of the teacher. The Writing Process Movement advocated for teachers to listen and learn about their students' writing before being responsive to their needs (Calkins, 1994; Fletcher, 1993; Graves, 1984). In the past thirty years, writing instruction has evolved from the "assign and assess" habits that were predominant prior to the mid-1980s (Graham & Perin, 2007; Laman, 2011). A handful of pioneers in the Writing Process Movement began to lead the way in creating a writing workshop. They began viewing students as writers, and adopting practices, such as writing conferences, that invited students to embrace the messiness of creating, revising, and sharing their writing in a classroom community of writers (Calkins, 1994; Fletcher, 1993; Graves, 1984). Donald Graves (1984/2013), one of the writing process pioneers, noticed that some teachers seemed to misunderstand the intentions of the writing workshop and consequently deviated from the

nonlinear, recursive process, which stifled students' enjoyment of writing, and turned writing into skills-driven drudgery.

While definitions of the writing process have changed over time, it has never been intended to be a linear stage approach, but instead focused on student choice and voice (Graham & Sandmel, 2011). As such, the social component of a writing workshop is perhaps one of the most prevalent differences between a classroom that simply assigns writing pieces and a classroom that is committed to growing students as writers. One of the most critical, and also the most challenging, components of writing workshop where discussion is of paramount importance is the writing conference, where teachers meet with students one-on-one to talk about what the child has written and personalize instruction based on the student's demonstrated needs, curiosities, and motivation (Laman, 2011). Through peer conferencing, teacher conferencing, and sharing writing, the writing workshop explicitly promotes the social context of writing.

The potential downward shift in creativity in student writing may be related to the increased standardization of schooling. Teachers today are faced with the task of adhering to local, state, and national standards, including preparing their students to demonstrate their mastery of concepts and skills through myriad assessments. Research is ongoing related to evidence-based practices for teaching writing and the tension teachers experience when trying to follow the standards and also promote creativity (Kaplan, 2008; Mo et al., 2013; McCarthey et al., 2014; Troia et al., 2011). After examining a multitude of meta-analyses and research syntheses related to writing instruction and assessment, Troia and Olinghouse (2013) identified evidence-based practices that have a significant impact on student achievement. These included extra time for writing, strategy instruction, utilizing text models, creativity/imagery instruction, and process writing instruction, including writing for authentic audiences, engaging in cycles of planning and reviewing, and student input/ownership of writing.

Writing Workshop and Teacher Professional Development

The professional development that teachers experience regarding writing instruction may position them to challenge or re-envision standardized curriculum approaches. Specifically, McCarthey et al. (2014) identified that the CCSS have brought more attention to writing instruction but have also brought to light many challenges that teachers face when they are required to teach writing from a standardized curriculum. Factors such as teachers' beliefs,

experiences, and professional development affect writing instruction. As McCarthy et al. (2014) wrote, “examining how teachers negotiate these tensions is crucial to understanding their instruction, and ultimately students learning to write” (p. 59). It is therefore very important that teachers experience rich professional development like the National Writing Project, which may help them critique, challenge, and improve upon district-level standardized curriculum.

The aim of this study was to understand how elementary teachers who have participated in professional development from the National Writing Project (NWP) are teaching writing and viewing or promoting creativity within writing workshop as they navigate the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Specifically, the questions that guided this study were:

- 1) How do teachers with a background and pedagogy for teaching writing through the workshop model of the National Writing Project (NWP) navigate the increasing standardization of writing curriculum and pedagogy?
- 2) What are the district level expectations for teaching writing and then how, if at all, are these reflected as constraints or catalysts in teachers’ instructional decision making?
- 3) What resources are teachers using to support their writing instruction?
- 4) How do teachers identify and support creativity in writing?

Methodology

Qualitative methods were used to explore the experiences and perceptions of the elementary teacher participants regarding how they navigated writing instruction in their classrooms (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The study included a questionnaire, four observations of writing instruction in each classroom, and individual interviews with each of the teachers. Student writing was analyzed by the teacher and the researchers to determine how these pieces of writing supported creativity, using a creativity rubric that was modified from a study by Author and colleague (2017). This study followed the research design and approach of Davis (2012) who sought to explore teachers’ responses to the adoption and implementation of the Being a Writer curriculum through in-depth analysis of the practices of multiple teachers.

Participants

The participants (all pseudonyms) in this study were from the same suburban school district of a midwestern state and were selected using a purposeful sampling method. The

participants shared the common experience of professional development from the National Writing Project (NWP), as Fellows of the Summer Institute in their local community, although the dates that they attended the institute varied. The three participants were employed to teach a general classroom at the elementary level between grades 2-6 in the same New Hope school district. The second and sixth grade teachers teach at Oak Ridge Elementary school, and the fifth-grade teacher teaches at Clark Elementary School. Teachers' years of experience varied, ranging from 23-40 years. The three teachers were selected for participation, given their experience of teaching at the elementary level, as well as their affiliation with NWP.

Data Collection

In the first phase, the researchers utilized a Google Forms questionnaire with a few open-ended questions and a series of questions using a Likert scale of 1-4 for teachers to complete at the start of data collection. The goal of the questionnaire derived from Brindle et al. (2015) was to understand more about each teacher's pedagogy for writing instruction and provided an opportunity for teachers to carefully consider their responses before the interview. The questionnaire also revealed information about how any district-level practices influence the teachers' instructional decisions.

Much of the literature on writing workshop is derived from teachers self-reporting through interviews and surveys, often accompanied by observations (Brindle et al., 2015; McCarthy et al., 2014; Troia et al., 2019). For this reason, the present study also included classroom observations in an attempt to verify what was reported. In order to attempt to gain an understanding of typical instructional routines, observations were conducted for each participant on four separate occasions. The first and fourth observations were live, and the second and third observations were recorded using a Swivl robotic device. The Swivl follows the movement of the teacher during recording, allowing the researcher to feel present during classroom instruction, and also allowed the researcher to later pause and rewind particular moments for further review. Field notes were recorded by the researcher using the same template for all four observations. Notes from the observations revealed a range of evidence for writing instruction; process approach and conferring during writing workshop, student collaboration and creativity through cross-curricular activities, and didactic instruction for grammar and comprehension. These field notes were used to support the next phase of data collection, the interview process.

The next phase included each teacher participating in a follow-up 30-minute semi-structured interview after data from the questionnaires and observations were collected. The interview questions, largely derived from Davis (2012), helped the researchers to understand how the district-level practices influenced teachers' instructional decision making, as well as to learn more about the resources that teachers used in their instruction and to explore teachers' views and practices regarding creativity. In an effort to better understand how each teacher viewed and promoted creativity within their writing instruction, the interview session included the teacher and researcher discussing and evaluating student writing samples. At the beginning of the study the researcher asked each participating teacher to collect several samples of student writing that they believed showcased creativity. Together, the researchers and teacher used a creativity rubric that was modified from a study by Author and colleague (2017) to evaluate the students' work samples for their use of various creative components. The process of evaluating students' writing samples and discussing the creativity rubric provided insights into how the teachers viewed and promoted creativity within their approaches to writing instruction and assessment.

Data Analysis

Data analysis utilized the constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Miles et al, 2014), whereby the researchers interact with and interpret the data by making comparisons and asking questions. Analysis of the data included the process of open coding, deductive coding, in vivo coding, and clustering. For this study, the researchers used the evidence-based practices (EBP) that were identified by Troia and Olinghouse (2013) for the deductive codes.

Data was triangulated by reviewing each piece of evidence that pertained to each participant, searching for connections or discrepancies. For example, after completing the observations with the sixth-grade teacher, Sophie, the researchers noted that she had included a strong emphasis on the five-paragraph essay format, which was different from the other participants. Reviewing responses from Sophie's questionnaire coupled with observations and the interview permitted the researchers to understand her perspectives on teaching writing and motivation for applying NWP concepts into her classroom.

Results and Discussion

The results from each of the research questions will be addressed, accompanied by discussion about the findings. In order to answer the first research question, how do teachers with a background and pedagogy for teaching writing through the workshop model of the National Writing Project (NWP) navigate the increasing standardization of writing curriculum and pedagogy, the results from the online questionnaire were analyzed. Each teacher shared the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with a given statement about writing according to a Likert Scale of Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Grace (5th grade) and Sophie (6th grade) tended to share similar sentiments in responding to the questionnaire regarding their desire to teach students specific strategies for planning and revising, and meeting with students in small groups to critique each other's writing. Ella (2nd grade) reportedly disagreed with those viewpoints, and also did not feel that it is necessary for students to be able to label the grammatical function of words (e.g., nouns, verbs) to be able to write proficiently. Sophie was an outlier in her opinion that it is better to teach grammar through regular grammar lessons rather than when a specific need arises in students' writing.

The teachers' responses to these questions on the questionnaire support the pedagogy of teaching writing as an iterative process that includes strategy instruction (Calkins, 1994; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Graham & Perin, 2007; Graves, 1984; Langer & Applebee, 1987; Ray, 2001). Although there is evidence of a shared pedagogy among the teachers for teaching writing, the implementation and structure of writing instruction varied among these three classrooms. All three teachers agreed that it is important to teach planning and revising strategies to students (question 4), and they also agreed that formal instruction in writing is necessary in order for students to develop adequate writing skills (question 5). All teachers disagreed that spelling and correct English should be emphasized at the start of an assignment (questions 7 & 8). All three teachers in this study also disagreed that teachers should expect students to compose a good piece of writing in one draft (question 10).

The results from observing the three participants classrooms follow. Ella's second grade classroom was primarily a student-driven environment. Only one out of four lessons observed was teacher-driven, as the teacher modeled the structure of writing an opinion piece. Memos recorded

from the researchers' notes indicated that the teacher routinely employed a writing workshop in her classroom:

Judging by the automaticity the students exhibited in the routine, it was apparent that the classroom was a well-oiled workshop machine! Students' writing varied greatly, with an abundance of choice and enthusiasm. I saw mostly pieces of fiction writing on students' papers.

The most prevalent themes from the observations in Ella's classroom were feedback (from teacher and peers) and building a community of writers. Ella's approach to using writing conferences to help develop a community of writers supports the work of Franklin (2010) who concluded that students' growth in writing came through risk-taking, and that was achievable only after they had established a trusting classroom community. In this way, the teacher and students are all participating in writing conferences, and students have a clear purpose for their writing. They are part of a writing community.

Three of the evidence-based practices identified by Troia and Olinghouse (2013) were prevalent during the second-grade observations. Peer collaboration, motivation to write, and feedback each occurred in three out of four of the observations. These practices support the philosophy teachers have typically experienced during the Summer Institute professional development that was provided by the National Writing Project (National Writing Project, 2019).

Grace's classroom observations included student-centered work, as well. The four observations in Grace's fifth grade classroom were all focused on an inquiry unit that incorporated social studies with ELA standards, which Grace had planned with the Teacher Librarian in her building. Student choice was a strong tenet during this unit, as well as student engagement and motivation. The purpose of the inquiry unit was to provide a student-centered approach for studying the American Civil War in which Grace and the Teacher Librarian collaborated to elicit student understanding of the perception and perspective that provokes societal change.

Throughout this unit, several of the evidence-based practices identified by Troia and Olinghouse (2013) were present in Grace's instructional practices during the observations. Peer collaboration, inquiry instruction, and motivation were all present in three out of four of the observations in Grace's classroom. Students researched both independently and collaboratively,

using the note taking technique of “Sketchnotes.” Grace shared her thoughts privately during the third observation, admitting that she enjoyed providing students the opportunity for agency in their learning. She said, “I love teaching social studies this way! They have learned so much this year; I can’t wait to see what they do!” Other than that directive, students in Grace’s class were free to manage their time and resources accordingly.

On the contrary, Sophie, the sixth-grade teacher, displayed tension between her beliefs for writing instruction and her enacted curriculum. Sophie was very dedicated to her understanding of her district’s expectations and was typically very standards-driven with her writing instruction. However, the four classroom observations provided examples of teacher-directed assignments as well as creative activities.

The first observation began with six story starters listed on the whiteboard at the front of the room. As the students selected one of the prompts and began writing, the teacher immediately sat at a side table and wrote alongside them. Teachers as writers was a habit that was instilled in the NWP Summer Institute, but Sophie was the only teacher in this study who modeled this behavior. The room remained very quiet for the duration of the writing time. The activity was motivating and enjoyable for both the teacher and the students. The teacher announced that she would hang the students’ writing on the board so they could enjoy their writing.

The second observation provided a glimpse of teacher-directed instruction that required students to follow a five-paragraph essay format. Sophie began by pointing to the Learning Target that was written on the board and reading it aloud: “Today I can find evidence to support my thoughts when writing my essay.” Students had the choice of two essay prompts that asked them to analyze the movie *An American Tail* for the topic of immigration. The essays were structured with a five-paragraph essay format: introduction with a thesis statement, three supporting paragraphs with evidence to support their opinions, then a conclusion at the end of the essay.

The third observation continued students’ work on the essays from the previous observation, with students using a rubric to critique each other’s essays. Students appeared confused with how to use the rubric, which indicated that this approach was unfamiliar to them. The structure of these peer reviews was for an evaluative purpose, rather than helping each other grow as writers.

The evidence-based practices (Troia & Olinghouse, 2013) that were apparent from Sophie's classroom observations were the utilization of a word processor and feedback. However, the feedback was evaluative, rather than constructive with suggestions for growth, and most of the feedback that was observed was provided by the teacher. The sixth-grade observations showed evidence of peer editing during one of the classroom observations. Franklin (2010) described the difference between peer editing and peer conferences, suggesting that *peer editing* consists of students utilizing checklists or worksheets to follow as they check for correctness. The term *peer conference* connotes "a meeting that may or may not include evaluative feedback" (p. 80). A peer conference emphasizes the act of having a conversation about writing. The distinction between peer editing and peer conferencing is significant when considering the research question: How do teachers with a background and pedagogy for teaching writing through the workshop model of the National Writing Project (NWP) navigate the increasing standardization of writing curriculum and pedagogy?

During the Summer Institute, participants are exposed to the work of Donald Graves, Ralph Fletcher, and others who share the importance of the teacher's role as a facilitator in a writing workshop, letting students lead the way for their own thinking and writing. This appeared to be an area of tension for Sophie, who shared that she does not teach with a writing workshop approach, since they have a tight schedule and need to teach required pieces of writing in her district.

Sophie's excitement for writing and her readiness to participate in writing activities demonstrated her interest in writing, but her frequent references to district standards and rubrics indicated that Sophie navigates her instructional decision making through a strong influence of the prioritized standards and assessments that are required in her district.

Each participant was interviewed in order to answer the second research question, what are the district level expectations for teaching writing and then how, if at all, are these reflected as constraints or catalysts in teachers' instructional decision making? The results and discussion follow. Ella, the second-grade teacher, stated that she designs her lessons based on the needs that are evident in her students' writing or the district focus for a particular English Language Arts (ELA) unit. Students are given the choice of topic and genre, as well as the option to collaborate with a classmate. Ella described her system for providing feedback, either using sticky notes on

work that students turn in to request her feedback, or in person through writing conferences with her. Students may also ask their peers for feedback on their writing. The students in Ella's class have regular opportunities for sharing their writing with the class.

During the follow-up interview, Ella's responses indicated that her instruction is heavily influenced by the philosophy she developed by participating in the NWP Summer Institute. Her remarks referring to NWP's teachings of developing a writing workshop appeared 23 times during our interview. As Ella stated, "I stuck with what I knew, which is going through the Writing Project and building the culture." The professional literature that she read during the Summer Institute has remained an important guidepost for Ella's instructional decision making. As a result, Ella exemplified exemplary writing instruction that is less commonly found in typical classrooms (Graham, 2019). Ella felt strongly that students need purpose and extended periods of time to write "because it seems like the more we write, and the more we share, the more ideas keep budding in the classroom." Ella's excitement and passion for writing were evident from her interactions with students during the classroom observations, as well as her questionnaire and interview.

Grace responded to the third item in her questionnaire by stating that in her teaching she does a lot with the *Being a Writer* curriculum at the beginning of the year, discussing different types of writing and having time for free writing, but not as much time for free writing as she would like. Grace shared that she felt that writing instruction is dictated by the district curriculum, which includes the requirements of producing a piece of narrative, opinion, and expository writing. She said, "Much of our writing is dictated by our curriculum. We do narratives, opinion, and expository."

The codes that appeared most frequently in Grace's interview were teacher decision making, district expectations, and creativity. The training from NWP and the utilization of *Being a Writer* appeared to influence Grace's instructional decision making. For example, Grace described her dedicated times for writing at the beginning of the year as including a lot of quick writes. This would enable students to have plenty of options for ideas to return to if they struggled to generate ideas during writing time. Grace recognized and valued the importance of writing and made room

in her schedule to allow students time to write. Like Ella, this emphasis of time and space for writing demonstrates characteristics of exemplary writing instruction (Graham, 2019).

To navigate the increasing standardization of writing curriculum and pedagogy, Grace has demonstrated an alternative to isolated writing instruction by embedding her district's priority standards for ELA and social studies into an integrated unit. This approach has allowed her to provide authentic writing opportunities involving inquiry and social studies content.

On the contrary, Sophie, the sixth-grade teacher, succinctly explained that her students write approximately 15-20 minutes after their language arts lessons, as often as they can. If they are working on one of the required pieces of writing for the district, they may write for the entire language time, which is about 45 minutes. Sophie identified the required district writing pieces during her interview, including an argumentative paper, an opinion paper, and a personal narrative, which suggested that she was highly influenced by a standardized approach to writing instruction and pedagogy.

The third research question that was investigated during this study was, what resources are teachers using to support their writing instruction? To answer this question, resources that teachers used for their writing instruction were also examined. All three teachers in this study referenced the prioritized standards that had been selected for their grade level, either during their observations or within their teacher interview. However, the type of resources that were selected for instruction were largely the result of teacher decision-making by either the teacher, the building team, or the district grade level.

The *Being a Writer* curriculum was purchased for all teachers in the district several years ago, but was presented to teachers as a resource, not a mandated curriculum. Therefore, the extent of utilization of this resource varied among the teachers in this study.

The fourth research question, how do teachers identify and support creativity in writing, guided the researchers to examine the teachers' beliefs of what constitutes creativity in students' written work and how the teachers support students' creativity in the classroom. Two questions from the teacher questionnaire specifically addressed the topic of creativity, and there was some disagreement among the three teachers in this area. Grace, the fifth-grade teacher, indicated that

she somewhat agreed that creativity cannot be taught. Ella and Sophie strongly disagreed with this statement. Ella, the second-grade teacher, somewhat agreed that the CCSS do not allow opportunities for creativity, while Grace and Sophie somewhat disagreed with this statement. There were also contradictions between some of the questionnaire responses and the actions observed during classroom visits.

Ella's responses to the questionnaire indicated that she disagreed with the statement "Creativity cannot be taught," and somewhat agreed with the statement "The Common Core State Standards do not allow opportunities for creativity." During the classroom observations, Ella demonstrated how she has been able to incorporate a writing workshop within her classroom routine while meeting district standards. She looks for depth in her students' writing when identifying creativity. As she explained in her interview, "Anybody could write character, setting, problem, solution." Ella supported creativity in her classroom by allowing students choice in their style and topics of writing, and helped students develop their unique, creative ideas through writing conferences that allowed students to dictate the needs and direction of their writing.

Grace described how she is allowing her understanding of creativity to evolve. Although she admits that this shift in her thinking is difficult, she models risk-taking and a growth mindset. Grace explained that when looking for evidence of creativity, "I think it's got a lot to do with the way they put things together." This is a shift in the way Grace has begun to perceive creativity. As she described her transforming views of creativity, Grace said, "It's hard for me because when I think of creative writing, I think of writing cute little stories, you know?" However, when considering a project that integrated English/Language Arts and Social Studies, she added, "That was creative. It was the way they presented the information."

Based on the classroom observations and the follow-up interview, it appeared that Sophie typically offered a more traditional approach for teaching writing. However, during the first and last observations, Sophie tried to use a more creative approach for writing. This revelation came as a result of Sophie's reflection after her decision to participate in the research study. In the interview she explained:

It made me reflect more about maybe what I was doing...and then by doing the creativity part...made me reflect a little bit more about how I could put some creativity into that because it's just not...creativity isn't a part of sixth grade per se, because we do so much

technical writing...It made me think maybe some creativity would be good...and enjoyable.

In this comment, Sophie explained how she had viewed creativity as being separate from the sixth-grade curriculum, but her involvement in this study was causing her to question her values and beliefs for teaching writing in her sixth-grade classroom.

Conclusion

Although all three teacher participants in this study shared the same experience of the Summer Institute that was offered through a local site of the National Writing Project, they applied their learning in various ways in their writing instruction. Ella exhibited confidence in facilitating a workshop approach where students directed their learning through choices of topics and genres and the ability to experience collaborative feedback. Ella addressed required expectations through whole group minilessons, as well as individual and small group writing conferences. Grace did not incorporate writing conferences but did allow her students plentiful opportunities for choice and individual expression. Sophie was passionate about her personal interest in writing but believed that students were best prepared to be strong writers once they had mastered the formula for a five-paragraph essay.

Sophie's inclination for traditional instructional decision-making and reinforcement of the five-paragraph essay aligned with the observations from Wilcox et al. (2015), who noted that classrooms in their study that exceeded expectations were focused mostly on more essay writing, research, and citing text evidence. They concluded that:

This finding suggests that at least in some educational settings attempts to align to the CCSS may ultimately work against recommended practices identified in the research such as the use of creativity/imagery to prompt writing, and self-regulation and metacognitive reflection as teachers focus on the use of rubrics to align students' writing to the CCSS tests. (Wilcox et al., 2015, p. 920)

Sophie's adherence to teaching formulaic essay writing and utilization of rubrics was evidence of the care she has in making sure that she prepares her students to be successful writers. One may conclude that Sophie's definition of successful writing is to score well on a writing rubric.

As noted, the outcomes of each of the three participating teachers varied considerably. However, one observation from the results is that years of service did not appear to impact the results. It is not possible to summarize all of the data into one generalization. Therefore, it would be beneficial to continue the research into the long-term instructional practices of teachers who have participated in professional development through the National Writing Project.

Future research is needed to examine successful methods for preparing teachers who participate in the NWP Summer Institute to become teacher leaders of writing. Specifically, how can district leaders support teachers' passions for writing instruction and build upon the knowledge and pedagogy learned through Summer Institute participation in order to strengthen district writing programs? This may lead to implications for district leaders who are responsible for preparing professional development for their teachers.

It is imperative to align the school system's curriculum and assessments with their state standards (Care et al, 2018; Martone & Sireci, 2009). It is equally, if not more, important to support teachers in the research-based instructional strategies that have been proven to be effective for helping children to grow as writers (Graham, 2019). Neglect of these proven strategies may result in a reliance on checklists and rubrics to be certain to cover the standards, ignoring the value and effects of the instructional strategies that were employed. All of these alignment components must be regularly revisited to be sure that they are working; that is, students are achieving success with the intended outcomes. Finally, creativity has been proven to be a valued component of a student's learning experience (Beghetto, 2010). Yet in practice, creativity does not seem to be valued because it does not explicitly show up in state or national standards.

The literature has indicated that there is a need for creativity in schools (Beghetto, 2010, 2015, 2018; Kim, 2021), and the data from this research has demonstrated that creativity is not mutually exclusive with teaching the standards. The results of this study suggest administrators, educators, and teacher preparatory institutions consider reviewing their systems and improve upon their practices in elementary writing instruction by including more focus on integrating creativity into their writing instruction.

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