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Educator Views of Writing and the Common Core State Writing Standards: A Case Study

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

by

Michael Arthur Harrison

March 2017

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Melanie Sperling, Chairperson
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The Dissertation of Michael Arthur Harrison is approved:

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Educator Views on the Common Core State Writing Standards: A Case Study

by

Michael Arthur Harrison

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Education
University of California, Riverside, March 2017
Dr. Melanie Sperling, Chairperson

The most recent reform of education in the United States, the Common Core State Standards, seeks to produce students who are college and career ready. One of the strategies to help students become prepared for life after secondary school is to develop their skills in writing. The goal of this qualitative case study was to help us understand the range and nature of educators' beliefs and attitudes about the nature of writing and writing instruction in order to gain insight about how they responded to the CCSS writing standards. The participants were employees of one school district including district office personnel, school administrators, English teachers and math teachers. For this case study, I conducted interviews with the Director of Curriculum, two teachers on assignment working at the district office, the principal and assistant principal at one school site, a focus group of English teachers, one additional English teacher, a focus group of math teachers and one additional math teacher, all also at the school site. I used three epistemological positions -including formalism, structuralism and dialogism- as the conceptual framework to examine the beliefs, attitudes and values of the participants on

the nature of writing and writing instruction. In addition, I determined how these views affected the educators' responses to the CCSS writing standards. The results of the study indicate that a range of views on writing existed in the school district which led to an uneven response among participants to the new standards. There was also a mismatch between the teachers and the district office personnel in their interpretation of the standards, contributing to the varied responses to the CCSS. Despite this conflict, there was agreement that the state-wide assessments were the driving force in affecting changes in curriculum. This study implies the need for those who design reform policies to account for the current views of educators tasked with implementing new policy in order to best meet the challenges in new reform policy.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In the history of education in the United States there has been a steady stream of reforms, all attempting to improve the quality of our schools. Each reform has its own features and points of emphasis, but all are based on specific beliefs and values about learning rooted in a variety of subject matter and/or learning epistemologies. The newest example of such a reform is the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). A case in point is the CCSS's approach to writing and writing instruction, which differs dramatically from that of earlier reforms. My qualitative case study examined the beliefs and values of educators in one school district regarding the nature of writing and writing instruction, and how those beliefs and values, - and their epistemological underpinnings - , intersected with the CCSS.

When districts adopt or enact a reform, they implicitly - and, at times, explicitly - ask educators to either take on a new set of ideas or align their current views with those expressed by the reform. Educators may react with a defensive posture (McHenry, 2016) or alternatively, they may feel allied to the underlying beliefs of the reform and fully embrace it. To fully understand the nature and context of the CCSS, and to help ensure the wise approaches to the reform's writing goals, this study helps us to understand the range and nature of the beliefs about writing held by those on the ground who, defensively or with full embrace, are charged with implementing this reform. This was the goal of my study.

The CCSS and Writing

Policies and practices related to writing instruction in the United States have taken many forms. New technologies, high-stakes testing, and evidence based practices have all influenced writing and literacy instruction (Applebee & Langer, 2006). During the Bush administration in 2000, the No Child Left Behind standards privileged literacy with a focus on reading that moved writing instruction into the background. But with the advent of the CCSS, there has been a renewed focus on writing as the central means for teachers and students to develop and share knowledge (Applebee, 2013). In fact, this elevation of writing as part of integrated literacy instruction is fundamental to the new standards. In the past, teaching reading and writing have been considered separate enterprises, and in some ways continue to be considered so by many teachers. The new standards, however, attempt to consider the two together and expand the use of writing across disciplines. The premise is that all of the disciplines, not just the English Language Arts (ELA), bear the responsibility for literacy development, including writing. This shift in focus places new responsibility for instruction in writing on a range of teachers, many of whom have limited to no experience teaching writing or using writing to teach their varied disciplines. In addition, the standards place new emphasis in ELA on evidence-based argumentative writing, which has induced a change in focus in the English curriculum at many schools (corestandards.org).

The Study

This case study focused on one district, and on how district personnel, administrators, and teachers of ELA and math met the challenges associated with implementing the CCSS writing standards. My approach was grounded in sociocultural theory as I investigated the views of the various educators in the Orange Grove Unified School District (OGUSD; all identifiable places and people have been given pseudonyms), including a close look at their beliefs about writing and the epistemological stances that were reflected in and may have informed those beliefs. I examined how the beliefs about writing within the district informed instruction in the context of one school, Green Valley High School. In addition, my study considered the relationship between the range of beliefs held by the different educators and the writing standards from the Common Core State Standards. While educators may or may not be conscious of the beliefs or the epistemological stances that undergird their choices when they design curriculum, these beliefs and stances do play a role in decision making. Broadly, a person's view on writing guides their notions of what constitutes effective writing and writing instruction.

The Problem

The CCSS English/Language Arts writing standards emphasize the use of writing in a variety of modes, including writing over extended time (what is often termed a "full process essay") as well as in a limited time-frame or timed writings ("English Language Arts Standards," 2013) Many educators and certainly the architects of the CCSS expect

that a new emphasis on writing will bring about changes in the amount of writing students do, in addition to improving the quality of student writing (corestandards.org). For example ELA literacy standard 9-10.5 states: students will “develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grades 9-10).” This standard emphasizes what some see as stages in the process of composing a longer piece of writing (a topic I cover in chapter 5 when I discuss the use of prepackaged writing programs). (corestandards.org) At the same time, standard ELA literacy 9-10.10 calls for a balance of frequent shorter writing experiences: students will “write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.” These two standards reflect the new emphasis on an increase in the amount and types of writing students will produce. The major shift for English teachers is the privileging of argumentative writing over other types of writing such as, more traditionally, literary analysis. Now, what is expected is predominantly making an argument in a written response to reading, using textual evidence.

Math

In addition to the shifts required of the ELA teachers, math teachers are expected to make several changes in their curricular approach under the new CCSS. One of the shifts is to emphasize writing that explains how students arrive at their math answers.

This shift has implications especially for instruction in math classes at the secondary level. The expectation to write explanations, while not explicit in the CCSS themselves, is prevalent in the Smarter Balanced Assessment tests that provide assessments for the CCSS in fifteen states, including California. The California Assessment of Student Proficiency and Progress (CAASPP) is one of the assessments developed by SBAC. An example of the type of explanatory writing students must perform on the tests can be seen in the released question from SBAC for standard CCSS math G-CO.C.11.

Problem: Ted claims that the two shaded triangles must be congruent. Is Ted's claim correct? Include all work and/or reasoning to either the triangles congruent or to disprove Ted's claim (caaspp.org, 2016).

The exemplar answer reveals the expectations for a written explanation for this type of problem.

Exemplar response: Yes, triangle ABC is congruent to triangle OGE. To show this, first notice that sides AB and DC are congruent because they are opposite sides of a rectangle. Similarly, side AC is congruent to side DE because they are opposite sides of a parallelogram. To complete the proof, we show that angles BAG and COE are congruent. To see this, first notice that angles BAC and ACO are congruent because they are opposite interior angles for the parallel lines AB and DC. Also, angles AGO and COE are congruent because they are opposite interior angles for the parallel lines AC and OE. So by transitive property, angles BAG and COE are congruent. Therefore, triangles ABC and OGE are congruent by SAS congruence ("California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress," 2016)

The exemplar could be considered a full paragraph of explanation. It is important to note that most questions on these tests are selected single response multiple choice, with only a small number requiring written responses. However, the performance assessments, another portion of the test that measures the application of knowledge, include problems that require more extensive writing. Math teachers have had to make adjustments in their curriculum and in their thinking about instruction based on the requirements for writing on portions of the SBAC tests. For math teachers, this has proven to be a challenge because writing has not traditionally been a part of the math curriculum.

The shifts in curricular emphasis for both English and math teachers raise issues concerning how educators will respond to the new standards. Because the CCSS writing standards have only recently been adopted, the way that district office personnel, administrators, and teachers implement them has not been studied in any depth. It is worth knowing the level of commitment these educators bring to implementing the new standards. Do they simply dismiss the standards as the “next big thing” or embrace them and attempt to execute them to the best of their ability? And for what reasons?

One way to approach such questions is to look closely at how educators represent the standards. Examining how the writing standards are represented is key, maybe even fundamental, to understanding the values and attitudes of those charged with implementing them. How people discuss, write about, or enact the writing standards (e.g., through curriculum, instruction, professional development) can reveal their values and attitudes about them. Attitudes and values have an impact on the quality of the

implementation of the writing standards and theoretically how students acquire writing proficiency.

. The focus in my study on how district office personnel, administrators and teachers take on and think about the implementation of these new standards provides a missing perspective in the research literature about how the attitudes and beliefs of the participants inform the day-to-day implementation of the CCSS writing standards.

In order to foster our understanding of the issues discussed above, I asked the following research questions:

How do district office personnel, administrators and teachers meet the challenge of implementing the CCSS writing standards?

1. What do the CCSS writing standards mean to those given the task of implementing them?
2. How do educators view the nature of writing?
3. How do educators view writing instruction?
4. How do the views on the nature of writing and writing instruction intersect with the CCSS-WS?
5. What roles do the views of the nature of writing play in the implementation of the CCSS-WS?

In answering these questions the study found that the views on the nature of writing and writing instruction varied among the participants in this study. My study found that three culturally-rooted, and sometimes inconsistent, views of the nature of writing and good writing instruction existed in the minds of the educators I studied, though they may not necessarily have been aware of these views: formalism focused on the written text itself, structuralism focused cognitive process, and sub-processes, that take place in the act of writing, and dialogism focused on the social-contextual aspects of writing. While these three views may not have been explicitly articulated in educators' talk about writing, in my analysis I found telling indications of each. In identifying evidence of these views, I was able to see how they related to the educators' responses to the new writing standards in the CCSS.

Furthermore, though there were areas agreement, no single underlying set of beliefs or stances on writing seemed to exist across the Orange Grove school district. Perhaps because of the variety of views on writing, there was an uneven response to the CCSS writing standards. Depending on a participant's outlook on writing, there was either strong resistance to the new standards or some measure of acceptance of the change brought on by the standards. One result of the divergent viewpoints on writing was the presence of a mismatch in interpretation of the standards between the district office personnel and the English teachers. In addition to this mismatch, the math teachers felt that the district office was rushing the implementation of the CCSS. Because of the pace of the implementation, the math teachers felt they were not given sufficient time to understand and analyze the standards before changing their curriculum. Finally, the

single most influential factor that affected the curriculum brought on by the CCSS was the high-stakes, state-wide assessments. The beliefs about writing and writing instruction played a lesser role than the assessments for the district office personnel, the school administrators, and the teachers when it came to developing curriculum.

Overview of Dissertation

Chapter Two: Literature Review situates my study in research literature focused on reform and writing instruction, and recent research literature that explores issues related to teachers and the CCSS In Chapter Three: Conceptual Framework, I describe the theoretical basis for my study, analysis and presentation of findings. In Chapter Four: Methods, I review details of the site of my study, the kinds of data I gathered, and the methods of analysis I used to draw conclusions about the participants' beliefs and the CCSS. In Chapter Five: Findings I present the findings from my study and in Chapter Six: Discussion, I take up the implications of those findings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Writing instruction in the United States has evolved over the course of the past 75 years from a strictly formalist approach in which the writer was viewed as a transmitter of meaning to a dialogic view informed by sociocultural theory in which the writer is seen as conversant with an audience or reader (M. Nystrand, Greene, S. and Wiemelt, J., 1993). It is not difficult to find writing instruction that is informed by both ways of thinking. General research on composition and writing instruction, the historical development of composition studies, the role of the teacher, and the theoretical perspective on the dialogic nature of composition, informs my study (Nystrand et al.; Smagorinsky, 2006; Sperling & Freedman, 2001) but my focus here is on recent research that deals with reform in writing instruction based on socio-cultural views and, in comparison, research that addresses the CCSS writing standards.

It is made clear in the studies included in this review that K-12 students in the United States are not required to compose for extended assignments in any of the core disciplines-- English Language Arts, social studies, science, or math (Graham, 2007). Writing instruction in general was placed on the back burner with the onset of NCLB law, which privileged reading over writing (Hillocks, 2003; McCarthy, 2008). In fact, students were not required to compose as part of the assessment procedures for NCLB. According to Hillocks (2008), the lack of writing assessment beyond multiple choice questions on proof-reading was the driving force behind the neglect of writing instruction across the country. The architects of the new CCSS have placed an emphasis on writing

in all of the disciplines, not just in the English Language Arts. In addition, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, the company responsible for testing these standards, includes an essay portion that has likely influenced the way teachers construct curriculum to include more extended writing. Because the writing that is privileged in the assessment is argumentative writing, teachers likely tailor their instruction to this genre of writing.

Reform in Writing Instruction

One study that supports Hillock's (2008) contention that the NCLB had a detrimental effect on writing instruction was conducted by McCarthy (2008), who attempted to understand the attitudes of teachers toward writing and the nature of writing instruction while NCLB was in force. Using interviews and observations of 18 teachers in two states, the study focused on the differences in attitudes and instructional choices in high-income and low-income schools. McCarthy outlines three trends in writing instruction: process approach, writing as a cognitive process, and the role of genre. The process approach (Boscolo & Bazerman, 2008) includes self-selection of topics by the students, writing for an authentic audience, selecting revision strategies and presenting work to peers. The approach to writing with an emphasis on cognitive processes is described as helping students become more self-aware of their composing strategies and helping them to self-regulate their composing process (Flower, 1994b). Finally, McCarthy describes "genre" as a "set of rhetorical choices rather than formal definitions or lists of features" (p. 469). In other words, genres are not ruled by particular features as much as they are governed by the context of their production. For example, a student may

effectively use poetic language as part of an editorial in a school newspaper, while poetic language may not appear on a list of the features of persuasive writing. The student's poetry may be an effective rhetorical move given the context she finds herself in. McCarthy mentions the privileging of narrative, expository and argumentative genres to address the state standards in the two schools where her observations took place.

Two important findings from McCarthy's study include the effect that a narrow focus on testing had on curriculum and the differences in writing instruction between low-income and high-income schools. The teachers almost universally agreed that the NCLB state tests had a detrimental effect on their students and on learning. The teachers felt forced to submit to a narrow curriculum that featured test preparation above all else. However, there were differences in the degree to which teachers felt pressured to accommodate test preparation depending upon whether they taught at a low-income school or a high-income school. Teachers at high-income schools felt more comfortable ignoring some of the pressure to have their students perform on the assessments, and therefore were able to continue to provide somewhat more robust writing instruction. The teachers at the low-income schools experienced more prescriptive curriculum and consequently were forced to limit their writing instruction to strategies that would help students achieve on the test.

A later study (McCarthy & Ro, 2011) helped to confirm some of the findings from McCarthy's earlier work (2008) with regard to the influence of policy on writing instruction. The authors also examined the patterns of approaches to writing instruction in

a small sample of 29 third- and fourth- grade teachers in four US states. They identified four approaches that teachers used: writer's workshop (Calkins & Harwayne, 1991), traditional skills, genre-based and hybrid/eclectic. In addition, the study revealed a trend among teachers to use graphic organizers and focus on specific genres. The findings of this study can be separated into two parts: 1) the approaches to teaching writing; and 2) the major influences on writing instruction. The authors identified five teachers who used a workshop approach that involved mini-lessons, writing time, conferences, and sharing with peers. Six teachers used a skills approach which employed a district mandated curriculum in whole group instruction that isolated skills such as sequencing, paragraphing and mechanics. Most of this instruction relied on worksheets that were completed individually by students. Fourteen teachers used a genre approach (focusing on narrative, descriptive, research or expository). Though there were some similarities with the workshop approach, this approach imposed genres on the students rather than providing them a choice, specific instruction was given on how to complete the tasks, and feedback tended to be brief and teacher-led. The final approach was the hybrid/eclectic. Using this approach, three teachers combined elements of the other approaches. For example, some teachers focused on specific genres, but used a workshop approach to address the genres. The researchers found that a preponderance of teachers used the genre approach, though not in the sense that genres were used to emphasize social context in which meaning is constructed. Instead, teachers used this approach in a formulaic way as a response to the state standards. The teachers focused on the types of genres that would appear on the tests and used sample texts found on the state test sites to instruct students

in genre features apart from the contexts that shape them. This supports other research (e.g. Applebee & Langer, 2009) that identifies how standards and high-stakes tests influence instruction.

The second finding identified the major influences on writing instruction. Both professional development and the imposition of standards were considered by the teachers to be the most influential elements on their writing instruction. Nineteen teachers stated that professional development influenced their instruction. The type of professional development was either imposed by the district the teachers worked in or was voluntary. Teachers who used the workshop model were most likely to attend voluntary professional development while those who used a skills approach were most often required to attend sessions sponsored by their districts. In the districts where teachers were mandated to attend professional development, a skills-centered, packaged program for writing instruction was often imposed. Fourteen teachers (almost half of the participants) reported that state standards and high-stakes tests influenced their writing instruction.

Both of these studies (McCarthy, 2008; McCarthy & Ro, 2011) reflect the environment in which teachers of writing operated, the influence of government policies on instruction, and the kinds of instruction that were generally practiced. These studies suggest that teachers felt that the imposition of standards had mostly adverse effects on writing instruction. A further finding was that teachers continued to use a broad range of approaches in writing instruction, despite the imposition of the standards.

Other studies also offer insight into the differing contexts that influence the methods teachers use to instruct students in writing. Prado's (2006) qualitative study examined the struggles of three beginning elementary teachers in an urban setting. Issues related to policy, student interactions, and their own interest in teaching writing comprised the focus of this study. As indicated by other research (Applebee & Langer, 2009; Hillocks, 2012; McCarthy, 2008; McCarthy & Ro, 2011), concerns about preparing student for high-stakes tests superseded interest in writing instruction. This was particularly true for the beginning elementary teachers in Prado's study who concentrated on teaching reading and mathematics rather than writing. Coupled with their lack of preparation in writing instruction and their anxiety about their own writing ability, beginning teachers' classes were not able to provide students with sufficient opportunities to develop writing skills.

Three important findings arose from Prado's study. First, the teachers who participated in the study drew on a variety of not always helpful sources to develop their teaching of writing, such as professional development, trial and error, and self-reflection. Second, each individual context helped to shape the writing instruction of the teachers. Factors including the policy environment, types of students, the community, the level of collegial support, and the material distributed by the district all played a role in influencing the writing instruction of the participant teachers. Third, how each teacher managed the conflicting features of their context shaped how they learned to teach writing.

Teachers and the CCSS

In light of the recent implementation of the Common Core State Standards, Prado's study anticipates the need for beginning teachers to have quality instruction in how to teach writing. Her study points out that there are a range of contexts into which beginning teachers are thrust, each with its unique features related to writing instruction. These conditions suggest that it is increasingly important to understand how educators at all levels in varying contexts meet the challenge of implementing the CCSS writing standards.

A qualitative case study was conducted by McQuitty (2012) to analyze how one first-year teacher learned to teach writing in the face of new Common Core State Standards. This study in many ways supports the findings of Prado (2006) and echoes Johnson, Thompson, and Smagorinsky's (2003) study of how a beginning teacher learned to teach writing, influenced by the current standards and assessment environment. The participant in the McQuitty study, Elle, operated within a complex, multi-layered organization that included her undergraduate and graduate programs, her school district, her sixth-grade class, and her evolving notions about quality writing instruction. McQuitty describes this organization as "nested," meaning it consists of several layers of systems of varying complexity. The participant, Elle, adapted her conception of writing instruction to fit with the ideas, goals, activities, and demands of each system. In addition, her understanding of her own evolution as a writing teacher was instrumental in shaping her writing instruction. Her sense that her ideas about teaching writing fit with

those found within the school district and that echoed the ideas in her graduate program contributed to the ongoing development of her writing instruction.

Not only do teachers navigate layers of organizational systems day to day in the classroom, they also subscribe to theories and maintain identities that can seem contradictory on the surface. Sperling (2004) argues that English teachers manage multiple and at times contradictory theories and identities that make sense in their dialogic existence in schools. Her study of fourteen middle and high school teachers examined how the teachers perceived students' engagement in reading and writing, their reading and writing achievement and the place of assessment in the achievement-engagement relationship. In addition to focusing on teacher perceptions of these issues, Sperling also looked closely at the language that was used to determine the attitudes, beliefs and values the teachers possessed about these topics.

On the basis of interviews and observations, Sperling was able to detect multiple voices that teachers used which led to the identification of three sets of contradictions imbedded in their perspectives: literacy ability is innate vs. literacy ability is socially constructed; literacy achievement is reflected in assessment vs. literacy achievement sits apart from assessment; assessment is an impartial gauge of literacy achievement vs. assessment is a constructed (and in that sense partial) gauge of literacy achievement. Sperling accounts for these contradictory perspectives on literacy by suggesting that they reflect the contradictory environment that teachers work in. "Their thoughts and discourse represent these environments" (p. 250) . These kinds of contradictions often

are identified as problematic, but Sperling asserts that they are a natural outgrowth in teacher thinking about literacy and the teaching of literacy.

Understanding that teachers' ideas about writing instruction emerge from multi-layered nested systems and may contain contradictory perspectives is important when determining the most efficacious strategies for implementing the CCSS writing standards. This insight can benefit educators at various levels within a school district, from the superintendent to classroom teachers, in how they understand, support, and carry out writing instruction. In addition, it can be beneficial to gain understanding of how students respond to instructional strategies employed by teachers of writing. Peel's (2004) qualitative case study of a 10th grade English student's strategies to mitigate anxiety and boredom related to school sponsored writing provides understanding of how students respond to and are engaged by the efforts of writing teachers. A premise of Peel's case study is that development of writing is most successful when the student writer is intrinsically motivated. In the case of the participant in this study, Aaliyah, the kind of writing required by teachers was not rewarding enough to be intrinsically motivating. In contrast to the academic writing that Aaliyah was asked to perform, writing in social media or computer-mediated communication was inherently motivating. Aaliyah texted, posted, and commented frequently throughout the day using the conventions of her adolescent discourse community. Many factors contributed to Aaliyah's lack of motivation in performing academic writing. Her anxiety and boredom grew from the distance between her home and school literacies, including the issues of limited knowledge of writing conventions, a distance between what she felt was purposeful

writing and the writing topics and modalities that were assigned at school, and her need for a dialogic partner.

By collecting data through observation, interviews and extensive document collection, Peel also found that Aaliyah had shifting notions of what constitutes “good writing.” For Aaliyah, good writing in social discourse reflected what is “true” (p.72). On the other hand, she felt that good writing for school was defined by the lack of errors in “grammar, and all that” (p. 72). These findings are important for teachers of writing in all of the disciplines to consider as they learn to design curriculum to meet the challenges of the CCSS writing standards.

In the last five years, some studies have suggested improved ways of teaching writing that go beyond focusing on the classroom process of writing (i.e., pre-writing, drafting, editing, revising, and publishing). One recent study by Behizadeh (2014), raised the issue of “authenticity” in the kinds of writing that students are assigned. This two-year qualitative study examined how 43 students defined “authentic” writing experiences. The author explains that the term “authentic” writing has been defined by researchers as related to college and career readiness. This definition leaves out the students’ own fund of knowledge and may not match what students consider “authentic.” Her findings suggest that students need writing instruction that includes choice of valued topics, an emphasis on expression instead of conventions, and the potential for writing to impact an intended, actual audience. Her argument is based on the notion that a student’s judgment of an authentic writing task is the most important factor, not a generalized

correspondence between what happens in school and out of school. She references researchers who subscribe to the idea that students are the arbiters of what is authentic, not a researcher. She also posits that the “real world,” often referred to in reform policies, is dependent on a student’s fund of knowledge “rooted in their personal interests, family, and cultural experiences, social life, and community knowledge” (Moje, Ciechanowski, Ellis, Carrillo, and Calloazo, p. 29; Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez, 1992).

Meyer (2013) raised the question of the competency of content-area teachers to teach literacy skills. Two research questions guided her study: “Do middle school and high school content-area teachers have a foundational knowledge of the needs of adolescent literacy learners?” and “Do ELA teachers possess significantly more knowledge of the needs of adolescent literacy learners than their peers in science and social studies?” The study found that content-area teachers were not prepared to teach the literacies that are imbedded in the CCSS. It also raised concerns about the practice of using ELA teachers to help develop the ability of content-area teachers to instruct students in literacy skills. The study found that ELA teachers were no more able than content-area teachers to address the literacy needs of students outside their discipline. ELA teachers did not demonstrate knowledge of literacies beyond that of content-area teachers.

A semester-long qualitative study by Ketter and Pool (2001), though focused on high-stakes tests in general, remains pertinent when examining the CCSS writing standards. The research questions are relevant in the current testing environment: 1) How

did the test influence teacher beliefs about writing instruction?; 2) How did these teachers adapt their instruction to respond to the demands of the test?; 3) How did students who had not passed the test respond to their writing instruction and how did preparation for the test affect attitudes/beliefs about writing? The study focused on two classrooms, both ninth-grade English classes, and two veteran teachers who were considered to be successful writing instructors based on their students' performances on the Maryland Writing Test. Through collaborative data analysis, the authors found that the participant teachers had differing beliefs about writing instruction. Mrs. Smith, believed that writing was one of the most frustrating tasks she was asked to perform because students had such disparate skills and experiences with writing. On the other hand, Mrs. Jones loved to teach writing because it afforded students a sense of independence and confidence. The participant teachers shared several beliefs about the effects of the writing assessment: 1) it provided a more structured approach to teaching writing; 2) it improved students' writing competency; 3) it created frustration with irrelevance of the prompts to their students experience; 4) they believed that a wide range of writing skills were not measured by the test; 5) they felt that the focus on personal essays narrowed the language arts curriculum.

The key findings that Ketter and Pool identified were that the MWT diminished the ability of teachers to provide instruction in writing that accounts for the individual needs of students. In addition, they found that students viewed the test as a meaningless, yet important task to overcome. Teachers adapted their instruction to the narrow confines

of the test, and therefore, limited the range of experiences their students were given in writing.

A recent dissertation by Porter (2013) examined the CCSS in general. This comparative case study using cross-case analysis explored the way two elementary teachers at different school sites experienced the implementation of federally directed curriculum change. Data were collected through surveys, focus groups, interviews, and document analysis. The participants included the Race to the Top coordinator for the school district, principals at both schools, and a six-member focus group at each elementary school. The study examined the experiences and perspectives of teachers as they initially implemented the CCSS. Issues related to interpretation of the policy, the role of professional collaboration, the impacts on teachers' personal and professional lives, time and pacing, and alignments with other initiatives were investigated. Porter found that schools responded to the large-policy change by interpreting and making sense of the policy, framing the scale of the change and recognizing the policy's potential benefit. In addition, the teachers felt the adoption of the CCSS in their personal and professional lives, as well as the in the lives of their students. They also felt that their self-image as teachers was tarnished by the duplication of efforts and the compromises as educators they had to make. Finally, Porter found that the pacing and amount of time provided for implementation determined the level of quality.

Biguh-Ambe's (2013) mixed-methods study, examined the attitudes of 28 elementary teachers toward writing, their perceptions of themselves as writing teachers,

their students' attitudes toward writing, and the extent to which these attitudes improved after a ten-week research-based professional development program. Using pre- and post-workshop surveys, classroom observations and univariate analysis of the survey data, the study found that teachers must feel competent as writers themselves in order to provide the kind of instruction that helps students become proficient writers. References were made to prior studies (Englert, Raphael, Anderson, Anthonyy & Stevens, 1991; Englert Mariage & Dunsmore, 2006; Hillocks, 1986) that suggested teachers' perceptions about themselves as writers can influence their instruction and their students' development. Biguh-Ambe's study reinforces the idea that writing is a complex process that requires skills in a variety of domains. The implication from this study is that professional development should be instrumental in helping teachers develop their own writing skills, which can in turn help improve their abilities as writing teachers.

One study that took a broader view of the CCSS-WS, while at the same time maintaining its focus on classroom teachers was conducted by Addison and McGee (2016). They contend that though the CCSS includes standards that have merit, the culture of testing and accountability remains intact. They advocate for a greater emphasis on identifying and disseminating best practices in writing instruction. After an indictment of the origins of the CCSS, they make the case that in order to maintain the financially lucrative environment that drives the reform and the assessment of the new standards, the architects of the CCSS manufactured a crisis that flies in the face of current data on student performance. Their meta-analysis of writing instruction in secondary and post-

secondary institutions is intended to counter the negative narrative that served as the impetus for the CCSS reform.

Using a mixed-mode approach, they attempted to find patterns and relationships in the types of writing instruction that were featured in various studies. Examining the findings and implications of a range of studies, the authors built their recommendation for a path forward in writing instruction. The new standards figured prominently in the second half of the book, as they compared their findings to the anticipated direction of writing instruction that would result from the CCSS. The authors attempt to identify the state of writing instruction and the environment into which the standards were placed aligns with my study in the sense that I examined the underlying epistemologies that were in place at the time the new standards were implemented.

A survey study conducted by Matlock, Goering, Endacott, and Collet, (2015) focused on the views of teachers in support of the CCSS and its implementation, how the standards affected their instruction and whether the CCSS was a factor in potential plans to leave the profession. The researchers sent surveys to 6,826 teachers, of whom 1,303 responded, a 19% response-rate which, according to the authors, is typical of an online survey without incentives. Using SPSS software, the study found the teachers held a generally positive view of the CCSS and its implementation. The teachers were grouped by the grade level they taught and their years of experience in the field. One interesting finding from this study was that negative views of the new standards seemed to increase

with the grade level taught. In other words, teachers in the upper grades tended to hold more critical views than teachers in the lower grade levels.

The researchers noted that after conducting follow-up interviews, the level of positive support for the CCSS eroded over the time of the study as the political climate in the state began to change. A groundswell of criticism in the public arena by politicians, parents, and educators appeared to have some influence on the initially positive views of the CCSS held by the teachers. Their study served as a point of comparison with the initial findings as educators and the public wrestled with the notion that national standards would be a common goal across states. Three themes emerged from the follow up interviews and analysis: organizational marginalization, lack of agency to meet the needs of students, and risk-reward. Teachers felt that the implementation was out of their control and were therefore marginalized by the administration. In addition, they felt that their autonomy as educators who select methods and materials was at risk, which damaged the well-being of their students. Finally, the teachers were concerned about the increased accountability for their teaching as their autonomy diminished.

What seems interesting in this study is the pace of the change in the attitude toward the CCSS. The study survey was administered in 2013, with follow-up interviews conducted in early 2015. Considerable differences emerged in a relatively short amount of time as the standards were implemented. Though I did not conduct follow-up interviews in my study, it would be worthwhile to see if similar results would be found.

Two studies that complement my concern with teacher epistemologies and viewpoints were completed by Newell, VanDerHeide, and Olsen, 2014) and McCarthy and Mkhize (2013). Each addressed the underlying epistemologies and beliefs that guided teachers' instructional decisions. Newell directly takes up the shift in focus on argumentative writing in the English curriculum mentioned in my introduction. Drawing on traditions in writing theory, Newell identified three argumentative epistemologies: structural, ideational, and social practice. Based on these epistemologies, two research questions guided the research: 1) what argumentative epistemologies are reflected in the instructional units on argumentative writing? 2) How were teacher epistemologies for teaching argumentation made evident in their instructional reasoning and enactment of instructional conversations? The observational study of 31 high school English classrooms considered the way teachers' decisions about writing instruction privileged one of the three epistemologies mentioned above. The researchers also selected three focal teachers for case study analysis with each teacher representing a case of each epistemological stance enacted in the classroom.

The findings from this study suggest that a teacher's epistemic knowledge of argumentative writing serves as a source for curricular focus and decisions about teaching strategies. Understanding the nature of teachers' epistemologies also serves as a guide for developing the type of support required to meet the new standards. One epistemological perspective might require a different kind of professional development than another type of epistemological position.

Another study that looked deeply into the influences on decisions teachers make about writing instruction was done by McCarthy and Mkhize (2015). Unlike Newell's use of epistemologies, McCarthy and Mkhize use the term "orientations" to describe the "beliefs, values and underlying philosophies" (p.2) that affect the curricular choices made by teachers. The expressed purpose of the study was to gain insight into how policy contexts affect teachers' orientations to writing instruction in high-income schools and low-income schools. The researchers interviewed twenty-nine teachers from four states in the U.S. on writing instruction. They discovered that teachers in high-income schools promoted rhetorical style, developing voice, and the connection between reading and writing. They also found that teachers at low-income schools privileged grammar, mechanics, and sentence structure. Interestingly, teachers at high-income schools were allowed more choice about curricular materials and valued the quality of writing beyond issues of conventional correctness, while teachers at low-income schools were expected to use mandated curriculums. The main finding was that the teachers' orientations toward writing instruction were shaped by the school context, available curricular materials, and assessments. While Newell et al's study observed the presence of epistemologies that influenced writing instruction, McCarthy and Mkhize's study attempted to determine how the context within which teachers work has a bearing on their orientation towards writing instruction. Both studies share my interest in what influences, whether epistemologies or orientations, contribute to how teachers respond to new demands brought about by the CCSS.

The studies in this review suggest that high-stakes tests like the NCLB assessments and the current CCSS assessment by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium can have a detrimental effect on the teaching of writing. In addition, many of the studies suggest that the way teachers feel about their own writing and their abilities to teach writing create anxiety and resistance to the task. Importantly, these researchers used a variety of theoretical positions to examine how teachers feel about teaching writing, how students respond to the writing instruction they receive, and how assessment policies influence curriculum decisions. Because the CCSS is a relatively new phenomenon, there is a dearth of studies that examine the basis upon which district administrators and teachers respond to the new standards. My study is intended to close that gap.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

Many scholars point to Lev Vygotsky's work as seminal to sociocultural theory. Vygotsky attempted to understand how meanings, which by their nature are grounded in history and cultures, have been and are mediated via social interaction. Meaning-making for Vygotsky (1978) was not simply a cognitive process taking place in the individual mind, but rather a result of interactions with others in a social space. Individuals create meaning through their interactions in a specific social context. Vygotsky argued that to understand an individual's consciousness, one must account for the historical development of that individual. An individual's understandings of an event or phenomenon is a part of a historical trajectory that is formed by previous events, the context in which those events take place –family, school, work – and the wider culture in which these contexts are rooted (Wells, 2000).

Following this line of thinking, I see teachers' understandings of the CCSS writing standards to be dependent on the context in which that understanding is developed, the transformations it has undergone and the multiple factors that have contributed to its development. For example, theoretically, a veteran teacher will display a different understanding of the meaning of the CCSS writing standards than a beginning teacher, or an English teacher will be informed by a different set of experiences of the writing standards than a math teacher. The immediate context within which each teacher operates (for example, ninth grade English or geometry) contributes in part, too, to the development of his or her understanding of the standards. The larger contexts of the

school or community inform their view of the meaning of the standards as well. In addition to these kinds of immediate contextual influences on the perception of the writing standards, there exists a history of cultural and individual transformations in thinking that contribute to a teacher's understanding. At the time that I began my study, teachers were at varying places on a continuum of understanding of the writing standards. I viewed the way each teacher understood the writing standards as his or her "current" understanding, based on a variety of influences that came into play. Vygotsky's notion of "genetic" (his term) or historical development of psychological processes (1978), then, informed the course of my study.

In addition, Vygotsky viewed individuals as possessing a cultural inheritance of artifacts and practices that possess unique meaning in that individual's context (Wells, 2000). Because all humans are a part of a particular social and cultural context, we appropriate practices, ways of understanding, and beliefs that are suitable for that context. Vygotsky argued that "the social dimension of consciousness is primary in time and fact. The individual dimension of consciousness is derivative and secondary." (Vygotsky, 1979, p. 30, as cited in Wertsch, 1985). This idea suggests that the social dimension of how a teacher understands the CCSS writing standards is the genesis of how the teacher had individually come to their view of the standards. Vygotsky held that higher mental functions begin on a social plane. He termed the social plane "interpsychological" and the individual plane "intrapsychological." Interpsychological involves dyads or groups interacting with specific dynamics and ways of communicating (Wertsch, 1985). Through these interactions, an individual appropriates understanding of

a phenomenon (in this case, the meaning of the CCSS writing standards and how to implement them) and begins to incorporate that understanding into their individual view. This appropriation of understanding is what Vygotsky terms “internalization” (1978). That is not to say that an individual transfers ideas wholesale from a group, but that the social dimensions, including interactions of a group, influence the processing of the individual’s ideas. Vygotsky’s holding the social as primary to individual understanding is important to the way I approached my data analysis and formation of conclusions.

Applying Vygotsky’s principles to my study, I approached the study with the idea that the teachers’ understandings of writing instruction could be attributed to what they had internalized in large part from previous generations of teachers, the practices of the other members of the teaching community, and the interactions the teachers had with others.

In addition to the social dimensions of an individual’s understanding, Vygotsky contended that interpsychological processes are mediated by tools or signs, defining signs as psychological instruments that influence behavior. He suggested that psychological tools (signs) included the use of language, both spoken and written, which is inherently social (1985). How language (a sign) is used in a social context is instrumental in determining how an individual understands a phenomenon. For this study, I focused on how district office personnel, administrators and teachers used language to negotiate how they would meet the challenge of implementing the CCSS writing standards. Their ways

of using language indicated beliefs, values and attitudes about writing and the new standards.

As indicated above, communication, whether verbal, non-verbal, spoken, or written, is an important feature of socio-cultural theory. While Vygotsky focused on the interactions of individuals, Bakhtin's (1981) focus was primarily on the use of language to construct meaning. He was interested in the nature of an utterance and the context that informs any given utterance. Bakhtin suggests that "... any speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree. He is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe. And he presupposes not only the existence of the language system he is using, but also the existence of preceding utterances-his own and others'- with which his given utterance enters into one kind of relation or another (builds on them, polemicizes with them, or simply presumes that they are already known to the listener). Any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances" (2010, p. 69) The "chain of utterances" illustrates the connection between the kind of language used in a particular social context and the history of utterances in that context. An utterance, in any of its forms, gives expression to the understanding of an individual as it communicates an idea or emotion to a listener or respondent.

Central to Bakhtin's thinking is that any utterance (defined in broad terms: "a unit of meaning" however large or small) determines and is determined by a social context, which assigns meaning to it. In our interactions we use utterances to participate in meaning, and these utterances are also reflective of larger cultural contexts, genres, and

ideologies. “At any given moment . . . a language is stratified not only into dialects in the strict sense of the word . . . but is stratified as well into languages that are socio-ideological: language belonging to professions, to genres, languages peculiar to particular generations, etc.” (1981, p. 271). This way of viewing language is particularly important for this study because I paid attention to the use of language by participants in various settings within a school district: the district office, the administrative offices, and focus group meetings. The meanings assigned to terms related to the CCSS writing standards varied depending upon the context in which they were used. The language used by the participants reflected their ideological and epistemological positions which were either explicit or unconsciously maintained in light of their identity and position in the district.

Bakhtin (1981) also suggests that when a word (or utterance) is used, it is projected into an environment that already contains qualifications, values, points of view, and judgments. Each utterance contains and confronts “thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue” (p. 276). The implication of this dialogic view of language is that what we say is shaped by multiple factors: context, history, position, experience. The *way* that teachers talk about writing instruction or the *way* that administrators talk about the CCSS writing standards was subject to these and many other factors. I examined how the participants discussed planning and executing the CCSS writing standards with Bakhtin’s notion of the dialogic nature of language in mind.

In examining the work of the theorists referred to above, it is clear that the use of language in its many forms to communicate in multiple contexts both validates and gives expression to a way of being in the world. This understanding also has the ability to influence and have some measure of bearing on the larger culture in which it is set. The study's participants' understanding of the CCSS writing standards comes under the influence of cultural and historical legacies, the expectations of a particular community of practice, and their experiences and knowledge of writing instruction.

Epistemologies

As stated above, Vygotsky argued that to understand an individual's consciousness, one must consider the historical development of that individual. Within an individual's historical arc lay an accumulation of epistemologies, or ways of knowing. Epistemology, the branch of philosophy that deals with what can be counted as knowledge, where knowledge is located, and how knowledge increases (Cunningham & Fitzgerald, 1996) is a useful entry point for sorting what lies beneath an educator's thinking about the nature of writing and writing instruction. The term "epistemology" has been used by researchers in a variety of ways. Some couple the term with "belief," as in "epistemological belief" (Troia, Lin, Monroe, & Cohen, 2009) Others describe epistemology as an "orientation," (McCarthy & Mkhize, 2013) while still others refer to epistemology as a "constellation of beliefs" (Newell, VanDerHeide, & Olsen, 2014).

For this study, I consider beliefs, values, and attitudes a subset of an epistemology, and use the term "epistemology" as a platform that gives rise to an

individual's beliefs, values and attitudes. In accordance with sociocultural theory mentioned previously, what we count as knowledge is grounded in a cultural milieu and a product of our history in that culture. What we "know" in any context is expressed through beliefs, which inform our values and govern our attitudes. To illustrate this understanding of the term epistemology, I will turn to some of the data from this study. Brad, one of the teachers working on assignment in the district office, prioritized the structure of writing in his instruction. He stated, "As an English teacher my focus would be a lot on the structure of the writing as a whole." Implied by this statement is a belief that the structure of an essay is a necessary focal point for secondary writing instruction. This belief is an expression of an epistemology concerning writing instruction revealing what Brad values in writing. His belief about structure in writing and his attendant value of teaching structure grow out of his epistemological stance.

Formalism/Structuralism/Dialogism

In the past sixty years, researchers have consistently characterized composition in three ways: a focus on text, a focus on the individual writer, and a focus on the dialogic nature of writing (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones and Schoer, 1963; Newell et al., 2015; Nystrand et al., 1993). Nystrand and his co-authors argued that these three foci emerged in parallel to developments in critical and linguistic studies which were classified into formalism, structuralism, and dialogism. I argue that, though they do not necessarily have strict boundaries, these categories function as epistemologies that characterize the study participant's fundamental thinking about writing. For example, when the director of

curriculum in the Orange Grove school district stated that “conventions should be in place before high school,” this notion could be characterized as formalist in nature due to the emphasis on conventional correctness, a textual feature. This formalism seems to underlie her belief that a priority in writing instruction is to produce students who have facility with written conventions. In my data analysis and throughout the findings section of this study I talk in terms of epistemologies and the beliefs, values, and attitudes that are expressions of different epistemologies.

To further understand the nuances of the three epistemologies, a more detailed discussion is in order. When researchers have discussed formalism as it relates to writing, it is in reference to a focus on text itself, and not on the student, not on the student’s writing processes, and not on anything having to do with culture. From this perspective, students are expected to “create unambiguous explicit texts by manipulating text elements, including topic and clincher sentences, usage and syntax” (Nystrand et al, 1993, p. 276). Thus from a formalist stance, a writer’s main concern should be to avoid textual errors in grammar and usage, to employ rhetorical principles, and to follow prescribed guidelines for the essay form, such as creating five paragraphs. Though this view originated in the early part of the twentieth century, it persists today as seen in some teachers’ emphasis on direct instruction in grammar and the complaint that the new standards do not call for enough instruction in grammar and usage. Other evidence of the maintenance of formalist epistemology guiding writing instruction can be seen in the tenacity with which teachers cling to the five-paragraph essay (Johnson, Thompson, Smagorinsky, and Fry, 2003).

In my study, when participants privileged a focus on the elements of a text, I considered it evidence of formalist traces in their thinking. That is not to say that a formalist approach was their overall epistemological stance to writing, but it was the basis of their thinking in some contexts. Diana, an English teacher, provided a good example of formalist thinking when she criticized the CCSS-WS for not giving sufficient attention to grammar instruction. She also used a formulaic approach to literary analysis essays in which she expected her students to include a prescribed number of sentences that included concrete details and commentary in five paragraphs. These examples illustrate formalist thinking about writing.

Unlike formalism, an emphasis on an individual writer's ideas and the underlying cognitive structures in composing characterize a structuralist epistemology. The focus is on what happens in the writer's mind during the act of writing. Proponents of a structuralist approach suggest that writing instruction should be centered on the thinking process rather than the text (Emig, 1971). Flower and Hayes (1981) detail four points in their cognitive process theory of composition. First, they consider writing to be a set of distinctive thinking processes that writers organize when they write. Secondly, they argue that these processes are highly embedded - any one of the processes can be embedded in another. Third, writing is goal-directed guided by a growing network of goals. Higher-level goals are supported by sub-goals, and these goals can be changed based on what the writer has learned during the act of writing. It is important to note that this cognitive perspective on composing contrasts with the idea that writing occurs in clean-cut stages, a view that has been taken up by practitioners. The practitioner view of the "writing

process” centers on the notion of stages: pre-writing, drafting, editing, revising, and publishing. Yet this “process” is more accurately a linear set of instructional foci. These foci have been used in pre-packaged writing programs marketed to school districts. Teaching this process continues to be a staple in the curriculum of secondary schools throughout the U.S., and figured prominently in the English departments in the Orange Grove school district. More theoretically, a structuralist epistemology promotes the generation of ideas by students, the recognition of a rhetorical context (Nystrand et al, 1993), and the recursiveness of the composing process.

While formalism focuses on text and structuralism focuses on cognition, dialogism’s main concern is the interaction between writer and audience. Nystrand et al (1993) explains that in dialogism, language is considered a co-construction of meaning between a speaker and a hearer in a given context. The meaning in a piece of writing does not lie in the text itself or in the cognition of the writer, but rather is created in the implicit exchange that occurs between the writer and the reader (1993).

George Hillocks argues in *Teaching Writing as a Reflective Practice* (1995) that writing is essentially an “invention of self” (page 22). Hillocks suggests that many factors come into play when we write. “Making a statement in the first place requires an invention of the self. We define ourselves by what we say, and our construction of self governs what we say. When we write or speak, we posit ourselves as persons with beliefs, memories, motives and aspirations, none of which exist independently of the others. The person is the integration of all of these and more, and our writing derives

from the product of that integration” (page 22-23). Hillocks frames the discussion of the nature of writing by beginning with the individual, and then outlining two ideas that have guided thinking about writing in the research community as well as in the teaching field: writing as meaning making, and writing as discovery.

The idea that meaning making is a dialectical process undergirds Hillocks presentation of this idea. Any meaning a person appears to independently construct is actually the product of an entire cultural history. He describes meaning making as “a partnership between each individual and all who have gone before” (page 8). Again, Hillocks subscribes to the sociocultural construct that when we write, the context governs our choices and is a result of a variety of influences that have been built over time. The meaning to be made is a result of the context within which our writing occurs. Meaning making is defined by Hillock as constructing a new relationship with an intended audience, suggesting that the intention and agency of the writer is co-constructing meaning with an “other.” At the same time, a writer may simultaneously create a new relationship within writing itself. The writer may say something they did not expect to say (Graff, 1992b cited in Hillocks, 1995). These two definitions of meaning-making begin with the individual writer’s expression of self which stems from and leads to their interaction with others.

Writing as discovery is another common view of the nature of writing based in dialogism. It is often expressed in the phrase, “I don’t know what I think until I write it” (O’Connor, 1988) This view of writing is raised in discussion of narrative writing, poetry

and other creative genres, as well as genres of nonfiction. The discovery in writing occurs in the reformulation of ideas recovered through research. Even in creative writing, there exists an unconscious inquiry into past experiences. Writing as discovery serves as the basis for what some educators use in journal assignments, summary, and explanatory texts. Whether writing is viewed through the lens of meaning-making or discovery, the basic notion is that writing is sociocultural in nature and is dependent on the larger cultural context of the writer and her/his history.

Thinking in line with a dialogic epistemology was in short supply among the participants of this study. Writing instruction based on dialogism is difficult to teach and even more difficult to assess. I did, however, detect the presence of a dialogic epistemology in some ways as indicated in my findings chapter. One brief illustration can be seen in the English department's criticism of the CCSS-WS. The main concern was that time for writing instruction was being taken away, which meant that there were fewer opportunities for interactions among students in the writing process, as well as fewer interactions between the teacher and the students where texts could be co-created. These interactions can be said to display a foundation in a dialogic epistemology.

The use of these three epistemologies as the wide lens, coupled with the statements indicating the beliefs, values and attitudes of the participants as a narrow lens, allowed me to examine their responses to the new standards. Understanding what lies beneath the participants' statements of beliefs, values and attitudes deepens our insight into how they reacted to the changes brought about by the new standards.

Chapter 4: Methods

Why Case Study?

This is a qualitative case study of the views of administrators and teachers in a single school district related to the nature of writing and writing instruction. I explored how views about writing intersected with the CCSS writing standards. I chose qualitative case study methodology to answer my research questions. I made this decision because case study affords a deep and rich description of issues. An educational institution such as a school district is a complex and interactive social phenomenon in which interpretations, meanings and intentions are imbedded in social structures (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Case study method allowed me to describe in rich detail the views of the participants who operated within a single school district. Whereas many methods attempt to separate a phenomenon from its context, a qualitative case study accounts for context (Yin, 2014). A case study can describe the complexity within a particular phenomenon which leads to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Stake, 1995). This study focused on a variety of contexts, including the school district itself as the main focus, as well as groups of key participants- the district office, the administration, and school site teachers- that are “nested” within the school district (Rossman & Rallis, 2011).

The Site of the Study

Orange Grove Unified District Office

The focus of my study is Orange Grove Unified School District (all names of people and places are pseudonyms). I asked each participant to select their pseudonym for

the study), one of the 343 unified school districts in California. I selected a district that was “typical” rather than “unique” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) among the schools in Serra county, a mix of rural and suburban development, located 70 miles from a large urban center. This district is typical in the sense that it doesn’t possess any remarkable demographic outliers: It is, in general, ethnically and economically mixed; the district’s test scores are somewhat higher than those in surrounding districts (proximtyone.com), but not remarkably so; and it has a roughly average-size population when compared to other districts in its county (kidsdata.org). Put another way, these features mark the Orange Grove School District as “typical” in the sense that it doesn’t stand out for high achievement or low achievement, a concentration of ethnic groups, or being economically advantaged or disadvantaged. The district is similar to other districts around the state (on typicality see Bogden & Biklen, 2007).

In addition, I selected the district because it had begun to actively address the CCSS, the focus of my study, and had already taken steps to deal with the interpretation, contextualization and implementation of the new standards. In the years preceding the study, four teachers were placed on special assignment to attend to the new standards, develop scope and sequence guides based on the new standards, disseminate information about the standards, and provide in-service opportunities for teachers to analyze the standards and prepare for new methods of assessment. Thus, preliminary steps had already been taken in preparation for the first year of assessment. At the time of the study, the district was attempting to make sense of how to prepare both students and teachers for the new standards. The context of this emerging understanding fit well with

the purposes of my study and additionally helped to define the case as “typical,” as most, if not all, districts at the time of this study were in the early stages of dealing with the CCSS.

The sites for the study included the district office and Green Valley High School (GVHS). My first foray into the district facilities was at the district office, which is located in a former elementary school that strongly reminded me of the type of construction at the elementary school that I attended, which was built more than fifty years ago. The cinder block walls, “old-fashioned” restrooms, and disjointed lay-out suggested that this building was not originally designed to be office space nor could this be described as a luxurious building. In addition to the austere surroundings, I immediately noticed a seriousness of purpose. I was greeted in a business-like manner and was shown to the Director of Curriculum and Instruction’s office after just a few minutes. The Director introduced me to the teachers on assignment (TOA) who were responsible for English Language Arts. In the course of our initial conversation I picked up on the tone with which they spoke about the superintendent. It was a mixture of respect and fear. I had only emailed the superintendent to gain access to the district and had not met her in person. The district office revealed interesting characteristics, which I was to find out more about when I conducted the study. For example, at the time of my first seeing the office, any mention of the superintendent in conversation was often followed by a lowering of the voice and a mix of either opposition or support for her style of leadership. This pattern of speaking about the superintendent was repeated with the administrators and the teachers. I also encountered an explicit expectation for high

achievement and performance that originated with the superintendent. This visit gave me an opportunity to gain insight into the mechanism of implementation in the district, as well as gain a preliminary view of the beliefs and values of the educators who were a part of the implantation process.

Orange Grove Unified School District has three comprehensive high schools: one opened in 1891, making it the oldest high school in the state of California; another opened in 1997 to accommodate population growth due to new economic development in the area; and Green Valley High School, the subject of this study, opened in 2009 with 587 freshman and 430 sophomores.

In the Orange Grove Unified School District (OGUSD, the site for this study, two pre-packaged programs of writing instruction were prevalent throughout the high schools in the district. One developed in the mid-1990s by Jane Schaffer (Wiley, 2000) was based on the view that the writing process can be taught using templates to help scaffold students' thinking as they compose. Schaffer developed templates for multi-paragraph literary analysis essays that allowed students to plug specific components into the body paragraphs such as *topic sentence*, *concrete details*, *commentary*, and *concluding sentence*. This formula includes the prescription that each paragraph should have eight sentences organized in chunks. One concrete detail with two commentary sentences constituted a chunk. *Concrete details* included facts evidence, or examples to support the topic sentence. *Commentary* is the writer's analysis or interpretation of the evidence. In addition, Schaffer provided a formula for introductory and concluding paragraphs. Though there was some movement away from such a formulaic approach to writing by

some in the district, the basic vocabulary and strategy for teaching writing remained intact.

A second program adopted by the district in 2013 was developed by the California State University as part of their Early Assessment Program. The Expository Reading and Writing Course (ERWC) was an alternative course for twelfth-grade students who were not deemed ready for college English (Committee, 2013) The course is organized around twelve modules that emphasize the integration of reading and writing. The writing that is required in each module is predominantly focused on argumentative writing based on evidence. As stated in the ERWC manual for teachers (page 19, 2013) “Writing is generally ‘reading-based’ in that it synthesizes the viewpoints and information of various sources to help the writer establish his or her position in the ongoing conversation.” Much like the Jane Schaffer program, students are led through the writing process via exercises and worksheets that guide each stage of the process. The preponderance of non-fiction reading activities outweighs the writing assignments in the program which was one of the criticisms forwarded by the English teachers in the OGUSD. It is important to note that the ERWC program, which was designed for high school seniors, was also used in the tenth and eleventh grades at Green Valley High School. Some of the lower grade-level teachers were expected to use one or two modules in their curriculum.

The Jane Schaffer program and ERWC served as the basis for much of the writing instruction in the English departments at the high schools in the OGUSD. The math

department had not developed a single approach to writing instruction as it applied to their curriculum. Their talk about the new requirements for writing in the CCSS was centered on the shift to get students to use writing to explain the underlying mathematical concepts. A departmental or even district-wide approach to the use of writing in the math curriculum had not been developed at the time of the study.

Green Valley High School

GVHS at the time of the study served roughly 2201 students in four grades (9-12). It could be considered a typical high school in the district in the sense that the demographics, test scores and curriculum match those of the other schools. It is untypical only because it was the most recently built and has more advanced classroom technology than the other schools. I was given my first tour of the campus by the principal on a bright sunny morning in April. As we stepped from the administrative office to the quad, I commented that it looked less like a high school and more like a college campus. He mentioned that this was a typical reaction for people when they first visit. The quad was expansive with what I thought were grassy areas lined with tables and chairs. The principal explained that the “grass” was, in fact, astro turf. As we entered the faculty lounge/cafeteria complex, I was reminded of corporate employees’ facilities: comfortable seating, appliances, and a professional atmosphere. The faculty meeting room contained an impressive oak table surrounded by large leather chairs, the kind that one might find in a boardroom. This meeting room was the site of the Focus Group meetings that I held as part of the study.

This faculty meeting area was also equipped with large flat-screen monitors connected to platforms for presentations. A computer and built-in ports allowed for various presentation devices to be used. This room reflected Green Valley High School design using the most up-to-date technology available: classrooms were equipped with multi-media devices connected to whiteboards, all classrooms were internet accessible, and each teacher in core departments (English, math, history and science) had a laptop cart with enough laptops for each student in the class.

On my initial visit and tour with the principal, Mr. Aslanian, he mentioned that the school community was proud of the fact that the school was an energy efficient school with all utility, maintenance, athletic, and security vehicles operating on electricity or solar power. GVHS had installed solar panels and had utilized artificial turf in portions of the campus grass areas. To provide shade for students, over 800 trees had been planted and all landscaping required little water. Indoor hallways had natural lighting to reduce electrical costs and all rooms on campus were on a sensor lighting system. GVHS also had a shutdown policy regarding electricity during all long-term school breaks. The principal had been in the unique position of designing the facility, choosing teachers, and creating curriculum for the school's inaugural year. He spent two years working with a district team meeting with architects and construction companies, while at the same time hand picking a staff to serve students in the school's first year. During my visits, my impression was that students cared about their campus, there was a strong sense of community, and students felt safe while attending GVHS.

School Demographics

GVHS' population was diverse in terms of ethnic makeup:

American Indian or Alaskan Native: 1.6%

Asian: 6.1%

Black or African American: 6.3%

Filipino: 2.3%

Hispanic or Latino: 41.7%

Pacific Islander: 0.7%

White (not Hispanic): 29%

Other or Not Specified 0.5%

Roughly half of the students at GVHS received free or reduced lunch. This was a higher percentage than was the case with the other two high schools in the district, but it did not stand out when compared to other schools in the county. Students who spoke English as a second language made up approximately 20% of the total school population. About 10% of the population fell into one of three Special Education categories: RSP (Resource Specialist Program), SDC (Special Day Class), SH (Severely Handicapped). These percentages were fairly representative of the district as a whole, thus GVHS could be said to be a typical high school in the Orange Grove district.

Scores

Test scores on the first administration of the California Assessment of Student Performance Progress (CASPP) placed GVHS in the middle of similar schools. Sixty-nine percent of 11th grade students met or exceeded the standards for reading on the

CASPP. This was determined by the superintendent to be an unacceptably low score for reading. The ELA scores led to a curriculum focus on reading, while the math scores led teachers to reflect on how they could address individual student needs in developing math skills. Thirty-seven percent of GVHS students met or exceeded the standards for math. The English and math scores also led to the implementation of more frequent professional development time.

Participants and Participant Selection

The participants in the study included one director from the district office, two teachers on assignment, two site administrators, four English teachers to form a Focus Group, one English teacher for individual interviews, eight math teachers to form a math Focus Group and one math teacher for individual interviews.

My initial contact with the district was an email conversation with the superintendent, Meredith de Beauvoir, who, though unwilling to be a part of the study directly (she felt there were too many time constraints), agreed to approach the principals in her district about participating in the study. Two of the three principals were willing to take part in the study, and Jack Aslanian, principal of GVHS, contacted me through email fairly soon after my contact with the superintendent. His school met the criteria I had hoped for in a school site, so we agreed to begin the process of contacting other potential participants. At his suggestion, I approached one of the two assistant principals at GVHS, Dr. Alisson Bacon, to request her participation. She was the administrator most directly

responsible for handling the CCSS and its attendant curriculum issues. Our initial conversation felt to me to be lively and interesting. She decided to come on board.

When I asked for suggestions about the best way to contact possible teacher participants, the principal suggested I make a presentation at one of the late start faculty meetings to generate interest. (“Late start” meetings are fairly common in high schools. Approximately once per month, the bell schedule is adjusted so that students arrive one to two hours later than usual in the morning, allowing the faculty and staff time for meetings.) This idea seemed more than reasonable, so I arrived at their next late start meeting with a presentation on the purpose and focus of my study. I met initially with the math department consisting of around 20 teachers. After my presentation, I gave the teachers a sign-up sheet to be passed around with a request for Focus Group participants and one participant for individual interviews. I quickly noticed that the teachers were simply handing the sheet to the teacher beside them without signing up. With a broad smile, I asked, “Ok, what is the problem?” The immediate response was, “Time.” I acknowledged that this is always a factor for teachers and that I completely understood. Thankfully, one of the teachers commented that if they could use the late start time for a Focus Group meeting that would make it easier to participate in the study. With the exchange of a few glances in the direction of the principal, Jack Aslanian spoke up and said he would be happy to arrange for Focus Group meetings to take place during the late start time. The sign-up sheet was passed around again, and this time eight teachers signed up to be part of the Focus Group, as well as one who agreed to be a participant for individual interviews.

A similar scenario occurred when I met with the English teachers later. However, I was also able to tell them that late start time would be available for our Focus Group meetings, so they were less hesitant to join the study than the math teachers had been. In fact, there was some genuine interest in the study topic expressed at our initial meeting. Six teachers agreed to participate in the Focus Group and one agreed to individual interviews.

Once I had the high school participants set, I contacted the district office to find out who was responsible for curriculum and instruction. I was told that the director of curriculum was Kam Aslanian, the GVHS principal's wife. She agreed to meet with me to discuss the study and asked if I would like to include the Teachers on Assignment (TOA) who were responsible for ELA curriculum in the district. Sensing a golden opportunity, I agreed. We met the next week in Kam's office and it was decided we would consider the TOAs a focus group.

At that meeting, Kam spontaneously suggested that we have lunch with the "teachers on assignment," to which I quickly agreed. The teachers, Selena Dupree and Brad Rice, immediately agreed to participate in the study and our conversations were valuable for several reasons. They served as a conduit between the teachers and the district office personnel. The TOAs along with the Director of Curriculum were responsible for guiding teachers in developing the scope and sequence of curriculum, determining assessment models and apparatus, and providing professional development to help with the implementation of the CCSS.

It is safe to say that the participants were all self-selected. This follows what Merriam (1998) refers to as non-probability sampling, or *purposeful* sampling where a researcher is looking for rich, high-quality information. My aim was to have willing participants who might want to reflect genuinely on the issues related to the CCSS.

The Participants

Orange Grove Unified School District Director of Curriculum and Instruction

Kam Aslanian had been the Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the Orange Grove Unified School District for two years. Prior to that, she was principal of an elementary school for seven years. Her undergraduate degree was in Art, which explains her also teaching middle school and community college art classes for three years. Her other teaching experience included twelve years as an elementary teacher, predominantly in the upper grades. She also worked as a curriculum/visual arts coordinator for the County of San Bernardino for three years. In addition to her professional career, Kam raised four children (and a husband, as she says) who at the time of the study were all grown. She had worked in three different districts over the course of her career, and she felt that varied experiences afforded her a certain breadth of knowledge about how school districts are structured and how they, generally, operate. In our conversations, Kam often referenced her own teaching experience in anecdotes to illustrate her points. She felt to me to be personable, and she never sounded condescending when talking about or to other educators. Many would describe her as “down-to-earth.”

The School Principal

Jack Aslanian began his career in education as a high school history teacher. He had been a classroom teacher for five years before becoming an assistant principal in a large urban district for two years, and again an assistant principal in a small rural school district for five years. He then became a principal at the middle school in the same rural district for eight years before moving on to a principal position in another district where he served for four years. From there, Jack took a position in the district office at yet another district where he was the Director of Secondary Education. He had served in this position for two years when there was a need for a temporary principal at Giant Oaks High School, which Jack agreed to take. Shortly after, he was hired to be the leader of the new high school, GVHS in a bordering district, which is where he worked at the time of the study.

Assistant Principal

The assistant principal, Allison Bacon, was responsible for the math department at the time of the study, which was a natural fit in light of her background. (The principal and other assistant principals each had responsibility for certain departments.) She grew up in Colorado where she earned her bachelor's degree and teaching credential. She was recruited to come to the Orange Grove school district at a career fair and taught in both middle school and elementary classrooms. She earned her Ph.D. while teaching middle school math and then was asked to be the assistant principal at the alternative high school in the district. She served there for two years until she was asked to join Jack Aslanian in

opening Green Valley High School. She felt that her fundamental views of curriculum were shaped by her middle school teaching experience. In her view, middle school teachers are focused on teaching strategies, while high school teachers are more concerned with content.

English Teacher

Diana Walker decided to be an English teacher while in high school. She herself attended Orange Grove Unified School District while growing up and described herself as a “local girl.” She said that her high school English teacher had a substantial impact on her entering the field of education despite the fact that she described this English teacher as “very eccentric.” Diana also went to college locally and earned her teaching credential at a nearby state university. Her student teaching was completed at one of the three high schools in the district. Because there were no teaching positions open in the Orange Grove district at that time, Diana first took a job in a town a few miles away, where after two years she was asked to teach AP Language and Composition and be the yearbook advisor. After three years, she was offered a job in the Orange Grove district at what was then the newer school in the district. She taught there for four years and was involuntarily transferred (because she was the most recently hired) to Green Valley High School when it opened. Coincidentally, her old master teacher transferred to the school at the same time, and when this teacher gave up the department chair position, Diana took over. In addition to her department chair duties, she was also the yearbook advisor at the time of the study.

Math Teacher

Louie Short was a math teacher by trade, but as our conversations progressed, I sensed he was more a renaissance man who included philosophy, literature, and music in his math lessons. He was a recent addition to GVHS, but was a seasoned teacher. Louie had taught for twelve years in another part of the state prior to being hired by the Orange Grove district the year before the study. He brought with him a sense of duty to help students acquire skills, not only in mathematics, and to teach them how to learn in all disciplines. He was enthusiastic about teaching writing in his math classes. This enthusiasm was surprising to me at first, but as I continued to talk to him, I discovered that he wrote fiction for his own amusement and had been an English literature major when he began his studies in college. He said he switched to math, thinking math was more practical for developing a career.

District Office Focus Group

Selena Dupree and Brad Rice, the district office focus pair struck me as having complementary personalities. Selena was a French teacher who was placed in the position two years before and was the only TOA for the district, while Brad was an English teacher who had just started as a TOA in the year of the study when three new TOA positions were added. Selena was steeped in the CCSS standards and their sub-points, while Brad approached his position more globally, meaning he took into account the context within which students, teachers, and administrators operated. Selena appeared to

be confident and spoke in long paragraphs filled with examples and anecdotes. In our conversations, I noticed that Brad had a tendency to echo what Selena was saying, and often did not finish his sentences before moving to another idea.

Math Focus Group

The math Focus Group consisted of eight very lively people who taught various grades and levels of math. Six women and two men volunteered to be a part of the study. Three teachers taught courses like Integrated Math I, which required an adjustment in the curriculum related to the CCSS, while two taught courses such as AP Statistics or Calculus which were not directly affected by the new standards. These teachers were relatively young. Most had taught for ten years or less.

English Focus Group

The English Focus Group consisted of four teachers. The original composition of the group was six teachers, all women. However, just before our first meeting, two felt they could not spare the time to participate in the study. One was an AP teacher who was teaching Literature and Composition for the first time and felt a duty to use her time to prepare her classes. The other did not provide a reason but wanted to remove herself from the group. The resulting group was a more veteran group than the math focus group. One teacher, Nancy, had been teaching over thirty years, while the least experienced, Lola, had been teaching for thirteen years. The other two teachers, Buffy and Jersey, both had been teaching for fifteen years. This group was a bit more subdued in terms of expressing

enthusiasm for the CCSS compared to the math group, and they were more critical than the math group of the CCSS and the district office's handling of the implementation.

Data

Data consisted of interviews in answer to pre-determined questions and follow-up questions. The interview questions were informed by my research questions. They addressed the shift in focus from the NCLB related California standards to the CCSS standards, writing instruction, and writing in general (see complete interview protocol in appendix A). These were the three key components from my study addressing how the participants responded to the new challenges brought on by the CCSS and the testing that coincides with the standards. The participants' responses to these questions led to a variety of clarifying questions, as well as questions that tried to probe deeper to reveal beliefs, values, or attitudes. I met with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction (DCI), the principal, the assistant principal, the focal English teacher and the focal math teacher on two occasions each for forty-five minutes to one hour each time. I met with the English Focus Group and the math focus group twice for fifty minutes each meeting. The administrators and the DCI interviews were conducted in their respective offices, the teacher interviews were held in their classrooms, and the focus group interviews were held in a conference room. All participants signed consent forms that allowed me to use a LiveScribe pen to record their responses.

All interviews were audio recorded via a LiveScribe pen. After each interview session, I wrote field notes that included my impressions of the interview and comments

about what the participants said. I looked over notes taken during the interviews to find any material relevant to my research questions. As I transcribed the audio recordings from the LiveScribe pen, I utilized transcription symbols from Ochs (1979) that indicated overlap, self-interruption, and intonation. I included what the participants said, what I said, and reactions such as laughter or groaning that revealed emotional responses. I consulted my notes where appropriate to note non-verbal responses such as nodding of the head in agreement. After reviewing the transcripts, I returned to the audio recordings to clarify unintentional errors in the transcription.

Data Analysis

As state above, I performed ongoing analysis during the data collection process. After each interview session, I created field notes that included observations about the answers, the tone of voice/body language used in particularly interesting responses, and ideas for follow-up questions. Initially, these field notes focused on my impressions. Later, I began to mark participants' responses according to whether I thought they represented a belief, a value, or an attitude toward writing. This procedure was useful when I later analyzed the data as a whole.

After transcribing approximately ten hours of interviews, I divided the data into statements. For the purposes of this study, I defined a "statement" as a cohesive thought that carried explicit meaning. For example, Lola, an English teacher, identified a problem with the implementation of the CCSS by saying, "There is a huge divide between what teachers feel needs to happen and what people outside the classroom feel needs to

happen.” Lola’s meaning is clear and does not require much if any inference to understand. I did not include other forms of communication such as laughter, groaning, or affirmative noises – “Mmmhmm” – as statements because they required a greater degree of inference than explicit statements. Some statements were brief, without elaboration, while other statements were more elaborate, sometimes including qualifiers that clarified meaning. For example, the Assistant Principal made a brief statement about the focus on content versus instructional strategies at the high school level, “The high school has been a big shift (for me) because it’s very much about content.” She did not elaborate further about what this meant to her. An example of a statement that included qualifying features was provided by the Principal on the same subject, high school focus on content. “So I get really irritated because (laughs) so many of our high school teachers lack strategies. They are content focused which is fine, but if you’re not able to deliver that content in a way that students can relate to or understand, you know we’ve missed the boat.” These two similar statements express beliefs about a focus on content at the high school level, yet one provides more detail about how the speaker feels and includes a statement imbedded with a value (“ . . . you’ve missed the boat.”)

I created three codes to analyze the data: statements about the CCSS, statements related to writing instruction, and statements about the nature of writing. The statements remained separated by participant and focus group. The division of data into these three categories provided me with an analysis of the participants embedded views in each statement.

The next step in my data analysis was to compare statements reflecting the participants' views across participants. I separated statements that shared commonalities in beliefs, values, and attitudes from each participant and focus group to determine where they were aligned. Likewise, I culled statements that were conflicting among the participants and focus groups. The most obvious had to do with whether the district followed pre-packaged writing programs. The district Director of Curriculum and Instruction stated, "It's interesting because we don't have a district-wide writing program." This stood in stark contrast to Brad, a teacher on assignment at the district office, who revealed that they used the Expository Reading and Writing Class program as the basis for their district-wide writing focus. "We also developed a writing focus for... across the grade levels looking at the ERWC as our endgame of our backwards planning from there and then cross-referencing the standards." These contradictory statements revealed some of the tensions present in the district with regard to writing instruction.

During this process some statements surfaced that neither held anything in common among participants, nor directly conflicted among participants. Louie, a math teacher, reflected an attitude about writing instruction that was unique among the participants

You know that always shocks me though because even if you're a math teacher, that's such a copout I'm a math teacher, because you should know how to write because you're educated you have a degree from college, you should be able to help a high school kid with their writing. Just like I would expect an English teacher at least help them with

their math. The English teachers say this same thing, math is not my thing. It's high school math, it is not rocket science, without teaching calculus. But I guess they are the senior-level but we're talking just basic. And should at least be able to read it and explain it to him. You're an adult you're educated.

Louie's attitude that English teachers have an obligation to help students with math in the same way that math teachers have a duty to help students with writing was a singular idea that wasn't found in any of the other interviews.

These statements established and revealed an additional basis for discussing the participants' views that were not directly related to my research questions but helped to broaden my understanding of factors that affect the way the Orange Grove School District handled the CCSS writing standards.

Finally, I coded the statements of into categories that reflected the epistemological stances outlined in my conceptual framework. When statements were focused primarily on text, they were assigned the code "formalist." Statements that concentrated on an individual writer's ideas and the writing process were given the code "structuralist." Finally, statements that indicated a focus on the transactional nature of writing were coded as "dialogic."

Table 1.1

Epistemology	Definition	Example	Marker
Formalist	Focused on text, conventional correctness, number of paragraphs, genre features.	“I don’t think high school teachers should have to worry about writing conventions. I think those should be solid by the time students reach high school.”	“...writing conventions should be solid.”
Structuralist	Focused on ideas, individual writer’s processes, and underlying structures in composition	“It [ERWC] emphasizes a thesis driven making a claim in finding the evidence, finding the authors claim in finding the authors evidence and commentary and then turning around making your own assertion, finding evidence and supporting it with evidence.”	“... making an assertion, finding evidence and supporting it ...”
Dialogic	Focused on the interactions of the writer and the reader, awareness of an audience, teacher and writers are co-authors.	“It’s more about having a conceptual question, a conversation with them. You know like actually talking not just about solving for X or Y but actually why this is happening.”	“...a conversation with them ... actually talking.”

Chapter Five: Findings

If the originators of the Common Core were to take into account the current views of writing and writing instruction held by the educators in this district, they would find that there was not a singular, one-size-fits-all understanding of what writing is and what effective writing instruction looks like. The administrators and teachers in the Orange Grove school district expressed several different ideas about the nature of writing and writing instruction, some that were seemingly contradictory. While the administrators and teachers might appreciate writing instruction based on a dialogic approach, viewing writing as essentially a transaction between a writer and a reader, their decisions about curriculum were often driven by what was required to prepare students in a formalist way for the state-wide assessment. In many cases, then, the personal views of writing held by the administrators and teachers were trumped by the formalism of the assessments. There was also evidence of a mismatch between the views and perceptions of the nature of writing and instruction between the district office personnel and many of the teachers. There appeared to be a conflict over priorities in the curriculum, specifically, what to include and what to abandon. In addition, there was a difference in how the CCSS-WS was interpreted by those in the district office leading the implementation and those in the classroom responding to the changes brought on by the new standard.

District Curriculum Director

The Nature of Writing

Kam Aslanian, the director of curriculum and instruction, shared her memories of being considered a successful writer in her middle school years which revealed the development of her current view of the nature of writing. She described being very good at following the directions of the assignment which included following a template, but looking back realized that it was not what she later considered “good” writing.

I was really good at the mechanic parts of it. Sentence structure... But I was not a good writer. I was taught, like Selena [one of the TOAs in the district office] was saying the formulaic way of writing. So I could write a complete sentence, or I could write a topic sentence with supporting details, I could write a beginning, a middle, and an end. I could do all that, and I could get an A, but it wouldn't be very good. It wouldn't be interesting at all but it would give all of the information.

Kam brought to mind sterile writing instruction when she explained the writing instruction she received at this time was decontextualized exercises in writing and lacked salient features of composition such as dialogic voice (Sperling & Appleman, 2011) or attention to an audience. “I didn't write well. I absolutely knew that any assignment a teacher gave me I could write to that.” She provided an anecdote to illustrate her ability to be solicitous to the teacher and meet the requirements of the assignment.

“I remember in seventh grade a teacher holding up...[Kam’s paper]. She had given this writing assignment. I even remember what the writing assignment was. She gave a writing assignment. This was in the social studies class, and she must not have been a very good teacher because she said, ‘I’m so disappointed. I had one person do what was expected in this class. That was Kam Machover. And she’s the only one that did what was expected.’ And it was a writing thing so I got an A on it.

Kam recognized she was skilled at completing sterile writing exercises that she now might consider contrary to effective writing instruction. Her view was that writing should be interesting to the reader, not just the completion of exercises for the teacher. Though she found success in school sponsored-writing, she sensed that this success may have been misleading in terms of the development of her writing later in life.

Based on her comments, Kam realized that following a formula was not the be all and end all in writing. It was as if she instinctively knew that writing was a more complex task that included individual agency and voice. In the following interview exchange, Kam became very animated as she answered my question.

“... I didn’t know you could, I didn’t know you could write the way you speak. I didn’t know you could write and be yourself, you know? It was just always...

PI-are you saying you didn't know you could have a sense of voice in writing?

Kam- (*Excited*) I didn't, I didn't. I didn't know that. I just... So that's why my writing would just start out... I had a limited knowledge base from which to work. But it was sufficient."

The idea that her writing could emerge from a more personal place and go beyond following a structured formula seemed to be an important revelation for Kam in the development of her view of writing. She appeared to be reflecting the line of thinking that writing reveals the "true self" or can be considered an "identity performance" (Sperling & Appleman, 2011). She clearly felt a strong sense of agency in her own writing which became a part of her current thinking about the nature of writing. This agency may have emerged from Kam's discovering, as what she says suggests that writing is a meaning-making act (Hillocks, 1995). Much of school sponsored writing does not provide opportunities for meaning making (Britton, Burgess, Martin, and McLeod, 1975), and Kam appears to know this.

Later, Kam answered my question about "what is good writing" by revealing her awareness that contexts call for appropriate genres in writing (Bazerman & Palmquist, 2013).

"Good writing... It depends. If it's narrative writing it's entertaining. It keeps me focused, and makes me want to read more. If it's informational

writing... It's not just the basics. It really does inform me. It just doesn't give me a summary of what I need to know. I really, when I'm done reading that I can go out and talk on that subject. And I was the type of writer who would give you bare-bones."

Kam revealed a felt sense that writing is situational and dialogic. She implied that writing is located in a social milieu that carries a set of expectations related to a genre. Her differentiation between narrative writing and informational writing revealed her awareness that writing cannot be distilled to one formula or template; otherwise it only contains the "bare-bones," and does not help the reader accomplish a thorough understanding of the context of the writer's ideas.

The interview excerpts revealed that Kam subscribed to a mix of viewpoints about the nature of writing. When she described being able to successfully complete writing tasks as a student, she seemed to be saying she learned how to select ideas and structures that met the requirements of the assignment, but she felt her writing lacked the authenticity found in personal writing. It is as if Kam recognized that structured ideas are a part of the nature of writing, but that "good writing" has something more. The sense that writing is directed to an audience in a given context and is instrumental in co-creating that context is the kind of dialogism Kam seems to have discovered. At the same time, she talked about the necessity of conventional correctness in successful writing which echoes formalist thinking about writing. Her comment that "if they are able to understand writing conventions, then you've got more than half the battle won,"

foregrounds objective properties in writing (including strict conventions and usage). To say that “half the battle is won” implies that grammar usage and conventional correctness have a prominent place in her view of writing. She did not say how students should learn to use correct conventions, but she assumed that they would master them prior to high school. If she advocated for decontextualized direct instruction of conventions and grammar, then it could be argued that she subscribed, though perhaps unwittingly, to a formalist approach. She was not alone. As will be demonstrated later, Kam and the rest of the participants held conflicting ideas about the nature of writing; however, an emphasis on conventional correctness was consistently shared by nearly all of the participants.

Writing Instruction

I assumed there would be a strong correlation between the way participants viewed the nature of writing and their ideas about writing instruction. This was not as clear-cut as I expected.

As Kam talked about writing instruction, there was a noticeable presence of varied and sometimes conflicting views about writing instruction in her comments. In some cases she advocated for a focused instruction on conventions and correct usage which aligned with a formalist approach, while at other times she promoted a more dialogic approach, taking into consideration the audience and social context for the writing to be done. She also ardently noted and advocated for the widespread use of “thinking maps” which reflected a structuralist view with its focus on the development of

ideas in the act of writing. As we talked, her mind moved from one approach to writing to another, and she appeared equally enthusiastic and appreciative of each. Kam found value in more than one view of writing instruction, and did not seem to foreground or privilege one over the other. As Sperling (2004) has suggested, educators often maintain coexisting views that may or may not be contradictory in nature.

Over lunch, I met with Kam and the TOAs who formed the district office focus group. In the midst of our conversation, she spoke about the place of conventions in the overall scope and sequence of English instruction. Kam remarked “I don’t think high school teachers should have to worry about writing conventions. I think those should be solid by the time students reach high school.” Thinking that students entering high school would have a “solid” understanding of the formal properties of the English language suggests that Kam prioritizes instruction in conventional correctness prior to high school. A focus on the grammatical features of writing as a precursor to the development of ideas reflected the kind of formalism seen in part of her view of the nature of writing.

Though she rather strongly suggested that students entering high school should have a “solid” grounding in written conventions, Kam recognized that this was rarely the case. In fact, she said it would be a mistake for teachers to assume that students possess this level of knowledge about conventions. Again, during our lunch meeting with the TOAs, Kam observed that, “When I’m teaching writing I assume that they know nothing, and I think that is one of the problems with the teachers. One of the problems they have is they assume too much, that the kids know more than they know about grammar.” Kam understood that there might have been some distance between the ideal of having

students thoroughly grounded in the conventional features of writing and the reality that most are not. However, interestingly, she valued this formalist ideal.

Kam's views of writing instruction also reflected the notion that students can be led to generate their own ideas through scaffolding strategies. In our individual interview, Kam spoke highly of the use of thinking maps in the elementary grades.

“Thinking maps (*primarily used in elementary*) are graphic organizers and a way for students to put their thoughts on paper. They use those thinking maps to generate their writing. That seems to be very popular right now. We look for best practices and we looked at how kids are being successful. A lot of schools in this district are very successful with what they're doing.”

Attributing these thinking maps to the success of the district's schools suggests a view of writing instruction that moves students through a progression of cognitive moves including prewriting. Thinking maps are considered by those who subscribe to a cognitive process approach to writing to be part of the brainstorming step in the writing process. Kam did not necessarily privilege these practices over her formalist tendencies, and seemed to hold them in concert with a dialogic approach to writing instruction, maintaining the view that writing was a transaction between a writer and a reader.

PI-do they follow... Would you say that all of the sites follow a similar methodology for teaching writing?

Kam-No. I would say at the elementary level a lot of teachers use thinking maps and *Write from the Beginning* (a formal system of templates for writing in various genres). It's interesting because there is not a district wide writing program.

PI-why is that? It just hasn't developed yet?

Kam-yeah, I think that everybody kind of goes out and gets her own little programs and goes with that until it gets old and then they find another program and they go with that until it...

PI-you mean packaged writing programs?

Kam-Mm hm,yeah. But it doesn't make you a better teacher of writing.

PI-what does make a good teacher of writing?

Kam- in my own personal opinion. What makes a person a better teacher of writing is... And I don't think you have to be a good writer to be a good teacher writing. You have to recognize good writing when you see it. But teachers who are not... The first thing we did... I'm just trying to think back... I bought my whole staff a book on what good writers do basically and how you... What does a good beginning for writing look like. Here are some examples of how you start. And then there are some anchor papers and exemplars, rubrics, expectations for kids. I'm a big believer of calibrating with colleagues, sitting down and looking at student work, I would give this a three on the rubric what would you give it? Why would you give it that? I think it's conversations among teachers in their... But it

comes down to professional development. I try to provide teachers with the tools necessary because we expect them to go out and do this, but we need to provide them with what they need. But what they want are programs.

This exchange is a telling example of how the epistemologies that form the basis of Kam's view are nested together without necessarily foregrounding a particular one. The district-wide use of pre-packaged writing programs such as *Write from the Beginning* and thinking maps suggests that a focus on forms and ideas may be a common view of writing instruction among teachers in the Orange Grove school district. Yet, the fact that Kam didn't intervene as the Director of Curriculum and impose a district-wide model for writing instruction reveals Kam's belief in the appropriateness of a cognitive processing or structuralist model of writing instruction. Her apparent acceptance of teachers selecting writing programs based on a structuralist view of writing instruction implied that she shared similar beliefs about writing instruction with the teachers. However, as stated above, Kam did not adhere strictly to one view of writing instruction, which likely allowed her to be flexible when it came to what the teachers felt they needed.

It became apparent in my conversations with Kam that her thinking about writing instruction was not guided by a single view. There was evidence of at least two epistemological stances that underpinned her ideas about writing instruction, but they did not necessarily drive her decisions about curriculum. As the district administrator in charge of the implementation of the CCSS, Kam's individual views of writing were not the sole basis upon which she made decisions. In the case of the teachers' request for

writing “programs,” she was willing to meet their needs despite her suggestion that packaged programs were not necessarily ideal for writing instruction.

CCSS Writing Standards

For Kam, there was one main point of intersection with the writing standards in the CCSS: writing as an assessment tool. One of the central shifts from the NCLB assessments to the Smarter Balanced assessments is the inclusion and emphasis on written responses. District office personnel in general are ever vigilant about student performance on statewide assessments. Kam was no exception. When our conversations turned to the CCSS, she immediately steered the talk to the assessments.

Kam, heavily invested in the outcomes of the Smarter Balanced assessment, welcomed the greater emphasis on writing as compared to the NCLB standards because it aligned with her belief that writing was as important as reading in the scope and sequence of the K-12 curriculum. She discussed the need for teachers to prepare students for the types of questions included in the Smarter Balanced assessment as an ongoing process.

Kam-yes. But you’re going to see with the Smarter Balanced assessment there’s a greater emphasis on writing. And I remember when I was principal, over two years ago, and Smarter Balanced was coming up, and I said if you do nothing else, from day one I wanted students’ answering questions in complete sentences. I wanted them to be able to take whatever the question was and turn that into a statement and answer doing that. I would tell my teachers that I wanted students to *do* that because it will help them on the Smarter Balanced. They’re going to get

a point out of five instead of no points. If they can say, you know, why did the seagull fly across the picnic area? The seagull flew across the picnic area because... At least then the kids can focus and continue that sentence... But to write nothing, I can see with Smarter Balanced we are going to go there even more so.

Here was evidence of Kam's tightened focus on maximizing student performance on the state assessment. Her views related to the nature of writing, described earlier, faded into the background as she narrowed her concern to test performance. Instead of perhaps promoting writing instruction that would help students develop an appropriate voice in their writing or promote subjective personal writing in the curriculum, Kam felt a sense of duty to focus on argumentative writing (and explanatory writing in the math classes) because that was her understanding of the kind of writing privileged on the state-wide assessment.

In addition to the concern about performance on the state assessment, Kam felt it was important for teachers to include a writing component in their classroom assessment which reflected her view that writing clarifies and makes plain what students are thinking. Again, she did not identify the forms or genres of writing to be used as assessments, but promoted the use of writing as a way to assess students' thinking.

Kam-Teachers should include writing on their own assessments not just the Smarter Balance tests. Otherwise we would have no way of knowing what kids are thinking. There are two ways, well there are three ways, well there are more

ways than that. We know when they're thinking, we don't know what they're thinking. We know what they're thinking when they write, we know what they're thinking when they speak. The better they speak and write, the better we understand the thinking. So I like that, I used math journals when I taught math so I can see exactly what they understood. Because if they're describing something to you and there's a gap there, it's easy to see what they don't understand.

In this excerpt, Kam turned to formative assessment. Though the focus was not exclusively on writing for the state assessment, those assessments lurked in the background in the sense that Kam wanted students to have practice with the kind of writing that might appear on them. It appeared that Kam's overarching concern was to prepare students for optimal performance on the Smarter Balanced assessment, even as she promoted writing as part of formative assessments.

Kam's focus on implementing curriculum that prepared students for the state assessment was what propelled her to foreground a formalist epistemology, which researchers have found to be true in other districts. (Newell et al, 2016). Though there was evidence of both structuralism and dialogism when she discussed curriculum design and the nature of writing, the driving force directing her curriculum decisions in the district was the formalist nature of the state assessment (in California it is the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress). It is not unusual for educators to maintain a nested set of seemingly contradictory epistemologies, while privileging one over the other to meet the needs of a given context (Sperling, 2004). Kam's position as

Director of Curriculum and Instruction most likely constricted her focus on assessment results because she was held accountable by the superintendent, and to some extent the public, in a way that other educators in the district were not. Her role as a leader was more visible and therefore she may have felt more pressure to ensure and maintain high test scores, thus she was more likely to emphasize one type of writing to the exclusion of others when she made curricular decisions.

District Office Focus Group – Selena and Brad.

While the Director of Curriculum and Instruction expressed varying views in our discussion of the nature of writing and writing instruction, her ultimate concern was how students would perform on the CAASPP which could be said to reflect, as Beach (2011) says, a formalist epistemology. The TOAs who formed the district office focus group, Selena and Brad, shared some of the same beliefs about the nature of writing with Kam. Unlike Kam who didn't explicitly privilege one writing or instructional paradigm over another, Selena and Brad seemed to foreground argumentative writing with the use of model essays and scaffolding strategies to teach it. Selena's experience with writing was clearly grounded in logic and argument. Her affinity for the CCSS-WS can be located in her prior experiences related to writing, particularly in her college years. She describes leaving behind "all the narrative, fluffy stuff from high school," and the "what's your opinion?" writing, and embraced the focus on argumentative writing she found in college. In our first interview, Selena made this explicit.

and the other advantage of college was it was very . . . exactly like common core research evidence logic you know, and I didn't like all the narrative, fluffy stuff from high school I was never into fiction and all that 'what's your opinion?' As soon as I got to the concrete . . . prove the point of what this philosopher is doing or write a research paper and do XYZ, that I was good to go because I had a natural bent towards the more logical, you know, informative, so for me, I became an academic writer in college and I use that so much in what I do now.

Selena's "natural bent towards the more logical" reflects what Newell (2016) terms an Ideational epistemology which "prioritizes the use of argument to engage deeply in content . . . and develop original ideas." Selena implied that writing- specifically argumentative writing- reflects ways of thinking that account for context and include efforts to persuade a reader (Britton, 1970; Nystrand, 1993). For Selena, these ideas seemed to inform and guide her view of what writing is and should be. Her focus on an individual's development and delivery of a cogent argument made her a natural ally of the CCSS-WS. She dismissed expressive and narrative writing with her term "fluffy stuff," as she privileged the logical and argumentative.

Brad, Selena's colleague as a TOA, approached writing from a slightly different angle, though it can also be inferred that he was influenced by structuralism and formalism. In both our meetings Brad raised the issue of the structure of writing. He referred several times to his experience in a high school history course. The teacher required a significant volume of writing and used it as an assessment tool. Brad

remembered not only the volume of writing but also the teacher's focus on how the writing was structured.

I had the same history teacher for 10th 11th and 12th grade. All of his tests were short answer and essay. No multiple-choice for any history test they took 10, 11, 12. And he really stressed the writing structure and I really felt that he helped give me the confidence in doing that. A lot of it was the mere time of actually, 'Okay we have another essay, another essay, another essay. Some were shorter essays, some longer essays that we would edit and develop. I also had him for AP where he also did the DBQ's [Data Based Questions make up a large part of the AP US History test] for a AP US and AP Econ and world history too, so when I got to college most everybody that I was around did not feel very comfortable with writing, but I did, I attribute that a lot of that to him.

This emphasis on structure seemed to be a foundational experience for Brad, as we shall see below when he promoted instruction in the structure of essays. Though he recognized that there were many aspects to writing, he clearly felt that a well-structured piece of writing was paramount. "I learned in high school that there are structures for any kind of writing, and without a sort of structure the writing . . . the piece falls apart." For Brad, these structures can be deciphered and then taught.

In addition to Selena's predilection for logic and Brad's proclivity for structure, they both believed in a strong connection between reading and writing. Selena led the discussion of the relationship between reading and writing, while Brad assented by

nodding his head in agreement or occasionally offering a “That’s right.” Selena alluded to a body of research without actually citing any in her statements about a reading-writing connection in both of our interviews.

“My favorite quote is ‘reading and writing are inextricably linked,’ you know to be a good writer you need to read quality pieces and vice versa.”

Later she remarked about this connection in the context of the CCSS-WS:

“but I think the way the standards are written for Common Core is writing is very inextricably linked to reading and that that process which has been proven over and over and over again that the better readers are better writers, better writers are better readers, and you see the way that the reading standards are worded ties directly to how the writing standards are worded, and everything is, is...coordinated.”

Both Brad and Selena held the connection between reading and writing that is embedded in the CCSS-WS in high regard. They felt the way the reading standards reinforced the writing standards and vice versa represented a strength of the standards. Their apparent affinity for the spiraled standards and the linking of reading and writing suggested that their view of writing was based on the notion that it should be in response to a text. They did not bring up the idea that writing can be a reflective practice or a vehicle for processing emotions or opinions; their discussion of writing narrowed in on responding to an external source which was one of the explicit shifts identified by the originators of the new standards.

Writing instruction

Selena and Brad shared an interest in what they (along with the school administrators) termed “writing across the curriculum.” There seemed to be a general consensus among the district office personnel and the site administrators that “writing across the curriculum” was taking place. The term “writing across the curriculum” was never defined, but it was mentioned in both sets of interviews as though it were a commonly recognized occurrence throughout the district. Brad attributed this term to the CCSS and implied that it was imbedded in the standards. “It's a change, but I think writing across the curriculum is really going to strengthen the students writing skills.” He seemed to assume that there was widespread agreement in departments across each high school site and across the Orange Grove district that there would be a change in the use of writing as an instructional tool. However, there was no discussion about what “writing” might mean for teachers in disciplines other than English. Brad did not seem to have an awareness of the complex issues associated with demanding writing across the curriculum (Swanson-Owens, 1986).

Kam, who sat in on the first focus group interview, on the other hand was expecting resistance to the incorporation of writing across the curriculum. She weighed in with a concern about how teachers in departments that don't traditionally promote writing would react to the inclusion of direct instruction in writing in their discipline.

Teacher's reactions will no doubt be twofold: [speaking in the voice of a teacher] ‘because I don't know how to teach writing, and secondly it is so labor-intensive

in grading it. And I don't feel competent in grading it because I don't even know where to start.' That's what teachers told me all the time. So, when you have social studies and science teachers that are being told that they're going to have to incorporate writing into the program their first thing is 'I don't even how to teach writing, I don't want to know how to grade those papers, I didn't become an English teacher on purpose,' and so there's the no.

Unlike Brad, Kam displayed a sensitivity to the differing needs of teachers in the various disciplines, and seemed to understand the resistance teachers might have when asked to incorporate writing into their curriculum. (Later, I will discuss examples of this type of resistance in some of the members of the math focus group who feared they would have to provide direct instruction in how to write an essay, but also feared the time intensive grading associated with writing instruction.)

Like Kam, Selena also revealed a sense of how teachers would react to writing across the curriculum in her comments about science teachers.

The time aspect too of you know, they need to know how to write a lab report, not write an essay, thinking like thinking like a scientist is more important than writing for a scientific journal /Brad-right, but writing like a scientist/ I'm thinking about their filter as they are hearing that and as they are seeing that standard that we all know there's a place in the world for scientific writing. It is just that from their filter, it is not their priority. They are seeing it that way. That this is just a low priority.

Both Kam and Selena seemed to understand that the meaning of “writing” and “writing instruction” are dependent on discipline specific contexts, and both were able to anticipate resistance from teachers who might make assumptions about what is expected in terms of the use of writing in their curriculum. Even so, the term “writing across the curriculum” seemed to be used loosely, and in fact, we will hear from the site administrators that there wasn’t actually an articulated plan for implementation of writing across the curriculum at GVHS.

In light of the fact that the Director of Curriculum and the TOAs were responsible for the curriculum throughout the district, it is worthy of note that they were adamant about *not* having a district writing plan, (despite the fact that the English teachers use what can only be described as a program –ERWC [Expository Reading and Writing Course] and Jane Schafer- district wide.) In our conversation, Brad made a simple, yet telling statement about a district writing “plan.”

Selena-so that’s how we built the writing program, well is not a program, but the writing focus, over-arching plan

PI-and this is something you developed?

Kam-we don’t have a writing program.

Brad-yeah we don’t have a writing program, but it’s our writing program. *We need to be careful with our language on that one.* (Italics mine)

Both Kam’s interjection, “We don’t have a writing plan,” and Brad’s counsel that “We need to be careful about our language on that one,” revealed an undercurrent of unease

about the actual presence and value of a writing plan in the district. My sense was that they wanted to move away from formulaic, prepackaged writing programs, and move in the direction of a more organic, CCSS driven approach to writing. I sensed that there was some agreement among the leaders in the district (including these participants) that pre-packaged writing programs like *Write from the Beginning* were considered too formulaic and did not lead to successful writing. Selena clearly subscribed to this view based on her comments from our second interview.

There's a danger that it could become very formulaic, so if you take the Jane Schafer method which we implemented in ninth grade for years, there are wonderful pieces in that program but over time it has become very formulaic so kids... The common core is not formulaic at all. They want kids to work, right, for different . . . for different audiences, for different tasks in different formats, and a formula doesn't fit. What that [Jane Schafer method] teaches them to do is to write a really solid five paragraph essay for every single thing they're ever given in their life which becomes counterproductive to the process that you're trying to accomplish.

In contrast to some earlier statements, the district seemed to have taken into account the writing process, and they recognized at least some place for agency in writing. This promotion of student generated ideas, echoed structuralism. The kind of formulaic programs like Jane Schaffer and *Write from the Beginning* that had been used in the

district were characterized as “counterproductive” by Selena, which implied a belief that writing also involved the development of ideas generated by the individual student.

“So, what we put together, and it’s an umbrella plan, it’s not a detailed plan, it’s an umbrella plan. We looked at the middle school curriculum as well and looked at what skills they were focusing on and how they termed those skills because we want common terminology /Brad- yeah/ so we took those three things into account and we put together an initial draft writing plan. The focus right now for ninth grade for example is clarity concision and precision. That hits our standards solidly. Allows ninth grade teachers to shore up skills from k-8 if they need to as well as enter ninth grade standards and so that lens for ninth grade writing is clarity, concision, precision, so everything that they focus on be it a one-time paragraph, be it a five paragraph essay, be it a research paper. It is a very clear focus. Every ninth grade teacher knows ‘Oh okay, did you say it clearly, did you say it as concisely as you could and did you use precise language for that?’ “

In this plan (which is not actually a *plan*) there was further evidence of an emphasis on the development of ideas by the student. The focus on issues of genre and audience as seen in the plan’s elevation of clarity and precision implied awareness that writing is transactional (Britton, 1970) or a negotiation between the writer and the reader (Nystrand, 1989). Kam, Selena, and Brad appeared to have a felt sense of the cognitive processes associated with this negotiation, and seemed to have moved beyond beliefs about writing based exclusively in a formalist epistemology that promoted the use of templates, model

essays and fastidious attention to rules of grammar and conventional correctness. This approach contrasted with the district's prior use of prepackaged programs. It's worth noting here that the English teachers made no mention of "clarity, concision, and precision" in our interviews. It appeared these ideas had not yet been disseminated to the classroom level at the time of the study.

CCSS

When our conversations turned to the implementation of the CCSS-WS, each of the members of the focus group including Kam had positive things to say about the new standards. Selena in particular felt that the new standards were an improvement over the NCLB standards for several reasons.

I think that's really an improvement over the NCLB standards, which you could teach writing in isolation, and while there is an argument for that, like what Emma was saying this morning [at a planning session with teachers], you know about... That this topic sentence has to use keywords in the writing /Kam-that is one of the standards?/ yeah, it is, but it is not worded as such, you know that, but I think it was easier to teach writing in isolation in the previous standards whereas now I think it really, if there's fidelity to standards it really needs to be taught in conjunction with research, in conjunction with reading texts, in conjunction with a variety of types of writing.

Selena's interpretation of the standards suggested that each of the standards had multiple applications and was not just about discrete skills. This interpretation reflects the

structuralist idea that students were expected to interact with a variety of contexts and tailor their writing to the requirements and expectations of a particular context. As stated in my introduction, this understanding of writing reveals the strand of structuralism present in the standards that accounts for situated learning, even though the dominant epistemology that informs the standards is formalist (Beach, 2011).

In contrast, Brad described using a prepackaged program based on templates and model essays (ERWC) as the basis for the district's development of writing instruction. Though this certainly contradicted what was said earlier about "being careful" how they described a writing "plan," Brad was direct and forthright about how they used ERWC as the source for the writing instruction in the district.

"While we've taken a lot of feedback from the teachers as far as what has worked, and we also developed a writing focus for... across the grade levels looking at the ERWC as our endgame of our backwards planning from there and then cross-referencing the standards, and /Kam-I was going to say the standards really guide them/ yeah the standards really kinda guide us."

The fact that these district leaders "backward map" from the ERWC writing program which was steeped in a formalist epistemology suggested that though Kam, Selena, and Brad each expressed beliefs about writing in line with structuralism, their implementation of the CCSS-WS privileged formalism. Selena and Brad worked hand in hand with Kam, so it made sense that their primary mission was to develop a writing curriculum that would contribute to student success on the CAASPP assessment, despite how the

differing viewpoints contended for dominance in the curriculum decisions of the district personnel.

When the state of California adopted the CCSS, the task of deciphering, interpreting and ultimately, implementing the standards in the Orange Grove USD fell to Kam and the district office focus group members. As they confronted the shifts brought on by the writing standards, their individual views of the nature of writing and writing instruction played a role in their decisions about the implementation. I found that Kam, Selena, and Brad viewed writing from several angles based on the three principal epistemological stances outlined in my theoretical framework. I also found that, even though their personal views of writing were in line with structuralism and dialogism, the need to promote positive test results on the CAASPP overshadowed these personal views and forced Kam, Selena and Brad to privilege formalism in their curricular decisions.

School Administration

The administrators at GVHS served as a link between the district office and the teachers in terms of how the CCSS-WS would be implemented. If state officials expected a seamless, unilateral implementation of the standards through a plan that worked its way from the district office to the classroom, they would be dismayed by the varied interpretations of the standards at each subsequent level in the Orange Grove school district. The district office personnel filtered the writing standards through their beliefs and planned accordingly. At the same time the school administrators at GVHS viewed the standards through the lens of their beliefs about writing. Jack Aslanian, the principal, and

Allison Bacon, the assistant principal responsible for curriculum, focused on writing related issues that were not mentioned by the district office personnel.

The Nature of Writing

Jack Aslanian emphasized that he valued clarity in writing. The following statement typified what Jack said in various ways: “I think good writing is writing that the reader can understand exactly what you’re trying to get across or say.” For Jack, if a written piece’s meaning was clear to the intended reader, then it was a successful piece of writing. He talked about clarity in the context of his reading and in the context of his production of written communications. “If someone writes something to me, I want to know what it says, or whether it says what it really means.” He reiterated this later by saying, “I’m constantly reading things, you know, whether it be from parents, teachers or kids or whatever, and I want to be able to say that I get what they’re trying to say.” It seemed especially important for Jack that the meaning in any written piece be immediately clear, without much room for interpretation. He was conscious of being clear in his own writing, particularly as clarity applied to emails.

I think writing is super important because so much can be conveyed or not conveyed through writing. And it can either be conveyed properly or not properly and I use email as a perfect example. Email can be so misinterpreted, because you know there’s no tone. So I find myself when I’m writing emails to be especially careful about how I couch things, and read it back and look at it and really look at them, and I don’t know if this really answer your question, but really look at them and when I finish, I say how is the person who’s receiving this going to take this?

Am I conveying what I want to convey in a way that it won't be well received, or am I putting it in a way that they feel that I am being patronizing?

Jack did not define how meaning can be “properly conveyed or not conveyed,” but it can be inferred that he operated from an internal, implicit, rubric for clarity. His rubric seemed to also involve appropriate tone. He mentioned the struggle with communicating an intended tone and how he was careful about how his writing came across to his intended audience. Jack seemed to believe that if the tone was appropriate, then his writing would be clear. I suspected that the politics of Jack's position as a principal came in to play when he was composing communications, thus he was conscious of the tone and clarity of his writing.

The fact that Jack valued clarity in his writing suggested that he paid attention to the audience for his writing. He mentioned that his frame of reference for clarity in writing was the emails he wrote. He qualified that by stating, “. . . if I were reading essays or still in the classroom that might be a little bit different,” suggesting that academic writing would have different demands for a reader or a writer. He seemed to separate the functional writing that his job demanded from academic writing that students or teachers might do in the classroom. When asked a general question about the nature of writing, he referenced the type of writing that he most regularly engaged in, workplace communication. Naturally, he did not mention writing literary analysis essays or explanations of mathematical procedures, but he did emphasize the importance of clarity in writing as it related to email.

Jack's concern for clarity implied that his view of the nature of writing emerged partly from the notion that writing was a two-way street. Taking into consideration the relationship a writer has to a reader, as well as the context of the communication, Jack displayed a seemingly innate sense that writing is both situated and situating (Sperling & Freedman, 2001). When he said "It (writing) can be conveyed properly or not properly," Jack recognized that communicating "properly" or "improperly" was done in a situated context. At the same time, he displayed awareness that his communication contributed to the context and could elicit changes in the context.

In addition to clarity, Jack discussed the need for "flow." He did not mean "flow" in the sense that Csikszentmihalyi (1996) does (an automatic, effortless optimal experience); he meant that there was a coherent structure to a piece of writing.

"There is a flow. I can understand what the person is saying, what they want or what they're trying to get across. There's a, it's going to sound so basic but there's an introduction, there's a "hey, this is what this is really about, and then there's an explanation of what it's about, and there's a conclusion that wraps it up. I can figure out whether it is three short paragraphs or three long paragraphs exactly what's being said."

Though this statement also revealed Jack's concern with clarity, he ultimately was talking about structure. He described the simple structure of beginning, middle and end. This expectation for an identifiable structure which adds to the clarity may have informed his decisions about writing instruction, though he did not say so directly. This simple

structure appeared to serve as a template both for what Jack expected to read and how he developed a piece of his own writing.

Jack shared this view of structure with, Brad, who mentioned the need for recognizable structure in writing several times in our interviews. In one instance, Brad commented, “-as an English teacher I, my focus would be a lot on the structure of the writing as a whole you know analyzing the structure.” This priority in writing is echoed by Jack when he mentioned the need for the most basic structure in communication: a beginning, middle, and end. Both educators appeared to adhere to the notion that underlying structures in writing govern and respond to the expectations of readers (Nystrand, 1993). Jack’s self-admitted simple description of a “beginning, middle and end” typified the sense both men seemed to have about the expectation readers could have for a piece of writing.

Another aspect of writing that Jack mentioned was the effect the writing process itself had on his thinking. “Writing has always been important. When I really want to figure out something I write my thoughts down, like do I really want to retire right now?” After chuckling at the notion of retiring, Jack talked about how the act of writing helped to clarify and refine thinking. “When I write something down, I have to really know it. I have to be clear in my head, which doesn’t always happen, but writing it out forces me to be clear.” By prefacing his general statement about writing with “it’s always has been important,” he suggested that writing is an important process to clarify thinking. It served as a way to generate ideas and to refine them after they have been committed to paper (or

screen). The effect that the writing process had on the writer was what Jack considered to be valuable, and it made sense in light of this that he would encourage writing activities across the curriculum to promote clear thinking. Here Jack seemed to maintain two views of writing simultaneously. On the one hand he focused on an individual's thinking in the writing process, while on the other hand he attended to the social context of a piece of writing. His attention to the effect of the writing process on his own thinking and the effect of his writing on others reflected both structuralist and dialogic sensibilities.

When I asked Jack how his thinking about writing developed, he, like many of the participants, referred back to his high school and college instructors. Though it had been more than 40 years, Jack remembered clearly the names of these teachers, if not the methods of instruction they used.

I was very fortunate. I had a really good English teacher, Rob Shelton, in high school. Rob was just a phenomenal teacher, and writing was... And literature and writing were really an emphasis for him. And then I went to Ventura junior-college and had a guy by the name of Bruce Collins, and it should tell you something that I remember these guys' names after 40 years, who was just an awesome writer, and I have been told that I am a good writer, I don't know if that's accurate or not, but I've been told that. And I go back to these guys really emphasizing writing and allowing you some freedom to screw up and then get good feedback.

Jack's memory of writing instruction was that the teachers were very passionate about their subject. "I just remember learning a lot from them because I enjoyed it and they were passionate about what they did." He remembered getting clear feedback on conventional errors and the structure of his writing, but didn't recall writing in any genres beyond expository or persuasive. At the time that he was in school, there was not an emphasis on literary analysis or narrative writing. His experience with writing in school likely informed what he believed about writing and was, at the very least, in the background of his decisions about writing curriculum at GVHS. It can be inferred that he saw writing as a valuable activity for thinking and communicating, and he saw it as an important "life-skill" or works-place skill. This utilitarian view of writing was shared with Louie, the math teacher described later in the chapter.

Jack's notion that what was most important in writing was clarity appeared to be a part of his view that writing was transactional in nature. He seemed to value clarity above correctness, though he did not mention the role of conventional correctness. He had a sense that clarity was the most important issue across genres, whether a workplace communication or a piece of literature. Beneath the surface of Jack's statements about writing lay the belief that the clarity of a piece of writing can be affected by the audience and the appropriate tone for that audience. He mentioned the email genre and expressed his concern that tone was often misinterpreted, which led to his caution when sending emails out. He was very conscious of the audience in his emails and was careful not to sound "condescending" or "patronizing."

Assistant Principal

As a former math teacher, Allison was surprisingly enthusiastic about writing, and she felt confident in her abilities as a writer. Though she did not mention it, I suspected her Ph.D. experience led to some of her confidence in writing. She described herself as the “editing guru” in the office because she was able to pay attention to details related to spelling, usage, and conventions. She believed that her skill as a writer was developed while in high school in Colorado, and felt that her training as a writer was superior to the kind of instruction her own children were getting here in California.

If I were to compare my childhood to my own children’s, I realize just how amazing our writing program was in Colorado. Whatever it was that we did, when I graduated from high school I was a good writer. We had good writing instruction. At that time it was a lot of, God we wrote a lot of essays [laughs] it really wasn’t scripted as much as some of the things I see my kids come home with like the Jane Schafer, I’ve seen teachers also put, say this and fill in your information, real scripted. It was (in Colorado) a little more basic guidelines, I think and open a little bit. And yet very strict on the grammar content and detail. You know, all of that. I went through the public school system like everybody else, but it just seems different from my own kids. The process I guess.

Allison revealed that her experience in high school, where there was a high volume of writing, influenced her beliefs about writing. She wistfully remembered the large number of essays she had to write while in school. Expecting a high volume of

writing certainly contrasted with what has been reported about the effects of NCLB where the curriculum was narrowed to subjects that were tested, meaning that writing was pushed to the periphery (Dee et al, 2010). This early experience for Allison appeared to have led to the belief that students should be writing frequently, and in greater volume than has been expected so far. Her early experience in school also seemed to have shaped her emphasis on conventional correctness. Allison's role as the "editor" among her peers reinforced her view that conventional correctness was a sign of good writing.

As a teacher it's very important to me that I always make sure that it was professional, and error-free. That used to irritate me so much if I had a typo or anything when I was presenting to kids just really try to, again be complete, and detail, and professional in whatever I do. That has carried through now with being an administrator, there's so much writing and my job it's ridiculous. I'm kind of our editing guru I guess in our little admin department. I get asked to check things all the time. I'm real big on possessives, the apostrophe does mean "that is." I see something that's out there, saying "*teachers, 'S*" come to the whatever. This would just get under my skin that's my biggest one is apostrophes.

There were echoes in this passage of Jack's emphasis on workplace writing. Though he was operating from primarily dialogic notions when discussing the writing of emails, the core of Allison's concerns clearly emerged from more formalist thinking. She not only wanted to reflect her professionalism, but also seemed to feel an obligation to serve as a

role model to her colleagues and students when it came to correct conventions. Again, there was a simultaneous presence of competing views of the nature of writing in Allison's mind.

Further evidence of concurrent views of the nature of writing can be seen in Allison's belief that writing was a means to promote thinking, which was a part of Jack's understanding of the nature of writing. Both administrators acknowledged the value of writing in all disciplines, not just in disciplines that traditionally have included writing in the curriculum.

So I would say that's the number one. I would take that as a foundational piece.

There is absolutely no reason why you cannot have kids write a paragraph in every single subject. From PE to English, and I really believe that because if the student can articulate their thinking, apparently isn't that the ultimate goal, to communicate effectively.

This awareness that writing promoted thinking suggested a view that there are cognitive processes occurring in the act of writing, and therefore, writing should be used as a vehicle in all of the disciplines to promulgate thinking.

Much like Kam in the district office, and to some degree the TOA focus group, the school site administrators maintained varied stances on the nature of writing. Both Jack and Allison valued clarity of communication in writing which may have grown out of the fact that most of the writing they did was directly related to communicating with students, staff and parents through letters and email. They also shared a belief that writing

was a means to promote thinking and should be embedded in the curriculum of all disciplines. Writing for learning seemed to be fundamental to their view of writing in the context of schools.

Writing Instruction

Understanding Jack's notions of the nature of writing shed light on how he viewed writing instruction and provided insight into the decisions he made related to writing in curriculum. Jack displayed the same awareness of genre he expressed in talking about his own writing when he discussed writing curriculum. He recognized the different purposes of writing in the various disciplines and revealed his awareness that each genre has its own set of expectations.

We talked about writing across the curriculum a lot. We've emphasized that, but we haven't come up with a particular system we expect everyone to use. Because it varies so much by core subject area what is needed or expected in writing, so what I think has happened is that there is increased writing across the curriculum, but it doesn't necessarily, it's not necessarily all Jane Schafer, all six traits.

He seemed to be addressing a claim that a system of writing instruction should be in place that was used school-wide. However, he argued that each discipline held different requirements for writing, making a single system of writing, such as "Jane Schaffer", or "Six Traits" impossible. His cognizance of genre helped him to "emphasize" writing across the curriculum without forcing teachers to use a "system" of writing instruction that may be inappropriate for the kind of writing that was applicable to their discipline.

This awareness that writing occurs in a social context with varying demands according to the expectations of a given genre suggested Jack's view was influenced by a dialogic epistemology. Jack realized that form is only part of the composing picture, and he understood that there was not one form of text that could be hammered to any genre of writing. It was this attention to genre that underpinned his advocacy of "writing across the curriculum" below. At the same time it created a conflict between what he felt to be true about writing and what informed the CCSS-WS. He did not mention any concern about this in our interviews, but he clearly felt there was more to writing than what would be tested on the state-wide test.

Jack's belief about writing as a tool to enhance thinking was also reflected in his statements about the effect writing has on learning. He suggests that when students write, learning becomes more deeply embedded.

Yeah, because I think when you learn something, you learn it, and if you could put it writing it reinforces it and that makes... I think it becomes part of you. You know, it's not just rote learning.

He suggested that rote learning was less valuable than "deep" learning, and writing was the vehicle for this deep kind of learning. To Jack, rote learning of the kind that was privileged in the NCLB, limited the broad, critical thinking that was required of students in the current reform culture. The perspective Jack brought to writing instruction was rooted in his thinking about the nature of writing, believing that writing must be clear (and therefore, attend to both audience and genre) and have a positive effect on critical

thinking. Part and parcel of Jack's belief in the positive effects writing could have on thinking was his support for "writing across the curriculum."

It's important to note that he said "*We talk often* (my emphasis) about writing across the curriculum. . . . *We've tried* this over the last three or four years, and frankly it just hasn't taken hold of a particular (system of writing)." This suggested that, though there had been a lot of conversation about writing across the curriculum, there wasn't any formal way of insuring that all of the disciplines featured writing as part of the curriculum. Jack believed that writing had increased across the disciplines, but he didn't offer any particular evidence of that. He also pointed out that he believed the English department "hybrids" the use of the Jane Schaffer method and the Six traits. This echoed part of what the district office personnel said about not using a packaged writing program. Ironically, they still maintained many of the tenets of both "packaged programs," which may have put Jack in a bind between the direction from the district office to avoid packaged writing programs and trusting the English teachers to use effective practices that maintain elements of the programs they had been using in the past. Jack acknowledged that the English department didn't fully embrace the Jane Schaffer method, but modified it, which was somewhat aligned with his belief about adopting appropriate methods for specific disciplines. In this case, he referred to the appropriate use of a modified template by the English department.

I got the sense that, for Jack, the ideal was that there would be a significant amount of writing in *all* of the disciplines, but he knew that there was no actual

mechanism to make it happen. He certainly encouraged teachers in the various disciplines to expect more writing from students, but wasn't specific about how writing should happen. The fact that he held this ideal was evidence that he valued writing as a learning strategy, and that he believed writing instruction should be tailored to individual discipline, yet he didn't promote or enforce writing across the curriculum beyond having conversations about it.

Allison shared Jack's belief in writing as a vehicle for thinking. As a former math teacher, her orientation in terms of writing instruction was to use writing to reveal an understanding of the mathematical processes as opposed to focusing on the product of the process. Allison felt it was a return to the way she taught prior to the NCLB reform, which I will discuss later.

I had my students write a problem-solving journal I think I called it, very creative (said with a hint of sarcasm) (laughs). But they would get a problem of the week and they had to write out very specific things like what it was the problems ask you to do, I don't remember now. It had five parts and one of the things in there was to really write about how they solved it, you know. Explain their answers and really get after thinking.

Focusing on the development of the individual student's thought processes via journal writing suggests that in addition to evidence that Allison was influenced by formalism (seen in her focus on writing conventions discussed above) in her view of the nature of writing, but there was also structuralism at play in her view concerning writing

instruction. This is consistent with the interplay of views found in the district office personnel as well as Allison's colleague at the school site, Jack.

Allison further explained her view that writing enhances thinking in the exchange below.

The thing is that in a way to me having taught at that time pre-California state standards, the common core is taking us back. It's taking us back to where we were. To something that was in my opinion something that was a much better way of teaching, then those standards, drill and kill, they were done for the last 10 or 15 years. It was about the thinking and the process, the connections in the real world really. And that's where we were headed back to. It's a different twist, and we're calling it something a little different and approach it a little differently, but in lessons, I don't know, I don't personally see much difference. For me, I guess, in science, the same thing. We just had to do a lot of writing, I wasn't necessarily so big on the let's do this big research project or a report, you know, formal type writing in that sense, labs. But it was more of an everyday explaining, explain your answers, explain the results, tell me why, tell me how. The ways that we really get at thinking. That's how I view it all; just to get at the thinking. It's not just about the right answer (laughs)

There were several avenues for discussion in this excerpt. One was that Allison reiterated and continued to resonate with Jack's statements about the value of writing to promote thinking. She discussed this in the context of a return to the pre-NCLB days before writing was overshadowed in curriculum by testing of discrete skills. For Allison, writing

as a means to clarify thinking was foundational to her understanding of the purpose of writing, at least as it pertained to a school setting. In a sense, ideas in writing were privileged over form. Reminding her perhaps of her own school experience, Allison maintained a positive attitude about the CCSS-WS because she viewed the shift as a return to a stronger emphasis on writing. She also made a case for “writing across the curriculum” which was mentioned earlier in my discussion of Jack’s view of writing instruction. She specifically advocated for an increase in writing in math and science classes, however, only in the interest of promoting thinking about concepts, not as an end product.

Allison’s ideas about writing displayed the same kind of overlapping epistemological characteristics as Kam and Jack. At times she would foreground attention to form and conventional correctness, while at other times she turned her focus to using writing as means to develop ideas. She was happy to be moving away from the kind of writing instruction that she termed “drill and kill,” and was anticipating what she felt was more effective instruction based on the generation of ideas.

CCSS

Both site administrators believed the CCSS would produce positive effects on the curriculum and instruction in the district, which guided them when they addressed the shift in focus on writing in the CCSS. Jack succinctly stated his view of the CCSS. “I think the common core is more realistic for what our students need to be successful.” He did not offer any direct criticism of the standards in our conversations. Allison was

equally positive and was specific about why she felt the new standards marked an improvement.

I think they are a way to make learning meaningful for students by helping to bridge content across the curriculum with a real life application of that content. I think that the standards are, I'll say more meaningful experiences in the classroom in the sense that critical thinking components, and again, I'll say student driven curriculum. A lot less of a teacher being the director of the knowledge and it's really more student centered.

Allison's view that the CCSS was meaningful, student-centered and grounded in "real life application" colored her interpretation of the standards and may have influenced how some of the teachers responded to the standards. Following is a discussion of Jack and Allison's general views about the new standards. I will then discuss how their views intersect with the CCSS-WS specifically.

Jack, the principal, held the opinion that both the NCLB and the CCSS were generally positive. He felt that the accountability that came along with the NCLB standards was good for American students because it moved people "out of their comfort-zone" and raised the bar for instruction. His view was that the CCSS forced students to use more critical thinking than the previous standards. Allison viewed the CCSS as taking us back to a better way of teaching. As a former middle school math teacher, Allison emphasized process over product, which explained why she felt the CCSS was a return to more effective strategies for teaching math.

I think common core, when you look at all the standards, it isn't content based. It's very much process-based. It's taking content and teaching it differently so kids have to think about it and support their answers with evidence ultimately.

She appreciated the renewed emphasis in the CCSS on writing across the disciplines and felt that writing was a way to promote thinking and a useful method of assessment. Both Jack and Allison felt their role in implementing the new standards was to act as a facilitator for the teachers. Neither believed an autocratic approach would work, so they worked closely with the teachers to provide them with resources. They both believed the CCSS was more student-centered than NCLB which they perceived as an improvement. Jack recognized the implications of the move to the new standards. "For me it (CCSS) was a huge shift which I thought was good and a long time coming." The shift to a more student-centered curriculum was the primary change that Jack believed educators faced.

For Allison, it was a return to a way of viewing teaching that was more effective ("taking us back to the pre-NCLB days."). Allison's belief that the CCSS was a return to a "better way of teaching" informed her positive take on the new standards, and came into play when she encouraged teachers to develop "new" strategies to address the CCSS.

One belief that emerged from the interviews with two of the school administrators was related to their role as facilitators of the CCSS implementation. Both Jack and Allison believed that the teachers were central to the success of the CCSS at GVHS. Jack stated this succinctly when he said, "Common core is only going to work if teachers

embrace it and do what they're supposed to be doing with it." Allison shared this belief as evidenced by her comment, "The whole idea of common core or state standards or whatever you call it next year, it still comes down to the teachers." Both of these statements revealed the belief that without teachers collectively engaging in the implementation of the CCSS, the reform would be less than successful or at least not live up to its promise.

In light of their belief that teachers played a vital role in the implementation, Jack and Allison both subscribed to a collaborative model of leadership, providing time and resources for teachers to process the CCSS and develop instructional strategies to address the new standards. Allison expressed her role directly in several statements.

I'm a messenger, you know, I'm on their side and I'm trying to help so (**PI**-Less directive?) yeah, that's really the message I'm trying to get to them is look this is the direction we're going with Common Core, these are the standards this is what that looks like, here are some resources.

In a later interview, she reiterated this belief in her role as a facilitator.

We've taught, we brainstormed a lot, and talked about strategies, and like I said shared a lot of resources, but what it all comes down to in the end is that's all I can do I can't make anybody do anything. We can't force them to change their instruction. People are going to do what they need to do to get their kids to learn the content. We can suggest, we can help, we can support.

These statements suggest that Allison perceived limits to her power. She could not “make anybody do anything.” She appeared to anticipate resistance from at least some of the faculty to the changes imposed by the CCSS. Her approach was to provide resources and time to those teachers who embraced the new standards, and accepted that some teachers would continue to provide the same content and use the same instructional strategies they had historically used prior to the implementation of the CCSS. In her view, the best approach was to facilitate the change for teachers who were willing, and hope that those who might be resistant would come around some time in the future.

Jack demonstrated his belief that his role was as a facilitator by working alongside teachers and actually teaching a lesson. He taught the same lesson in a number of classrooms to gain an understanding of what the teachers were facing, and to gain a deeper understanding of what the CCSS entailed at the instructional level. He reflected on the experience, “Teaching common core, using common core strategies isn’t easy, but I wasn’t afraid to step up and do it, and you can’t be afraid to step up and do it because it’s a process.” Taking the step to teach a lesson and his reflection on his experience, strongly suggested that Jack’s approach to implementation was collaborative. Later, he suggested that he learned a great deal through the process. “I’m supposed be an instructional leader so we would share those responsibilities. I learned a lot by doing it.” His belief that he should “share those responsibilities” revealed Jack’s underlying attitude that his role resembled that of a coach rather than an autocrat. In our second interview, Jack stated, “The common core is only going to work if teachers embrace it and do what they’re supposed to be doing with it.” It appeared that Jack believed the best method to help

teachers embrace the new standards was to work with them in the classroom and share the burden of the changes brought about by the CCSS by providing teachers with time and resources.

In our discussion of the standards themselves, both Allison and Jack viewed the CCSS as much more student-centered than the NCLB standards. They both mentioned the fact that the NCLB standards focused on discrete skills and particular content, whereas the CCSS was focused on process, application in novel situations, and rich critical thinking. For Allison, part of what made the CCSS student-centered was that learning was more meaningful for students. She stated, “I think that the standards are, I’ll say more meaningful experiences in the classroom in the sense that critical thinking components, and again, I’ll say student driven curriculum. A lot less of a teacher being the director of the knowledge and it’s really more student centered.” She also believed that the emphasis on application within the standards generated a more meaningful experience for the students. Allison also suggested that the more meaningful nature of the CCSS gave students a deeper purpose for learning than simply regurgitating facts on a pointless test. “And I think in the end it’s more meaningful for kids because they’re finding a purpose for their learning as opposed to just taking a test.” Allison’s belief that the standards were student-centered was reflected in her comments about “meaningful experiences,” and her statement that students found more purpose in their learning beyond just preparing for a test. The fact that the curriculum was broadened across disciplines with a “real life application” component was what Allison believed made the CCSS more student-centered than the NCLB standards. “I think they (CCSS standards)

are a way to make learning meaningful for students by helping to bridge content across the curriculum with a real life application of that content.”

Jack’s belief that the CCSS was student-centered was similar to Allison’s. He recognized this as an important and difficult shift for some teachers. He believed that teachers were expected to alter their focus to the underlying processes and away from a purely content-oriented curriculum. In our first interview he stated, “I feel like, in theory, Common Core is so different in how we’ve been teaching with the idea that being so student driven. That’s a huge shift for teachers.” He reiterated this point in a subsequent interview. “I think common core, when you look at all the standards, it isn’t content based. It’s very much process-based. It’s taking content and teaching it differently so kids have to think about it and support their answers with evidence ultimately.” Because Jack believed this was a difficult reorientation for many teachers, he was willing to provide time and resources for teachers to develop more student-oriented curriculum that addressed the CCSS.

Jack and Allison served as the “middle managers” when it came to enacting the CCSS-WS. They appeared to be subject to the same forces that played upon the district office personnel, that is, they were held accountable by the state and by the public for test scores. However, they appeared to focus to a lesser degree on the California Assessment of Student Progress and Performance than the district office personnel. Their views on the writing standards indicated that they felt the development of ideas was a central concern in school sponsored writing, a stance that differs from the focus on the texts and

text features that was endorsed by the district office leaders. Jack and Allison agreed that the CCSS was more student-centered, more meaningful to students, and more focused on process than product. Both administrators welcomed the shift in emphasis on writing for multiple purposes in varied disciplines which served to promote critical thinking. Not only did the school administrators attend to the structuralist elements in the CCSS-WS, but they reflected this underlying epistemology in their leadership approach. They both expressed that their roles were as facilitators in a collaborative leadership model, focusing on attaining resources for teachers to support the implementation of the new standards. Again, the site administrators, like the district office personnel, subscribed to multiple viewpoints related to writing; however, unlike Kam and the TOAs, Jack and Allison foregrounded thinking in line with a structuralist epistemology.

With varying views of the nature of writing and writing instruction by the leadership in the Orange Grove USD and at GVHS, it is interesting that at the time of the study there was such divergence in approaches to writing. There appeared to be at least some tension between the personal views of writing held by district leaders and the urgency for some (predominantly the district office personnel) to align instruction with the CAASPP assessment. While there were some shared ideas about writing between the district personnel and the school administrators, there was less resolve to focus exclusively on the state-wide assessment for the principal and assistant principal. The school administrators had direct contact with the teachers and worked in a collegial fashion, trusting teachers to implement the CCSS-WS in their own way. This of course, left room for teachers in various departments to interpret the CCSS for themselves.

Again, the sponsors of the Common Core may not have anticipated the range of interpretations of the standards present in the Orange Grove USD. In addition, they may not have considered how the varying epistemological stances might undermine or at least diminish the quality of the implementation process.

English Teachers Focus Group

The five English teachers also exhibited some common and some competing views on the nature of writing and writing instruction. They naturally had more investment in writing instruction than the other participants in the study, and consequently held stronger beliefs about writing and how the CCSS-WS would affect their instruction. As Jack and Allison pointed out, the teachers were a critical piece of the implementation of the new standards, and their views of writing could contribute to the quality of that process or could lead to a rejection of the reform altogether. In the case of the English teachers in the study, it was a bit of both.

Nature of Writing

The English teachers were a lively group who offered strong opinions, particularly about the CCSS in general and its impact on writing instruction. When I posed the question, “What is good writing?” it didn’t take long before the conversation turned to problems with the CCSS and the way it was being implemented by the district

office personnel. Consistent with the district office focus group and the school administrators, the English teachers revealed underlying beliefs related to the nature of writing in the context of their discussion of the CCSS.

The importance of developing ideas thoroughly and with attention to audience and purpose appeared to be most prominent in the thinking of the teachers as the conversation weaved in and out of criticisms of the CCSS implementation process. Buffy and Lola expressed beliefs about the dialogic nature of writing when they talked about writing in terms of interactions with their students. As will be discussed below, the teachers felt that their time for writing instruction was being minimized by an overcrowded curriculum, which meant fewer interactions with their students.

Buffy-yes (*writing becomes secondary to reading*) because one, there's no time for rewrites and rewriting this is so important to the learning of writing in general. If you don't edit and edit again and do it again you're not learning . . . At that time (prior to the CCSS) I really felt like I did a better job because I knew my kids better, I was able to spend more time working with them, I had more freedom to go around and help them individually. You can do a lot more editing, you can do a lot more working.

Here, as Buffy lamented the fact that she was limited in her ability to provide feedback to students in order for them to rewrite, it was clear that these interactions were fundamental to her understanding that writing is a social enterprise (Flower, 1994a). With her time restricted by class size and an overcrowded curriculum that emphasized non-fiction

reading, Buffy became frustrated in part because she valued social interaction as a basic feature of good writing instruction.

Lola expressed the situated nature of writing for different contexts and different teachers.

There's all this miscommunication, miscommunication about what exactly is required for writing, good writing. And I think that's intimidating. Because everyone has a different style. Everyone has different requirements and we are... As they (students) go through different teachers they get different things they need to adjust to.

Lola's sense that writing was dependent on context and that there were multiple and possibly competing expectations within given contexts suggests that she viewed writing as a dialogue. For example, she referred to the fact that students had to navigate different methods of writing instruction by different teachers. The larger context of school was embedded with potentially differing contexts, that is, individual classes. Her recognition that writing was dependent on the social contexts in which it was performed suggested that she saw writing as a transaction dependent on the expectations of varying contexts. The sense here also was that Lola preferred a more cohesive approach to writing within the English department where teachers shared similar expectations for writing. Her use of the term "miscommunication" seemed to reveal discomfort with the lack of a consistent approach to writing across the department. The acknowledgment that students would

benefit from a consistent approach to writing instruction by their English teachers was in tension with the idea that writing is context driven.

Unlike Buffy and Lola, Jersey and Nancy shared the notion that clear structure and thoroughly developed ideas were essential to good writing. Jersey told an anecdote about a former student, describing him as an exceptionally strong writer, but she highlighted the fact that his writing was undisciplined with regard to structure.

I'm thinking about somebody we had a couple years ago who was an amazing writer, but... We used an analogy that we asked him for a pool and he tried to bring us the ocean. You know who we are talking about... He's at Harvard now. And so he was like this incredible writer, but when I had them in 10th grade honors, I would be like, while his ideas are here, his writing is here. It was like it exploded (on the page).

Nancy concurred, and discussed the kinds of strategies they employed to help him organize his ideas. She referred directly to the Jane Schaffer method in her comments, though she didn't use the name.

He had to be... When he came he had to be reined in which was a shock to him because his ideas were so big. But he learned how to structure an argument first of all, a sustained argument. He learned how to engage in a conversation rather than just, here let me tell you all of the world's civil discourse. And he learned a way of writing... He came back last year after his first year at Harvard and talked to

my students and he said that, that . . . that format (Jane Schaffer) has served him well.

Jersey and Nancy saw this anecdote as confirming evidence that using a program like the Jane Schaffer method allowed students to be successful writers after graduation. Though it can be said that there was an element of formula in their adherence to a template for making an argument, there was a stronger sense that Jersey and Nancy focused on helping students develop and organize their ideas over learning just the form. Embedded as well, was the idea that structure in writing was a means of achieving clarity in a dialogue with the reader, or as Nancy states above, “engaging in a conversation.” Much like the district leaders and the school administrators, the English teachers held varying views of writing that were layered simultaneously, but were not necessarily contradictory (Sperling, 2004).

Later in the discussion, Nancy revealed further evidence of structuralism in her thinking when she made the case for a structured writing program.

The idea of making an assertion, finding evidence, comments... You know, we have been harmed here by not adopting some kind of structured writing program. We can say that because we came from the other high school where we went through the process of, and it took the Jane Schafer route, and eventually we dropped the Jane Schafer name because most of us know that that’s just, without her terminology it’s the basis of good writing. And we were all the same page.

As I will discuss later, this position –specifically that “we have been harmed here by not adopting some kind of structured writing program,” – stood in opposition to the district office disinclination to put a writing program in place. The presence of this shared value within the English department was substantiated by their use of the Jane Schaffer method and the ERWC program. It also suggests that the district office personnel were developing a new agenda for writing without these types of programs in the district, but this thinking had not filtered to the classroom at the time of this study.

The varied ideas about the nature of writing in the English focus group was similar to what I found with the District Office focus group. There wasn’t strict adherence to a particular way of thinking about writing, but in fact there was simultaneous presence of potentially conflicting views. For the English teachers in the focus group, dialogism and structuralism were most in evidence, though they also were subject to “teaching to the test,” (SBAC at the time of the study) which reflects the tenets of formalism. Some of the English teachers characterized the assessment as “absurd” and felt some frustration about it. Nancy was explicit about her frustration: “It [SBAC] is driving everything we do. It’s so absurd. It’s an absurd concept: one company’s idea.” The English teachers generally agreed with Nancy’s comment as indicated by nodding heads and affirmative expressions.

In sum, the English teachers’ view of the nature of writing was informed more by dialogism than other epistemological stances. Their focus on context and audience echoed what Kam and the site administrators believed, but contrasted with the narrow

attention to argumentative writing Selena and Brad shared. That is not to say that there was a lack of other epistemological stances, but that the English teachers' personal views of writing were more in line with dialogism. These conflicting views might have contributed to a more complicated implementation of the standards than the architects had in mind as we will see below. The inclination to view writing from a dialogic standpoint may not have made for the best fit with the more formalist aspects of the standards.

Writing Instruction

Teachers' views about writing instruction inform how they respond to the alleged shift in "current practice" (corestandards.org, 2016). Traditionally, English teachers have focused on reading literature in various genres with a literary analysis essay as a culminating activity. For these essays, there is typically an emphasis on a clear thesis statement supported by evidence taken from the work under examination. The use of literary analysis essays has been a widespread practice among English teachers for many years.(Applebee, 1977; Hillocks, 1986) The description of a "shift" to argumentative writing was found in a document produced by the Common Core State Standards Initiative: "The standards' focus on evidence-based writing along with the ability to inform and persuade is a significant shift from current practice" (corestandards.org, 2016). For the English teachers in this study, their current practice was in line with the focus on evidence-based argumentative writing; therefore, they did not perceive a "shift" in emphasis in terms of writing. Jersey made this point clear.

I think that ELA was not broken. I feel like ELA was already doing common core, but the people, the powers that be, all this is such a sweeping change so that we have to make sweeping changes. If they would have really looked into classrooms to see what was happening in English they would've recognize that it was already at work. There wasn't a need for everything that was happening.

The "shift" as perceived by these teachers was in the addition of new material in the curriculum. Lola describes the dilemma she felt caught in.

We haven't built into the curriculum anytime for instruction. We're doing a lot, but I don't feel like it's instructive. I feel like it's all about the big picture of the end. We don't have enough time, it's like let's do this but we really need weeks of writing instruction at every grade level. Every single grade level. And I don't think it's there.

Again, the focus on argumentative writing was not necessarily a shift for the English teachers; however, the inclusion of additional material in the curriculum, particularly non-fiction reading, seemed to impact the amount of writing instruction that took place.

Writing a clear and appropriate thesis statement was a priority to all of the English teachers. They also emphasized the need to use textual evidence. The focus on literary analysis in the department was established when the school first opened, and the English teachers were all in agreement that it was a priority in their writing instruction. In some ways this focus on literary analysis essays privileged a formalists view in the sense that teachers focused their instruction on the form, in this case the five-paragraph essay

(Applebee, 1977; Hillocks, 1986; Johnson et al, 2004). However, it can also be said that the teachers' use of a template to help students develop and structure ideas went beyond a strict formalism. These competing conceptions of writing instruction can be detected in the use of two writing programs at GVHS.

Despite the belief that “we have no writing program” expressed by the Director of Curriculum and the TOAs in the district office, there were two writing programs in use by the English teachers at Green Valley High School: the Jane Schaffer method and the Expository Reading and Writing Course developed by the California State University. The Jane Schaffer method is a scaffolded approach to literary analysis that provides students with a template for the contents of their essays. The basic outline includes an order of sentences for the body paragraphs in an essay: a topic sentence, followed by concrete details with commentary on each concrete detail and a closing sentence. Though this method can be applied to argumentative essays that do not involve literary analysis, it was used almost exclusively in conjunction with responding to literature in the Orange Grove USD. This method was implemented district-wide approximately eight years ago and nearly all of the teachers had received training and were using it in their writing instruction. Even when this method was officially set aside, the vocabulary inherent to the method remained intact. Nancy, a veteran teacher, expressed a similar belief that using this method was fundamental to good writing instruction. Note her remark, “It’s the basis of good writing.” The English teachers clearly saw the value in this kind of scaffolding method in their writing instruction as it was familiar to all, and appeared to be the basis of their writing instruction.

While some teachers recognized the Jane Schafer program as possessing inherently valuable features to teach writing, others felt it was unnatural. Buffy, who was a journalist prior to her teaching career, expressed reservations about the scripted and stilted quality of the writing produced using this method.

I was not English major. I was actually a journalist before I started teaching so my background is in writing. And expository writing at that, you know factual and reporting style writing, so I come at this from a different place because I know how to write, but it's harder for me to communicate to the kids in terms of how to teach them how to write. Because the way that we've been teaching them with Jane Schafer or whatever, is not how I would write. Just on my own. So I've struggled with that.

In a subsequent interview, Buffy reiterated her discomfort with the Jane Schaffer method.

The other thing for me to is that you talk about writing programs... You know I went through the Jane Schafer thing too at the other high school when I was there, and so I have a hard time too because I am a writer.

Despite Buffy's displeasure with the Jane Schaffer method, she still employed it as a part of her writing instruction. Buffy's conflict with teaching a template verses a more organic way of writing reflects what many of the teachers felt. Using a template or structured program is practical in a classroom with 35 to 40 students, but, as Buffy suggested, it is not how expert or professional writers necessarily write.

In addition to the Jane Schaffer method, the English teachers employed modules from the ERWC program. As mentioned previously, the ERWC program is organized in modules that pair expository reading assignments with argumentative writing. This was developed prior to the CCSS, but is now marketed as aligned with CCSS. Each module has a template for constructing an argument. This shares similar epistemological stances with the Jane Schaffer method in that both formalist and structuralist elements are present.

The English teachers believed there was some value in the course, but suggested that the way it was used by some department members was less than beneficial to students. Nancy observed that the tension between maintaining instruction in literary analysis while trying to add in non-fiction pieces motivated teachers to pick and choose parts of the modules to suit their desires. She believed this diluted the course to the point that teachers were simply providing students with worksheets instead of cohesive writing instruction.

They also chose to try to keep the major [literary] works in and then lose time in the modules. And so the course itself, and I think the goal of Cal State, that the course stands alone based solely upon the novels, I mean . . . the modules. And the 12th grade teachers just said forget it. Well and they kept literature and so then what's happening is you got really... It depends on the integrity of the teacher. Some teachers are trying to really make it all happen, while other teachers are

passively giving them a packet and saying do this. And the entire intention of the module process is diminished.

While Nancy was an early proponent of the ERWC, she believed it had been adversely affected by the overcrowding of the curriculum brought on by the CCSS mentioned above. ERWC was designed to provide consistency in the curriculum, but at GVHS it devolved into a packet-driven practice for many teachers which Nancy felt was not ideal for writing instruction. Here we see that Nancy valued ideas over form and was disappointed in the formalist elements in the way the ERWC program was used by some of the teachers.

Both the Jane Schaffer method and the ERWC were writing programs that drove the writing instruction at GVHS. Because they generally emphasized evidence-based analysis, the programs were aligned to what the English teachers believed about writing instruction, even they were still formulaic programs.

In an interesting comment near the end of our first discussion, Buffy made an important point that was also shared by the District Office focus group. “It doesn’t matter how great the common core standards are, the bottom line is when we purchased the SBAC (now CASPP), that’s what we’re teaching for.” This was just what Kam, Selena, and Brad suggested was the driving force behind their attempts to develop curriculum. Nancy enthusiastically chimed in with her agreement.

Oh my goodness I’m so glad that came out. I have even thought about that. It [SBAC] is driving everything we do. It’s so absurd. It’s an absurd concept: one

company's idea. And so we thought okay we will look at this because they're telling us now our common assessments will all come from the same company. And our district exam will come from the same company so at least the common assessments will be matching, and training ground for the test were teaching to. But then they didn't come through so we're still piecemeal in common assessments that are absurd. So there's zero...coherence in the common assessments and the standards.

Nancy's appraisal of the impact of the state-wide assessment was important because it brought to the surface the bind the teachers perceived themselves to be in. They were doing their best to teach writing in what they believed were the best possible ways, only to be confronted with a high stakes test that might not have been aligned to their thinking about writing. The idea that a single company would be in a position to direct the contents of curriculum in the Orange Grove USD was taken as an affront to the expertise of the English teachers. One of the reasons some of the teachers were less invested in teaching to the assessment was the fact that the district still used benchmark tests that were developed for the NCLB tests. This was what they felt was "absurd." The benchmark tests were multiple-choice and were far removed from anything students would be expected to do on the new assessments. They also perceived at the time of the study (rightly so, as it turns out) that the test would ultimately change in the next few years. Nancy's comment revealed the crux of the mismatch between the goals of the district office, the goals of the CCSS and the English teachers who have to live with the "shifts" in their curriculum.

Much like Kam and the TOAs at the district office, the English teachers' personal, mostly dialogic, views of the nature of writing seemed to give way to practices that tended to be structuralist and formalist. The writing instruction was based on pre-packaged writing programs that used templates that privileged forms over ideas, and conventional correctness over voice or student agency in dialogue with an audience. Their views of writing in the abstract seemed to be superseded by the practical matters of writing instruction and assessment.

CCSS

Of all of the participants, the English teachers offered the strongest critique of the CCSS. Averaging 15 years in the field, they felt that they were being forced to “fix something that wasn’t broken.” Diane in particular (interviewed separately), held negative beliefs about the CCSS and was consequently the most resistant to the changes she was expected to make. I found two themes to be prominent in my analysis of the interview data of the English teachers: 1) the existence of a mismatch between what the English teachers believed about the CCSS and the beliefs of the district office administrators; and 2) the English teachers believed the curriculum had become overcrowded as a result of the CCSS.

Mismatches – “There is no ‘we’.”

The English teachers strongly expressed beliefs about the difference in how they understood the CCSS and how the district office personnel understood it. Lola described these differences: “I think that’s another issue. There was a divide between what teachers felt needed to happen and what people outside the classroom felt needed to happen.” Collectively, the English teachers felt that the DO (district office) people were condescending and insensitive to teachers.

. . . everybody’s trying. I think a really good leader, you know, someone at the top understands that he or she does not know everything. Understands his or her limitations, even given the very high hoity- toity position and truly seeks the advice of somebody who does know. And that’s really what I don’t think they... They condescend to acknowledge.”

The apparent hierarchical structure of decisions about the CCSS was an issue for these teachers. They felt that they were not genuinely consulted about the best possible way to begin implementation, and were being forced to make changes to the curriculum that did not make sense to them. Though Nancy was included in the process of developing new curriculum, they felt their recommendations were ignored. Nancy explained succinctly how many of the English teachers felt about the implementation process.

Everything that I feel is stemming from the overcrowding (of the curriculum) because of this perception of common core or misconception of the common core from the top down. It is just ironic that the people calling the shots, maybe this is

just the way it always is, that the people calling the shots have the least understanding what really goes on in the classroom. Then to form expert groups and have the expert groups be full of professional expert opinionated teachers who are passionate give an assessment of the situation and have them completely ignored is so unbelievably frustrating. And so there is a divide now and it's just them and us. There's no we.

Nancy's last comment, "There is no we" struck me as an encapsulation of the apparently universal belief among the English teachers in the study. The teachers felt that their expertise was not recognized or called upon to help implement the new standards. There was an apparent lack of consideration of the curriculum which had been in place and the attendant changes that arose through the latest reform. The need for reform was not shared by the English teachers, and therefore, they were resistant.

In addition to a perceived mismatch with the district office personnel, the English teachers felt that forces beyond the district were responsible for some of the negative features of the CCSS. Jersey indicated an awareness of the larger context of the state office of education and its influence on the district.

To add to that, you're talking about from the top, I think a larger problem stems from the fact that we have a government entity forcing all this. Again that's how it's been since I started teaching is more and more that the government people who know nothing about... Because you have the government tell you, this is

how you're supposed to teach your kids. And this is what they're supposed to know. And then it just filters down and it gets more...

They felt that the district was, understandably, responding to the state office of education which was foisting changes on to educators. While the DO personnel accepted the task of implementing the CCSS apparently with little resistance, the English teachers felt they were forced to change their curriculum despite their concerns with the new standards. Jersey brought up this concern in our first focus group meeting.

That's a really important point because I think that ELA was not broken. I feel like ELA was already doing Common Core, but the people, the powers that be, all this is such a sweeping change so that we have to make sweeping changes. If they would have really looked into classrooms to see what was happening in English they would've recognize that it was already at work. There wasn't a need for everything that was happening. And then we might have time to focus more on a writing program across the board. And things of that nature that would really help to progress the idea of Common Core and the writing aspect of it. But instead we're having to change, and we're changing it in the wrong direction. It wasn't broken to begin with.

Jersey's objection to the imposition of changes to the curriculum was shared by all of the teachers in the focus group. There was agreement that the CCSS was a repackaging of old ideas, similar to what Allison, the assistant principal, was saying about "going back" to a style of teaching from a previous era.

Another area of mismatch between the DO personnel and the English teachers was reflected by Buffy.

In the planning of the curriculum they want everything to be in sync. They want everyone doing the same thing at the same time and... Everything... It seems like however, and it might be the interpretation of common core, the creativity is being taken out of what we do it instead it's been replaced with very strict guidelines that in my eyes are half right and half wrong.

Jersey expressed similar feelings about the scripted nature of the curriculum.

It's very scripted. Being on the committee that is writing, that is helping to write that curriculum. I feel like I don't want my name on half of it because it's so scripted. And when we went in there, we went in there with the idea that we could make it less, and that would afford teachers more creativity but instead it stripped them of a piece of it.

This belief that the curriculum was becoming more prescribed due to the CCSS was based on their experience on "expert committees" and the recent implementation of the Expository Reading and Writing Course (ERWC). Because ERWC and the CCSS arrived at roughly the same time, the English teachers considered them part of the same movement toward a scripted curriculum. Lola summed up what was expressed by several teachers succinctly: "I think . . . there is a huge divide between what teachers feel needs to happen and what people outside the classroom feel needs to happen." Interestingly, this perception of the movement toward a more scripted curriculum contradicted the

efforts of the school administrators who expressed the belief that the curriculum should be collaboratively built.

Overcrowded Curriculum

In addition to the mismatch in beliefs about the CCSS, the English teachers felt that one effect of the CCSS was to “overcrowd” the curriculum. They believed that the inclusion of the close reading of non-fiction selections took time away from writing instruction. Nancy suggested that “I would like to make a distinction. It is harder now with the common core to teach writing.” This was echoed by Buffy who talked about a specific effect on writing instruction pointed out earlier: limited time for rewriting. What the teachers believed about the overcrowding of the curriculum forced them to select which works they would include and which they will discard from their syllabi. This was done to maintain the amount of writing instruction they believed was vital in the curriculum. Nancy’s comment about this dilemma illustrated the tension the English teachers felt between the expectations of the DO and their own beliefs about what was important to include in the curriculum. “I agree, some of us have made decisions too, because we feel writing is so important to pick and choose from the overwhelmingly crowded curriculum.”

Not only did the teachers believe that the overcrowded curriculum affected the amount of time for writing instruction, they also believed that it forced them to forego the kind of remediation that they would typically have time for prior to the CCSS. Though the CCSS was portrayed as a “spiraled” curriculum where discrete skills build upon each

other over time (corestandards.org, 2016), the teachers viewed this with skepticism.

Buffy's statement illustrated the kind of doubt expressed by the teachers.

I feel like there's no time for writing instruction. They expect because the common core builds and they're supposed to already know certain things, they don't give us time. This is partially our district's fault in the way that we're implementing it. We haven't built into the curriculum anytime for instruction. We're doing a lot, but I don't feel like it's instructive. I feel like it's all about the big picture of the end. We don't have enough time, it's like let's do this but we really need weeks of writing instruction at every grade level. Every single grade level. And I don't think it's there.

Buffy's statement illustrated the tension between how the DO was implementing the CCSS as well as the teachers' belief that remediation of writing instruction was being replaced by time spent on non-fiction close reading. In light of their belief that time for writing instruction was diminished as the CCSS was implemented, the English teachers were not generally supportive of the district's implementation of the CCSS.

The CCSS reformers apparently did not account for the level of resistance to the new standards brought on by a belief that the curriculum was fine as it was. The English teachers, some of whom were veterans with many years of experience, felt that their expertise was not being employed in the decision-making process, and therefore were not enthusiastic about making changes to the curriculum. What the English teachers held sacred in the curriculum (literary analysis essays, fiction reading, and grammar

instruction) was threatened by the new standards and by the interpretation of the standards by the district office personnel. For example, the district office personnel called for a change in the amount of non-fiction reading in response to the CCSS recommendation that the ratio of fiction to non-fiction be shifted to 70% fiction and 30% non-fiction. The attempt to implement this part of the standards created tension between the English teachers and the district office because the English teachers felt that writing instruction was being reduced in favor of more non-fiction reading. For the English teachers in the study, the CCSS-WS were problematic because the standards threatened their “bread and butter” in the curriculum, which created a mismatch of interpretations about whether and how to implement them.

English Teacher - Diana

Nature of Writing

Diana Walker held strong opinions about writing instruction and the new standards, but did not address the nature of writing directly in our interviews. Like Kam at the district office, when I asked her how she defined “good writing,” she discussed her experience in high school. She had a very strict and demanding English teacher whom she credited with making her not only a good writer, but a good teacher as well. After describing the demands of reading literature, Diana portrayed her high school teacher’s writing instruction.

And then when we would write her essays. It was a lot of ‘So what?’ Those are the kind of comments she made, she would always do the regular editing marks but the big ones were “This doesn’t make sense” or “How does this relate to your

thesis?” Things like that. And she would always give us a chance for revision.

And I can remember thinking when I got to college that it was easy. She was the hardest teacher I’ve had and my writing, I don’t think it was any better than when I left her class. She just made you keep trying and keep trying, as she pushed you and pushed you and pushed you, and there was a big emphasis on a thesis and forecasting, making sure your thesis covered everything. And the emphasis was on if it was in the correct order. So she was doing a lot of the Jane Schafer things in her own way. You know the topic sentence and the evidence in the explanation and analysis.

Embedded in these comments were at least two epistemologies that inform the instruction Diana describes: structuralism and formalism. The fact that the teacher’s comments focused mainly on the ideas in the essay, prompting reflection on the legitimacy of the argument, and the fact that the teacher offered opportunities for revision, revealed a structuralist understanding of writing by foregrounding ideas over form or dialogue. At the same time, though, there was evidence that the teacher promoted a single approach to structuring an argument “in the correct order,” suggesting a lurking formalism.

The fact that Diana provided me with this rather detailed description of her training, and did so fervently, led me to assume she subscribed to the same beliefs in her own writing instruction. Her experience in high school seemed foundational to her view of the nature of writing, and it shed light on the ideas that informed her writing instruction. Coupled with her focus on the correction of conventional errors discussed

below, the same kind of juggling of simultaneous views that we saw in Kam and the school site administrators seemed to characterize Diana's beliefs about the nature of writing.

Writing Instruction

In many ways Diana's views of writing instruction mirrored the CCSS-WS. She privileged argumentative writing over other genres (though the arguments were in the form of literary analysis), employed strict templates with students and focused on conventional correctness, all of which were characteristic of a formalist epistemology.

Though Diana had developed a unique method for assessing her students' writing, her focus was on literary analysis and a modified version of the Jane Schaffer method.

I think they (other teachers in the department) let go of it, just because of the reaction to Jane Schafer. The kids when they would hear that they would just shut down. They didn't like it which it is stupid because if you've seen, you know, how she does it. I don't care what you call it, she has a great way of organizing it for the most part. I still actually use that system. So I think that was something I thought the other school . . . I'm kind of glad that we are adapting a system that they will push that for all schools.

Diana's opening phrase suggested that she operated without much coordination with the other teachers in the department. As detailed above, many (not all) of the teachers in the focus group continued to use at least the vocabulary of the Jane Schaffer method at the

time of the study. Both her continued use of the Jane Schaffer template and her endorsement of a district-wide use of this program revealed her formalist leanings: a single approach to developing a piece of writing. For Diana, teaching the form of argumentative writing seemed to take precedent over a focus on ideas or work in varied genres.

Further evidence of Diana's focus on argumentative writing can be found in her statement,

I like the argumentative to persuasive... My personal favorite is literary analysis because that's my bread-and-butter in knowledge; you know, read something and then write about it. Which is argumentative in some ways. You have to prove the thesis.

She indicated that this was a department-wide practice, which was confirmed in the English focus group, and which was also suggested by the development of a department rubric.

There is always a push and a hope that they're focusing on a thesis, and that they're following through with, you know, how it's organized, the body paragraphs. I think for the most part the teachers are really trying to follow that kind of thing. We do have a school-wide rubric and a department rubric that we are encouraged to use.

Like Diana, most of the teachers talked about writing instruction in terms of literary analysis and research. However, Diana set herself apart by describing her emphasis on shorter, more frequent writing with an emphasis on sentence construction. She believed that the practice of assigning four extended writing pieces over the course of a year was not as beneficial to students as shorter, more concentrated assignments.

I also have been doing a lot less of big papers and more just paragraphs. Just because they, I don't like the idea of them doing four big papers a year and they're supposed to grow and change. Because they can't remember the last one they wrote. So my kids do a lot of paragraphs and then I use the Jane Schaffer terminology in that chunk and they'll do two chunks or three chunks, things like that.

Her writing instruction was included a method of sentence analysis that she developed independently of the other department members. She assigned a grade for each sentence in terms of its function in the Jane Schaffer method. Diana broke down student writing sentence by sentence to ensure that students understood the vocabulary of Jane Schaffer's method of literary analysis. This was unique to her as the other teachers followed the Jane Schaffer method (though somewhat modified by some) more strictly. The following exchange from our second interview explained the details of her method.

Diana - A couple of years ago I came up with... I started using CD and CEM, the Jane Schafer writing system. And now I grade my kids sentence by sentence and I give them a score of 1to5 on every sentence. And I have just fallen in love with

this. . . . Now when I grade it on a one through five, and I always talk about what is 1,2, 3,4,5, and now I grade them sentence by sentence, and now when I return it to them, they can see why they got the score and then they can look at the sentence that they got low scores on and then I give an opportunity to revise that. But they only have to revise the sentences they want to.

I have them separate their sentences and label them. And this is something that all of the other English teachers and I don't agree on, but I want them to be able to prove to me that they know what the fact is versus what's analysis.

So I'm having them basically show me and prove to me that they know what a claim is and that they know what a fact is, and that they know what a... And I always talk to them about how long the analysis should be, it should be longer than your fact. I don't want to read the story again so don't give me huge quote and then don't analyze it. So what I do it it just goes really quickly and then I add up the points and that's her score.

PI - And they have specific types of sentences or do they come up with the vocabulary to describe their sentences or do you give them a list of... This is a claim this is a fact this is analysis.

Diana -usually at the very beginning... Yes. It's TS [topic sentence] CD CM's and I always change the order of it depending on what kind of task I'm asking them to do, so if it's a research paper there will be more analysis. CD is concrete detail, CM is commentary. So it's either explaining quote or analyzing it.

PI-so you adapted the language or vocabulary of Jane Schafer to it.

Diana-yes these are the exact terms she a uses, I just sometimes move the variation around, more CDs if it's a persuasive paper they'll be more CM's...They're going to catch themselves more often, the goal remember what their last mistake was and not do it as much. I get to see the growth of it a lot more than just, 'Hey it's been four months since we did our last essay, let's do another one.'

The extreme focus on conventional correctness and the use of specific concrete details and commentary without regard for other rhetorical moves seemed to be grounded in formalism. Diana's foregrounding formalism was consistent with the way the CCSS-WS is assessed, though there isn't any evidence that she was somehow influenced by the SBAC (or CAASPP). Her approach appeared to have grown from her experiences as a high school student and subsequent experiences in the classroom.

In addition to the short writing assignments explained above, Diana also included modules from the ERWC program that were focused on research as part of her writing instruction. She had some pointed criticism of the ERWC program in general, which provided further evidence of the mismatch with the district office personnel's view of writing curriculum discussed above. The following exchange took place during our first interview.

Diana -We do have a big research paper, we have synthesis paper. They get a bunch of different articles and they have to read them all and they have to include those into their paper. And that's a part of the ERWC.

PI-do you use that? They use it for 10th and 11th?

Diana-they use it for 9,10 and 11. For the lower grades we use one module for each grade level. And then when you get to 12th grade it's the 8 module curriculum. I think a lot of the curriculum is just fluff and stupid. The packets are huge and it's repetitive. I look at the packet and all the different activities that go along with it and then I just pull out the ones that are relevant. And I will give them any questions that cover pretty much everything.-ERWC is not realistic because they have a an entire activity where we are supposed to look at the title, and make all these assumptions which you should you know, when you're going to talk about if it's in Time magazine or if it's in USA Today it does matter but you don't need an entire activity for that with 14 questions to go along with it. Also I think a lot of times it's misused and get teachers that just treated like a packet and go, here I want you to do packet 1,2 and 3,and they don't teach anything. It is formulaic and I think that's what the district like it because it's all laid out. The problem I see happening is you've got teachers that just hand out the packets, 'Here I want to you do 1,2 and 3 today, and 4, 5 and 6 tomorrow,' and they're not grading them.

With very specific criticism, Diana's comments reflected in greater detail what the English focus group teachers said about the ERWC program. Teachers like Diana appeared to pick and choose relevant elements of the lesson they didn't find "fluffy or stupid." Even though the ERWC program was developed prior to the CCSS-WS, districts like Orange Grove Unified used it as a method to prepare students for the SBAC because they felt it was aligned with the standards. However, as Diana made clear, the program was not necessarily used as it was intended. It was not clear whether Diana would include ERWC in her curriculum if it were not mandated by the district.

Another part of the curriculum Diana used in conjunction with the rest of the English department and the two other high schools in the district was a common research paper. All of the freshmen students in the district were assigned a research activity on the same topic. The students didn't actually research the topic. The sources were provided by the district so the students could learn to cite them properly. Our conversation below reveals how the assignment was structured.

Diana-yes. And this year it's even different we kind of decided when I was in the expert group for the ninth grade, it's not so much about them finding the sources, we're teaching them how to cite them and how to use them properly. So we ended up... And also we are having problems with plagiarism too.... So we ended up picking up a bunch of different sources for them, me Selena and Brad. We picked the sources for them and they just use those to . . . to write the paper.

PI-so they don't have to do the actual research for the paper?

Diana-Not yet. The focus is on how to cite things. The next year is how to evaluate sources, it's supposed to progress through the grades.

The focus was not on the generation of ideas or the process of developing them, and this assignment certainly was decontextualized and did not account for audience, tone, or purpose. Interestingly, Diana was a part of the development of this assignment for the district with the TOAs in the district office focus group. Her participation in the development of this part of the curriculum suggested that in this case the district office and some of the teachers were working in concert prior to the development of the CCSS-WS, but with the onset of the implementation of the new standards, tension arose over how they would impact the curriculum.

Diana's view of writing instruction seemed to be traditional in the sense that she favored literary analysis essays over other genres of writing, she valued direct instruction in grammar and conventions, and she required at least a certain amount of research. There was little evidence that Diana was influenced by a dialogic epistemology as most of her thinking about writing instruction reflected formalist approaches. This was particularly clear in her sentence by sentence correction of literary analysis vocabulary in students' writing, not to mention her disappointment that the new standards overlooked direct instruction in grammar. Though Diana was critical of the new standards, her writing instruction was aligned with the CCSS more than any of the other English teachers.

CCSS

When our conversation turned to the CCSS-WS, Diana was very animated and provided long and detailed responses to my questions. On the surface, she would seem to have been an advocate for the standards and the SBAC given her apparent grounding in formalist thinking. However, she was quite critical of the standards and was defensive in her approach to their implementation (McHenry, 2016). She did not feel there was much of a “shift” in curricular emphasis, and felt that she had been approaching writing instruction in a manner that was aligned with the standards.

I don't know, I think a lot of common core and the emphasis on text dependent questions and writing down your answers is thought provoking... I think we've been addressing that in English as long as I've been a teacher. You know, and they keep saying trust me it's brand-new. No it's not brand-new. I've been doing it my entire career. Close reading. I think I know that districts are different but you know this is supposed to be scope and sequence, were all supposed to follow that. I don't know how closely. I don't think that's true in all districts where they had little bit more freedom. A lot of it has to do with how many people are following that, that's kind the of thing were seeing, now people are just saying, 'I'm done with this I'm going to do what I want.' But most of the things that we have, that I've done I've always adapted it to what is in my scope and sequence. It's always been close reading, it's always been provide evidence to support your claim in your opinion. So that really hasn't changed my life.

In Diana's response I heard a common refrain from teachers in this school about the latest reform: "Same curriculum, different package." Diana's response echoed Allison, the vice principal, and other teachers in the English focus group. As far as they were concerned, there was little that was new in the CCSS-WS. However, one change they recognized was that the SBAC was driving the focus of the curriculum. This was mentioned by Kam, the district director of curriculum and by Buffy in the English focus group. Based on her buoyant response below, Diana was equally critical of the assessment

Who's in charge of this? I had a conversation with the rest of the English department about... We, you know, the SBAC that is out now. It's produced by a company and they came up with the idea of what we should do and so they're sending out all this material, but basically it's all driven . . . this huge change is driven by this company the government decided 'OH like which ideas are best?' We found they haven't been able to deliver a lot. Our district was supposed to have this huge test bank of common core type questions at the beginning of the year.

Diana and others recognize that what is tested is emphasized in the curriculum. At the time of the study, there were only vague materials and rumors about the nature of the SBAC. This left Diana and other teachers to prepare students based on the standards, even though some of those standards would not be tested.

Another concern for Diana that was raised by the English focus group was the overcrowding of the curriculum which diminished the time teachers had to focus on writing instruction. Diana provided an impassioned response that revealed why teachers

felt overwhelmed by new curriculum demands for the inclusion of non-fiction reading.

You know you think about with us we need things, we want some sort of logical organization of material. I think universally everyone, 11th grade which is a American Lit. it's chronological. And then in some districts it's European Lit or world lit, and that to some extent is chronological and that makes sense. Ninth graders usually have survey but now we get Common Core which is more non-fiction fiction so it's not a survey. It's non fiction, nonfiction, nonfiction, oh drama, then it is nonfiction, nonfiction, nonfiction, oh a novel and there is no poetry at all. It is all gone. So they do a lot of research... You know, God bless them, you know their (the district curriculum director and the TOAs) hearts are into it, but I think a lot of times, I don't know if they're told to do it or they just take it upon themselves, they do a lot of the work and they present it, and what we're finding right now is that we don't agree with what they have. But then it comes up as, "Well we did all this work for you do you want us to do it over again." And so we get kind of guilted it into accepting it. And we haven't been doing it. We've been basically fighting against it and some feelings have been hurt.

Diana gave voice here to several issues raised by the English focus group. It was clear that there was pressure to include non-fiction in the curriculum at the expense of other genres (Diana mentions poetry and novels) and other pieces in the curriculum, particularly writing instruction. While she seemed to recognize that Kam and the TOAs

were doing their best to implement the new standards (“You know, God bless them”), Diana’s disappointment with the emphasis on non-fiction was clear. Secondly, she felt that the process of developing the curriculum was flawed in the sense that decisions were guided by the amount of work put in by the district office personnel versus the quality of the curriculum. Ultimately for Diana, the CCSS in general and the process of implementing them within the Orange Grove district was problematic.

Diana also addressed the issue of whether the district employs a writing “plan” or not. Though she still used the Jane Schaffer method without naming it as such, she claimed that the district did not have a writing plan to contend with the new writing standards. In the following exchange she pointed to the ERWC program and the scope and sequence of the overall curriculum that was in the early stages of development as evidence that there really wasn’t a writing plan for the district. Interestingly, she did not mention the “clarity, concision and precision,” terminology which the TOAs used to describe their writing program.

Aside from the ERWC, they don’t have an emphasis on writing. They have performance tasks written into the scope and sequence, but they’re very vague. There’s no rubric provided yet, I think it’s just a matter of we haven’t had a chance to, we’ve been . . . we had one day to write a whole semester of lesson plans. Not even lesson plans, it is just what they’re supposed to write. It hasn’t been perfected yet.

At the time of this study, Diana observed that a district plan for writing was in its seminal stages and that there had been a lack of time to hammer out the details of such a plan. Though Diana and the district office focus group both privileged a formalist epistemology which seemed to parallel the assessment mechanism for the CCSS-WS, obstacles such as a lack of time and disagreements about which standards to emphasize prevented them from working in concert to prepare a writing curriculum.

Further evidence of Diana's formalist view can be seen in her lamenting the absence of a sufficient number of standards related to grammar. Recalling her method of writing instruction where she graded student writing sentence by sentence, it was not surprising that she would look for the same emphasis on grammar and syntax in the standards.

I've also noticed that they don't even address grammar. The only thing that they have the in 9th and 10th grade standards is adjectival and adverbial phrases, which... When you approach it with those terms, the kids bombed those test questions. They're fine with prepositional phrases, but when you go with this terminology, they bomb it. Ninth graders, if you're going to just do a regular class, they still need subject-verb agreement. They need that kind of stuff, and it's not in the standards . . . it's gone. So I'm worried about that because of it's not being tested, they're going to be teachers that completely ignore it, and so I already

have problems with incoming ninth graders not knowing whatever it is. I can't imagine what it's going to be like in 10 years when it was...

The fear expressed in these remarks suggested that conventional correctness and knowledge of grammar was a central focus of Diana's writing instruction. Also her use of templates for literary analysis writing reflected her apparent belief that form in writing supersedes the development of ideas or the social context in which writing functions.

Mismatch with DO

Many of the same issues raised by the English focus group were brought up by Diana in both of our interviews. She talked about the tension created by the district office's call for including more non-fiction in the curriculum and the desire by the teachers to maintain the literature they loved, while at the same time maintaining room in the curriculum for writing instruction. As mentioned briefly above, Diana recognized a problematic dynamic between the TOAs and the English teachers with regard to how decisions were made to move forward with curriculum planning. The TOAs invested a great deal of time on developing materials for the teachers; however, when the teachers objected to the material, it was put in place anyway.

They just keep wanting to shove in nonfiction and because we don't want to let go of the novels and the short stories, basically the compromise was to just add the nonfiction to the fiction which . . . you can imagine what are schedules are like. When you're supposed to do the novel, it always takes five weeks already and now you have to do six news articles with all the activities to go along with that.

That's a lot. A lot of it I know for the 10th grade, they're unhappy with the selections. The pieces they've chosen.

PI-so the selections don't come from the English teachers they come from...

Selena and Brad?

Ideally it was supposed to be from the expert committee with all the English teachers who have taught for a while. What it's turned into is because the TOAs have a lot of time to do this and we don't, they help us out by finding all this material and providing it for us, except that were not happy with it.

PI-so they... Spent a lot of time developing all this, and you guys say this is not going to work. Is that right? And they say, 'But we did all this work'?

Diana-yeah . . . 'are you really going to undo all of our work?' and they are more aware of the standards. I think a lot of it is teachers say, oh yeah I know all the standards. You don't. There RIs [Reading for Information]. It's this thing, it's almost the same, as important as the RLs [Reading Literature] but now you've got the nonfiction. They're looking at it from that perspective and they need to find a way to address this one and this one, and I agree with that. But what ends up happening is you get this hodgepodge of, 'Oh let's throw this article in because it addresses that one standard' and it makes no sense. And teachers need, we need themes, we need units that make sense. What they do is they just shove all this together, well just because human beings are happy, that's the unit. And it has absolutely no, ... it makes no sense at all. And that's why we are fighting.

Diana went into detail about the conflict that was mentioned by the English focus group and explained why the decisions by the TOAs did not make sense to the teachers.

Consistent with the English focus group, Diana felt that though she and other teachers were invited into the process of developing curriculum, their input was dismissed by the TOAs. She also felt that the curriculum designed by the TOAs lacked cohesion, or to use her phrase was a “hodgepodge” of decontextualized articles that loosely fit together in an overgeneralized theme.

It’s a great idea but then they don’t seem to realize how much time it will take for us to actually follow through with that. The same thing is happening with the curriculum, you know, we wanted to keep our literature and we were fighting to get, you know not get rid of all of the literature, so all they’ve done is added nonfiction. Now instead of this, some of us going more in depth, which is the whole idea behind it. We’re either rushing through the literature and doing a worse job than before so that we can fit in all of the nonfiction or we’re kind of ignoring all of the nonfiction and sticking to what we wanted to. I think a lot of teachers are just stressed and we see that the opposite is happening. Instead of us going more in depth, and cutting out stuff, more stuff is being shoved into the curriculum.

Much of what Diana identified as problematic in the implementation process overlapped with the mismatch discussed with the English teachers in the focus group. The TOAs and Kam were understandably attempting to meet the demands of the state, but appeared to

lack a deep understanding of how the English teachers were responding to the proposed changes in the curriculum. The priorities of the English teachers were not in line with the priorities (for the most part, established by the state and handed down by the TOAs and curriculum director) of the district office personnel. The conflict of priorities seemed to be the source of the most tension related to the implementation of the CCSS in general, and the writing standards in particular.

Perhaps the most interesting element of my conversations with Diana was that her views of writing and writing instruction seemed to line up nicely with the CCSS-WS; however, she was quite critical of the contents of the standards and their implementation. She also seemed to share the belief with the other English teachers that their curriculum was not in need of reform. Diana did not appear to be concerned with incorporating the standards into the established curriculum, and she wasn't taking steps to necessarily learn about the new standards. Much like the other English teachers, Diana was forging ahead with her teaching and gave little attention to the CCSS-WS.

Math Focus Group

While the English teachers were the most critical of the new standards, in contrast the math teachers seemed to be energized by the prospect of including writing in their curriculum. There was still some mismatch between the teachers and the district administration's interpretation of the standards, but overall the teachers in this study embraced the shift to including more writing in their instruction.

The Nature of Writing

Much can be inferred from our interviews about the ideas that governed the math teachers' thinking about writing and their views on the nature of writing that was situated in a high school math class. As has been the case with the other participants in the study, the math teachers revealed the presence of three overlapping views on the nature of writing. The conversations addressed a variety of issues, including the relationship between talk and composing, the use of writing to clarify thinking, and the influence of writing on the affective domain.

The following exchange found Mark advocating for the use of talk prior to students composing. He showed an awareness of the dialogic nature of the composing process and the kind of co-authoring that teachers often engage in with students as they prepare to write (Prior, 2004). Molly responded by couching similar preparatory talk in her class as "conversations about problem solving."

Mark-although for math, am I wrong in thinking that if we are really going to work on writing that we have to start with instructional conversation, talking out loud, teaching them how to answer out loud and then eventually will transfer to being able to write it down? If we start on paper I don't know if they will be able to think... I don't know.

Molly-well that's what we've been doing in math one. Having a conversation about problem solving...

Mark-that's what I'm saying, I think were already doing it with a lot of the different questioning strategies we have...

It was interesting that these teachers discovered it was a natural step to move from talk in the classroom to inscribing text. They seemed to instinctively connect the talk in the classroom to the act of explaining something and composing which may, in part, have accounted for their affinity for the shift to an emphasis on writing initiated by the CCSS. This sense that talk and co-authorship were part of the composing process implied that Mark and Molly, at least at some level, viewed writing as a dialogue.

There was also some discussion of what "writing in math" actually meant. Eunice expressed some fear that she would have to teach students how to write an essay. She was quickly rejoined by Mark, Molly and Eunice who suggested that the kind of writing they were expected to assign was not a "stupid paper," but writing as a way for students to provide evidence of their thinking processes.

Eunice-it's going to take a few years. I mean it could take a few years for the kids to adjust and for us. And I don't know if that's what it will look like in a few years. I know I don't want to have to teach them how to do a stupid paper.

Mark-I don't view the writing and math in that way.

Molly-I don't either.

Eunice-I don't think that's the even goal of it...

Mark-and if it is, it's not going to be in my class. (Laughs)

Molly- I think the writing component in math is more of our understanding of what you just did. Can you explain? Not write an essay on how to solve.

Tiana-I think students have to defend their answers more, and make sure that makes sense. Hopefully, and hopefully relate to the context

Mark-I don't see it as an English assignment, like in a traditional English class, I see writing as more teach them how to think about a problem.

This exchange emphasized the generation of ideas by students. Learning how to think about a problem and express understanding without using a prescribed form seemed to be central to their view of writing in math. Interestingly, Tiana used the term “defend” which connotes an argument, fitting in easily the CCSS ELA standards. Tiana’s remark may have sparked Mark’s response to differentiate the math context from the English context. This point came up later as the teachers described their priority for expressing clear ideas in writing over conventional correctness.

Some of the teachers reiterated what Mark said earlier about distinguishing the writing done in a math class from what was expected in an English class. Latoya discussed the purpose of writing in math as sense-making, with expectations distinct from an English class. She provided an illustration of how she used writing in her class.

One of the things that, one of the tests I gave my students when we were working on construction was that they had to explain to me how to construct a regular hexagon within a circle, inscribed in circle, and they had to explain every single

step. They can do the construction there on the paper, but they had to explain where they put their compass, where did they, you know all those things. And I told them it was okay to use a form. So that's not correct writing but they were able to have a system as to what procedural steps were to be used, put them in the correct order, and write them in words that made sense to them, that maybe we had used in class. But I'm quite sure if they give that same paper to an English teacher, that teacher would look at it and be like 'Are you kidding me?' So it's not writing in terms of that... Does that make sense?

Latoya's anecdote added to Mark's, separating the expectations for writing in math from those for English, and emphasized the sense-making quality of writing. Tiana provided further evidence of this view.

And a good thing about writing down their answers too, is if they come up with an answer -512 people. [Latoya gave an example of a problem the students clearly got wrong.] Hopefully when they put it into an answer form, they realize why this doesn't make sense. 'I made a boo-boo I need to go back and find it.' [Here she was referring to how students self-corrected answers they discovered were wrong through writing their explanations. In addition, they found errors in their writing.]

Tiana and Latoya both expressed the view that when students write, they potentially clarify their thinking, while at the same time discover and manage syntactic and mechanical errors. When students "realize why this doesn't make sense" they have the opportunity to make corrections. Both teachers appeared to believe this was the chief

purpose of writing in a math class. By the word “boo-boo,” Tiana appeared to mean an error in their solution to the problem as well as, perhaps, an error in their expression.

As mentioned earlier, many of the teachers articulated the belief that the expression of ideas was privileged over conventional correctness. Latoya and Eunice brought this up again in our second interview.

Latoya-I think that you’re not teaching them how to write, you don’t have to look at the things like punctuation and capitalization and words in common and spelling it’s just more of them being able to put their thoughts on paper and...

Eunice-and you can read it and understand what they are writing. That they can communicate to you what’s on paper. It doesn’t have to be perfect, and not everybody has to write exactly the same way or the exactly the same thing, but can they communicate to you that they understand.

Here Eunice and Latoya addressed the issue of clarity that the principal, Jack, raised earlier. For Eunice, the purpose of writing was to make clear to a reader what a student understood about a topic, in this case a mathematical concept. The focus was on the ideas and the clarity of the communication, not necessarily the quality of expression or the use of a sanctioned form.

One view of writing that emerged only with the math focus group was related to the affective consequences of using writing in the math class. Eunice and Louie explained that they discovered an unintended consequence of the use of writing in the math classes.

Students who were not necessarily strong math students, but possessed solid writing skills were given recognition by their peers, which seemed to elevate their social standing in the class.

Eunice-I taught a piece that for a long time too, and I loved it because the kids, who did well in there, would always be the ones who were also taking calculus at the same time. The kid, a lot of your top grades are the kids that didn't always succeed in math, but because they could explain themselves beautifully, so they really shine in that class. And it's great for other more math kids to see that in a math class. It's a great way to intertwine the two. You can really see it. Like what Louis was saying...

Louie-think about how many times you put them in a group, and the kids are all huddled around the brainiac writer. If you put writing into the part of that cycle, they rely on someone else. There's usually someone else they can learn from. And I think that really does create a little balance in your classroom. Every kid should have. We just want to make sure that they understand that we are teaching math, but we're expecting you to be able to write too, and to think and all these other the things and just creating a balance. I think that's what we're going for in schools so...

Creating social capital for some students was certainly an element that I did not find in the discussion of writing with any of the other participants. Writing as a way to balance social capital and impact the affective domain of the students was a pleasant surprise.

Whereas the district office personnel, the school site administrators, and some of the English teachers displayed strong elements of formalism in their thinking about the nature of writing, the math teachers in the focus group viewed writing in more dialogic ways with a focus on explaining ideas. They consciously distinguished their views from what they assumed were the views of the English teachers, and prioritized the clarity of explanation over correct conventional forms. The math teachers also displayed stronger dialogic tendencies than formalist as seen in their preference for using talk as a precursor to writing and their recognition that student writing must acknowledge an audience and seek clarity in explaining understanding of mathematical concepts.

Writing Instruction

The math teachers approached writing instruction in a narrower way than the English teachers. Because the focus on written explanation was new to them, they were in the early stages of defining precisely the priorities for writing in their instruction. The data suggested strongly that the math teachers were most interested in the quality of the information contained in a student's written expression as opposed to whether that expression observed correct use of conventions. Though a few of the teachers mentioned the importance of complete sentences and correct punctuation, clearly the priority in their writing instruction was the informational content. This was articulated by Latoya a couple of times during our interview.

I think that you're not teaching them how to write, you don't have to look at the things like punctuation and capitalization and words in common and spelling it's just more of them being able to put their thoughts on paper and...

In the second round of interviews, as mentioned earlier, she reiterated the point:

And I told them it was okay to use a form. So that's not correct writing but they were able to have a system as to what procedural steps, put them in the correct order, and write them in words that made sense to them that maybe we had used in class. But I'm quite sure if they give that same paper to an English teacher, this teacher would look at it and be like 'Are you kidding me?' So it's not writing in terms of that...

Eunice offered a similar statement confirming the view that Latoya held:

You can read it and understand what they are writing. That they can communicate to you what's on paper. It doesn't have to be perfect, and not everybody has to write exactly same way or the exactly the same thing, but can they communicate to you that they understand.

In short, the majority of the math teachers believed that their task was to expect written explanations of math problems, but not necessarily to correct errors or provide instructional time on how to write.

Yet, a few of the math teachers expressed trepidation about what was expected of them in terms of writing instruction. Vanessa was concerned about her self-perceived

lack of skills in teaching writing. Though she was not resistant to the idea, she was mildly anxious about the prospect of teaching writing.

I can teach kids how to write. I know I need to teach kids next year because I don't teach intro this year, but I know that I'm going to have to get my mindset around complete sentences, explain what you're doing, I don't know if I can do that effectively.

Eunice, on the other hand, was adamant about not teaching writing in the way an English teacher might. Using a somewhat humorous tone, she declared that she would leave teaching if she were required to formally teach writing in her math classes.

It's not the same kind of writing at all. I agree it's not like, 'let's write this perfect paragraph.' You need an introduction, and you need a... Oh, no can do. I'm out! I know I don't want to have to teach them how to do a stupid paper.

The anxiety these two teachers expressed was grounded in their fear that they would be expected to go beyond promoting written explanation and teach essays about mathematical procedures. They were reassured by others in the focus group that, in fact, this was not the case. In general, the math teachers believed that the kind of writing they would expect from students in their classes would focus on evidence of conceptual understanding first and conventional correctness second. Their emphasis on ideas over form led me to infer that they were not slavish to formalist thinking, and were in some ways informed by structuralism.

What I found most interesting with math focus group was their enthusiasm and willingness to incorporate writing into a curriculum that traditionally didn't require writing. The fact that they sensed the value of written explanations validated what the framers of the CCSS had in mind. The openness that these math teachers displayed was the kind of response that any reform movement would welcome because it could potentially herald a successful implementation. It is noteworthy, however, that when I remarked about the positive response of these math teachers, the principal stated, "They are a small sample." While true, they did reflect the kind of response needed to make a reform flourish.

CCSS

The math teachers were generally positive about the CCSS and the inclusion of writing to promote thinking in their classes. Though there was some limited resistance to the changes brought on by the CCSS, the math teachers appeared willing to embrace the new expectations and had begun implementing changes in the curriculum in the classes that were most affected; however, some of the AP courses (Calculus and Statistics) were immune to the changes. The math teachers were relatively new teachers. All had taught for less than ten years, and they shared a certain enthusiasm about trying to help students understand mathematics in a more profound way than simply repeating procedures. In general, the math teachers believed the implementation of the CCSS was a worthwhile pursuit, that the CCSS promoted a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts than the previous reform (NCLB) and that the students were held more accountable for understanding concepts as opposed to just producing the correct answer. The concepts

that underlie the procedures were privileged by the CCSS and, though it was a new way of viewing curriculum, the math teachers appeared to agree it was an improvement over past practices.

The math teachers recognized that the shift to a new approach in their teaching required more effort, but all agreed the CCSS were beneficial for students. Elsa's comments illustrated the tension created by the need to change the way she presented material with seeing the value in the change. "You can see the value in it. It's not, I don't know, it's, it's not fun to have to change what you do, but I can see the value in it." Later in the interview, she reiterated her belief that the CCSS was worth the effort to change her methods and focus. "It takes a little bit of work, but I feel like it's worth it, so that's why we do it." Latoya echoed Elsa's sentiment regarding the worth of the CCSS. "It's also because I have a lot of buy-in now that I've been provided with a curriculum that is common core, and I see the value in it, and I believe in it, so now I have a better understanding of what it means and how to implement it into other curricular areas." These comments revealed the underlying attitude that the math teachers seemed to share about the CCSS: though it was new, it was worthwhile, and we will make the effort to implement it. Latoya, Eunice, Elsa, and Mark made similar positive comments about the value of the CCSS in the following exchange.

PI-so we have some new standards and we moved, I think I said this when I first introduced myself, very quickly from the NCLB standards to the common core

state standards. What do you see as the main differences between the two sets of standards?

Latoya-forcing the students to explain.

PI-and what you mean?

Latoya-to not just give an answer, not just plug 'n chug kind of stuff. Give reasoning behind what they're doing

Eunice- Show more understanding of what they're doing not just that they get the right answer. Not just, not just... (PI-plug and chug, is that what you said?) Yeah they have to explain in such a way that you know that they understand what they are doing, not just that they can get to the right answer.

PI-okay what was it like before? How would you describe it before?

Eunice-they didn't have to think really...

Elsa-procedure...

Mark-they had to understand the procedure but they weren't forced to explain it or teach it to somebody else

PI-okay, so prior to see CCSS they just had to understand the procedure, or use the procedure right?

Eunice-they understood how to do it but not why

Elsa-I think there's more accountability as far as making sure how much they will actually retain because of understanding the whys behind things, rather than just remembering the procedure.

Mark-has that happened have they retain more? Is it still at this point is it still the learning curve?

Elsa-they're learning that they have to write, because I push that so much. Like I gave a warm up for this math thing we were going to do where all I asked them to do was tell me do you always get a larger number if you multiply two numbers? And my math one kids actually wrote stuff out so much better than my algebra kids.

PI-what made their writing it out better?

Elsa-that's what I expected of them. I mean it wasn't really...

PI-so when you say it was better as opposed to looking at this as...

Elsa-oh it existed. (Laughs)

PI-oh okay. They did it

Elsa-there was more writing, there were more sentences or phrases as opposed to just an example with no words showing me that it does or doesn't. Do you know what I mean?

As we talked about the changes in their instruction, the conversation was energetic and enthusiastic. It was clear that the math teachers welcomed the change and valued the focus on expressing the underlying ideas of the mathematical processes.

The interview data did not reveal any strong resistance to the CCSS from the math teachers. In fact, the data suggested quite the opposite. The math teachers believed the standards were worth incorporating slowly into the curriculum, and expected that it would eventually be the basis for their curriculum. Tiana's statement encapsulated this view of the CCSS.

It's going to take a while. I think that this year because so many of us just embraced this with the new curriculum, and try to incorporate it into the older curriculum, that it's going to take time. I am already thinking of ways I would start the year off differently than this year because it's so new. So I think each year will become more comfortable with it. As far as this year, I think all of us are still kind of like, it's so new.

The fact that Tiana was beginning to plan for the following year with the CCSS in mind indicated her positive attitude about the new standards and her belief that they were worth the effort to make a change. Elsa and Latoya explained how the Green Valley High School math department planned to phase in the standards over time.

The implementation of common core is starting at ninth grade. So were phasing out our other courses. So ninth graders this year have the common core and then

they will continue it on through as everybody else pushes out. So this year only our freshmen have common core and well...

Latoya-only this year our freshmen have a common core *textbook* (laughter). I know that I teach integrated but I also teach geometry. Although the geometry book is not a common core book, I still try to integrate common core lessons into their curriculum.

The fact that Latoya did not have a “common core” geometry book, yet designed “common core” lessons suggested a commitment to changing the focus of her instruction. This attitude appeared to be present in all of the math teachers in the focus group. Part of the motivation for these teachers to embrace the change was their recognition that writing was an effective strategy for developing a deep understanding of the concepts. Elsa revealed the belief in writing as an effective strategy in the following statement.

They (students) have to show a deeper understanding. I think it goes back to the example of when you learn something and you understand it... But when you learn something, explain it to your neighbor that’s a little bit different. It’s the same thing, it’s that extra one step that you not only know it, but I can now explain how I did it. You know, whether it’s to a person or to a paper.

Like Elsa, the math teachers recognized that this fundamental step of explaining the process that produces an answer was the source of students’ deepening their understanding of mathematic concepts. Eunice expressed it simply as “it’s definitely a different way of thinking, it’s developing a different way of thinking.” These comments

imply that the shift in emphasis found in the CCSS helped the math teachers to see value in the new standards.

The math teachers also expressed that they deepened their own understanding of the concepts they were teaching by having the students explain the processes at work to find an answer. Latisha shared the insight she gained from teaching with the CCSS.

I grew up in the plug and chug and this is the answer. There are things that when I'm teaching it, like last year and this year, I understood it and I was like 'Oh that's why this works,' but I never knew when I was in school. Because I just had to do it, and did it. And that was the answer. And I've just been teaching it, and it appears when I'm teaching kids I get more now and understand why I have to explain more now, why. So it's kind of that same... I now have a deeper understanding of concepts than I had before. Because of that. (Writing explanations)

Much of Latisha's enthusiasm seemed to have its basis in the fact that she appeared to be learning along with the students. It was interesting to hear her describe her own epiphanies when she discovered the underlying concepts beneath the lessons she was teaching. In one sense, her view of the nature of writing could be described as dialogic given that she was interacting with the students written explanations, which in turn developed her understanding.

The math teachers also indicated that the CCSS held students accountable for their understanding of the mathematical concepts in the curriculum. The CCSS was an

improvement over what they termed “plug and chug,” the focus on the product of mathematical thinking. They believed that the inclusion of written explanations of the processes that produced a single answer held students accountable. On several occasions during our interviews the participants mentioned the students’ accountability for understanding what they were learning as one of the positive features of the CCSS. Eunice’s statement was typical of what other participants said about how the step of writing an explanation kept the students accountable for their learning.

Show more understanding of what they’re doing not just that they get the right answer. Not just, not just... plug and chug. They have to explain in such a way that you know that they understand, what they are doing, not just that they can get to the right answer.

Mark added that he believed the accountability motivated students to have a deep understanding of math concepts.

Being held accountable and knowing that you’re going to be held responsible for your answer in the way you write it makes a big difference in them being self-motivated to do it properly.

Finally, Elsa believed that because the CCSS held students accountable, deeper learning took place. “I think there’s more accountability (with CCSS) as far as making sure how much they will actually retain because of understanding the whys behind things, rather than just remembering the procedure.” These statements were representative of the kind of statements made by the math teachers revealing their belief that one of the effects of

the CCSS was to make students more accountable for deep learning of the math concepts found in the curriculum.

The math participants' belief that the CCSS were worthwhile was based on two themes that appeared in the interview data: the CCSS promoted a deeper understanding of the processes of mathematics, and the CCSS held students accountable for their deep learning. Based on these findings, I infer that the math teachers believed the CCSS was an improvement over the previous reform (NCLB) and that they were prepared to continue honing their curriculum based on the new standards.

Math Teacher - Louie

Energetic and enthusiastic, Louie Short was the first teacher to volunteer for my study. He was a particularly interesting person to work with because of his background in English and his zeal for writing. As explained earlier, Louie's interest in writing began when he was an English major in college and continued into his adult life. Expressing a broader view of writing beyond its application in a math classroom, Louie believed that all teachers, as educated persons, had a duty to include writing in their curriculum, regardless of their discipline.

The Nature of Writing

Louie spoke in general terms about the nature of writing, but it was clear that he felt writing was a foundational skill, particularly when building a career in a professional field. For Louie, learning to write well was a practical matter, as well as an avenue to

express creativity. The fact that his mother was an English teacher may have influenced his positive view of writing, as well as, ironically, his move away from teaching English as a career.

Writing is an important part of what we do in every class because it provides balance, and I actually was an English major for a while also. My mom's an English teacher and my dad is a physicist, so I grew up in both worlds. I actually like writing. I actually like reading, and I like writing. I can pretty much teach English if I didn't have to grade essays. It was the amount of workload comparatively. I actually really enjoyed writing for fun. I don't like grammar, or any of that. But I do like writing and I do like... I'm the guy who when I listen to Pink Floyd, I'm actually listening to the lyrics not just the sound. I like the sound too, but some people don't think about the lyrics, but I personally think writing especially as a scientist or mathematician, you have to be able to write. If you want to be published if, you go that way. You can't just be smart. You can't just know how to solve as an engineer.

Here Louie advocated for the kind of "writing across the curriculum" that the site administrators wanted to see in the curriculum because it created "balance." It was not clear what he meant by "balance." He gave me the impression with his remarks about song lyrics that he was attentive to words, and had a sense for the power inherent in language. All of this is to say that Louie did not fear writing or writing instruction as

some of the other math teachers did. He encouraged his students to write, and even enjoyed personal writing outside of his work.

Furthermore, Louie expressed that part of a teacher's duty was to help students become better writers, and by the same token, it was the also a teacher's duty as an educated person to help students with math problems, regardless of their affinity for math.

You know that always shocks me though because even if you're a math teacher, that's such a copout I'm a math teacher, because you should know how to write because you're educated, you have a degree from college, you should be able to help a high school kid with their writing. Just like I would expect an English teacher to at least help them with their math. The English teachers say this same thing, 'math is not my thing.' It's high school math, it is not rocket science, without teaching calculus. But I guess they are the senior-level but we're talking just basic. And they should at least be able to read it and explain it to him. You're an adult you're educated.

Interestingly, Louie did not talk about the nature of writing in terms of clarifying thinking, communicating, or employing pre-determined structures or forms. He spoke of writing as a fundamental part of preparing for a career. While the other participants focused their comments on specific issues in writing, Louie was more philosophical about the nature of writing as concomitant with being an educated person.

Determining the fundamental ideas that informed Louie's thinking was complicated by the fact that he spoke in general terms about writing. Inferences can be made that structuralism and formalism were prominent for Louie, and that dialogism played a less noticeable role. His use of writing to develop mathematical thinking and to explain the underlying processes indicated structuralism at play, while Louie's focus on conventional correctness suggested the presence of formalism.

Writing Instruction

To his credit, Louie did not just talk about the need to include writing in the math curriculum; he actively included it in his instruction and assessment. During our conversation, Louie showed me examples of the kind of writing students were doing on his tests. Reacting strongly, he mused about the reasons the quality of writing was so poor. Unlike his colleagues in the focus group, Louie appeared to value the development of ideas equally with conventional correctness. His comment that student writing was "depressing" signified to me the level of concern he had about writing instruction.

Louie -I mean it's pretty bad, it's depressing actually, some of the stuff they write.

PI-these are freshmen?

Louie-these are actually 11th and 12th-graders. Math analysis but you can see they don't really answer the questions. They all kind of answer the questions.

PI-Now is that a function of them not knowing how or are they just not used to doing it in a math environment?

Louie-that's part of it, but I think they just haven't been doing enough in their math environment. I'm the first teacher probably who has made them do it. I finally put it on a test, but you can see how much she wrote. (Shows me the test) I just gave her two out of 10 because she somewhat said something correct. But I did this as a class...I mean look at this, "In order for the graph to be accurate, graph correctly, and for the function to work, acetates must be used because they split the graph." I mean that's not even legible English, and so, and I mean I know she's trying. And look at her math . . . her math is actually really good, I mean when I... It's not like... But I feel like it is my duty to address this. That she can't write. They all can't. She's one of my stronger students in terms of what she's trying to do. I'm trying to look for one that got full credit. Look at this one and this one. Did he write a sentence?

Louie differentiated the "math thinking" from the attempts at "legible English." He expected his students to write with conventional correctness and in complete sentences, and could not dismiss errors due to his sense of duty to help students develop their writing skills along with their math skills. Though Louie did not mention specific strategies to teach writing and did not seem to provide direct instruction in writing, the fact that he held high expectations for writing on his assignments and tests was unique among the math teachers I interviewed.

He reinforced the value of quality writing by grading the tests with students in class, discussing the merits of both the math and the writing. In his anecdote he

emphasized the clarity of the writing on the test items, reminiscent of the principal's and a few of the math focus group members' main concern in writing.

I found that they were not taking those writing questions seriously until I put them on the actual test. And then when we graded them, I think I wrote this in an email, we actually graded them in class where they switch papers, and they were from a different period. And we were reading them out loud and I was on the spot grading them. And they were listening and I allowed them to criticize like 'Was this addressing the question?' No. So they all know now how hard it is but when I actually did this, I cut the point value, so I made it out of only five. So two out of 10 became two out of five which wasn't really a big deal.

Louie's inclusion of writing in his math class suggested that he was trying to comply with the CCSS and the emphasis on writing in the core classes. His reasons for doing this were partly because he genuinely valued writing as a foundational skill, and partly because he felt that was what was expected of him by the administrators and district office personnel (discussed below). Louie's emphasis on well-developed writing in his math class runs counter to not only the math teachers in his school, but math teachers in general (Applebee & Langer, 2011). The fact that he felt some personal comfort with writing may have diminished any fear he might have about writing instruction and enabled him to move forward with the shift brought on by the CCSS.

Like many of the participants in the study, overlapping views of writing were present in Louie's thinking. As I stated earlier, Louie did not engage in direct instruction

of writing, but the strategies he used for assessment in his classes focused on conventional correctness as well as the clarity of ideas. For Louie, “quality writing” entailed adhering to the expected forms, i.e. punctuation, capitalization and spelling. However, evidence of dialogism can be found in the following:

PI-let me ask you this, when you feel comfortable, after you reach your tenure, will you view including this kind of writing as valuable?

Louie-in my opinion it’s like what I was talking about, in terms of balance, I think it is. I don’t think it’s something I want to do every day. But I think every chapter looking for an opportunity to address either... It’s more about having a conceptual question, a conversation with them. You know like actually talking, not just about solving for X or Y, but actually why this is happening. We work on trying to get them to memorize how to do things.

The fact that Louie describes his interaction with students as a “conversation” and “actually talking, not just solving for X” indicates a broader purpose in his teaching strategies that was more closely aligned with the CCSS. He apparently believed that a deeper understanding of the concepts beneath mathematic operations was as important as being able to perform the operations. He enacted this belief through his use of classroom discussion. These discussions served as the basis for what students would then write about concepts and processes they were learning.

CCSS

There were two important factors in Louie's interaction with the CCSS: he already was more inclined to use writing in his math instruction than the other math teachers, and he was not a tenured teacher which affected his response to the implementation of the new standards. He felt it would be difficult to push back on the methods of implementation. In addition, though he agreed with the assistant principal, Allison, that the new standards were a return to a better approach to curriculum. Louie's inclination to use writing in his curriculum led him to transition easily into lessons based on the CCSS. As mentioned previously, he valued writing across the curriculum which was clearly something that the new standards promote. He provided me with examples of assignments and tests that demonstrated his commitment to the kind of writing expected in the CCSS. Seemingly genuine in his enthusiasm for writing in his classroom, Louie appeared to have gone further than the other math teachers in trying out "common core" lessons.

The fact that Louie was new to the district and was not tenured, played a role in his earnestness in implementing the new standards. He admitted that this was a part of why he was less resistant to the new curriculum.

Well, were supposed to all be doing it. I'm just in my second year this district...

You know how the tenure system works. We just re-signed so, now I'm on contract for my tenure periods, so I'm not just trying to... Now I'm in... But I still feel an obligation to at least try, I've always kinda tried to appease what the

district is a trying to do, you're either part of the problem or your part of the solution.

By stating that he “feels an obligation to at least try,” Louie revealed a sense of duty to the direction that the district had chosen. Based on the data related to writing instruction presented previously, my sense was that Louie agreed with the basic tenets of the CCSS and at the same time wanted to maintain his standing in the district.

Though Louie made efforts to adhere to the district's implementation of the CCSS, he did state that there could have been a more measured approach to it. He felt that the students were not making an easy transition to the new curriculum and needed more time to adjust to the shift away from “plug and chug” to an emphasis on mathematical processes.

The students are, like, ‘Oh this problem can't be done.’ Some of the answers are ‘cannot be determined’ because they don't have enough information. You know it's like, you know, they're not going to... That's why I said I just feel it is too far to one side. Instead of just saying, ‘let's start implementing’... That's why . . . kinda like where I am. I still teach the old curriculum but I'm just adding things that are common core and more like defend your answer, explain to me why this is happening. I think I showed you some of the examples.

With the focus on the underlying mathematic processes, students were frustrated when an answer was ambiguous or, as he said, unable to be determined. Louie felt that the implementation could have been more gradual. He reasoned that using material he had

previously developed coupled, with “common core” strategies, would have been more helpful for students in transitioning to the new curriculum.

He also recognized the mismatch between the district’s approach to implementing the standards and the needs of the teachers and students. A lack of time with department members to develop lessons and discuss strategies seemed to be at odds with the district led in-service meetings. Louie expressed some frustration with the approach to implementation taken by the district.

We were surprised actually that they gave us our collaboration time to do this [meet with me for interviews]. The fact that they allowed us to do it on Tuesday morning [the school-wide collaboration time] was a surprise. We had workdays like in-service days where we’re literally . . . , they’re showing us common core lessons making us go through it to show us, just for us it felt like a waste of time, four hours or so that we could’ve spent as a department... So they tried to give us our own time to write our own stuff, but that’s even harder because now we don’t have... It’s sort of like it seems like no one really knows how to make this adjustment. They don’t know how to make it; the teachers don’t how to make it. And a lot of the teachers are simply just saying let’s wait. I’ll just keep doing what I’m doing... You know.

The fact that Louie felt the meetings were a waste of time and that the district office personnel didn’t seem to “know how to make this [transition to the new standards] adjustment” was similar in tenor to the comments made by the English teachers. Both

Louie and the English focus group members felt that the district office personnel were limited in their ability to effectively conduct the implementation of the new standards.

Louie's view of writing instruction as a duty, and his need to establish himself in his new district certainly influenced his response to the CCSS-WS. Though he alluded to the fact that he felt compelled by his lack of tenure to cooperate with the implementation of the new standards, my sense was that he found value in the shift to writing explanations and embraced the standards sincerely. He appeared to be the only math teacher in the study who viewed writing in a broader sense, which may have played a role in his keenness for carrying out the implementation of the new standards.

Summary

One clear finding across the district was the variety of views among teachers and administrators on the nature of writing and writing instruction. Though many of the people shared some similar points of view about writing, I did not observe an agreement district-wide about a common principle guiding writing instruction. As well, the personal views on the nature of writing held by the various participants did not necessarily directly inform the writing instruction that took place. In some cases, instructional practices as discussed by the participants actually conflicted with their personal views on writing.

What seemed to be a natural outgrowth of the competing views of writing was the uneven interaction with the CCSS-WS among the people I talked to. The district office personnel, school site administrators, and the math teachers held the most positive views of the new standards, while the English teachers were the most critical of the changes

brought about by the reform. While there was at least an attempt by all of the teachers to implement the standards, the level of enthusiasm and commitment to change was uneven.

I also found that the uneven response to the CCSS-WS may have been due, in part, to a mismatch of expectations and interpretations of the new standards. The math teachers felt that the pace of the implementation was too rushed and did not include enough professional development. They also felt that district office personnel were not as informed as they could be about the implications of the new standards on the math curriculum. At the same time, the mismatch of expectations between the English department and the district office created tension, seen for example in the decision making process on how to proceed with the implementation, that may have affected the quality of the implementation. The main issue for the English teachers was their perception that the curriculum was becoming overcrowded because of a misinterpretation of the amount of non-fiction reading to be added. The English teachers felt this inhibited their time for writing instruction.

Finally, I found that ultimately, the assessments (SBAC and CAASPP) were what drove changes in the curriculum. Despite what the participants believed about the nature of writing and writing instruction, the single most important influence on their curriculum decisions during the implementation of the standards was the content of the state-wide assessment. From the district office to the classroom teachers, the assessment was the bottom line for the response to the CCSS-WS.

Chapter 6: Discussion

The Nature of Writing

It is important to consider the conditions under which any reform policy is implemented. In order for a reform to be “successful,” that is to have met goals and outcomes the reform is designed to address, there must be some understanding of what came before, the effects of the previous reforms, and the reactions to those effects by the educators who experienced them. It is also important to have an understanding of the demands that a new reform places on the implementers, the epistemological understandings of the participants, and the contexts within which the reform takes place (Honig, 2006). With the renewed focus on writing brought about by the CCSS, it is helpful to have some insight into the ways educators view the nature of writing. In this study it became clear that a singular, uniform epistemological stance related to the nature of writing and purpose of writing was absent from the Orange Grove school district. Though some of the educators shared similar viewpoints, often their stances were contradictory. As Sperling (2004) has argued, this is not necessarily problematic considering teachers and other district personnel operate in shifting environments that elicit varied views. To have a complete understanding of teachers and their beliefs about writing, it is important to pay attention to “tension-filled moments (Bakhtin, 1981) that serve to shape the beliefs, attitudes and values of educators as they interact with new reforms. A consideration of the underlying epistemologies of the implementers of a reform helps to anticipate the varied responses to it. This consideration can minimize a

cursory adoption of standards in which teachers change a few practices, but keep the heart of their usual teaching practices intact.

In the Orange Grove Unified School District, overlapping epistemological positions among the educators across the district complicated their responses to the new standards. The principal at GVHS, Jack, and the English and math focus groups all displayed a tendency to view the nature of writing in a manner consistent with dialogism, highlighting the transactional nature of writing between writer and reader. Mark, a member of the math focus group appeared to value the use of talk prior to assigning writing. His question, “Am I wrong in thinking that if we are really going to work on writing that we have to start with instructional conversation, talking out loud, teaching them how to answer out loud and then eventually that will transfer to being able to write it down?” reflects what Prior (2004) argues about how teachers become “co-authors” with students, serving a key role in the production of a text and guiding the planning process of writing. For Mark, class discussion prior to writing was a part of the dialogic process of writing as it functioned as a type of pre-writing that anticipates readers’ responses. For math teachers, employing interactions that lead to writing was a new practice. Though the math teachers in the focus group were generally amenable to this new approach, undoubtedly there were math teachers in the district and across the United States who resist these kinds of strategies because they do not fit with prior practices.

Similarly, the English focus group expressed an affinity for a dialogic approach to writing when they criticized the implementation because it took time away from the kind

of teacher-student interactions they considered essential to writing. The importance of the process of editing and revising as an essential part of writing was articulated by Buffy, “At that time (prior to the CCSS) I really felt like I did a better job because I knew my kids better, I was able to spend more time working with them, I had more freedom to go around and help them individually. You can do a lot more editing; you can do a lot more working.” The practice of developing student writing through interactions with a teacher seemed to be fundamental to the English teachers’ beliefs about the nature of writing. In light of the strength of this belief, they might have been reluctant to fully invest in the implementation of the CCSS-WS. The complaint that the teachers were losing time for writing instruction that included interactions with students could present an obstacle to the full implementation of the new standards. With the understanding that the English teachers highly value a dialogic approach, we can begin to gain insight into the nuances of why they may be resistant to the implementation of the reform. If teachers feel that the CCSS-WS threatens the amount of time for communication with students, their level of resistance would likely increase and possibly serve to undermine the intent of the new standards.

In addition to the use of teacher-student talk prior to writing, Jack, the principal at GVHS expressed dialogic orientation in his concern with clarity. His focus was on establishing a mutual frame of reference (M. Nystrand, Himley, & Doyle, 1986) with readers, recognizing that his writing was an interaction with a reader. Though conventional correctness and norms for structure came in to play when writing with clarity, Jack’s main concern was the clear reception of his ideas by an authentic audience.

His consciousness of a reader on the receiving end of writing reflects a similar dialogism found in the math and English focus groups. The emphasis on the interaction of the reader and the writer stands in contrast to the concentration on structures of argumentative writing where the text is the center of attention. Because argumentation is the cornerstone of the CCSS-WS, this emphasis on the structure of an argument tends to ignore the concern with audience and the transactional nature of writing. Put another way, the intended audience of an argument is hidden from view by the concentration on structure. Also, as DeStigter (2015) points out, the overemphasis on argumentation delegitimizes other genres of writing on the communicative spectrum.

While a dialogic orientation to writing was privileged by some in the Orange Grove School District, there was a second point of view that made up another part of the multilayered understandings of the nature of writing. For some in the district, the structuring of ideas in writing was central to their understanding of the nature of writing. Brad, one of the TOAs in the district office, as well as some of the members of the English focus group put the “writing process” front and center in their view of writing. However, they narrowed their attention to one of the processes, structuring ideas. Their way of thinking about writing was grounded in the notion that students could write effectively if they followed steps to structure their writing, an outgrowth (some would say a distortion) of the views of writing promoted in the late 1970s and 1980s, (Emig, 1971; Flower & Hayes, 1981) that focused on the writing process as a series of fixed stages. This approach is still present throughout the U.S. and here at GVHS. Students were provided with templates that guided them in ordering ideas in the construction of an

argument. With the placement of argumentative writing as the focal point of the CCSS-WS, the educators in this study viewed the use of formulaic programs like the Jane Schaffer model to scaffold the structure of an argument a natural alignment with their views on the nature of writing. In fact, the two writing programs that provided templates for argumentative writing (Jane Schaffer and ERWC) in use in the English department at GVHS fit nicely with the orientation of the CCSS-WS.

Essentially, what Brad and some of English teachers were advocating for was instruction in discourse knowledge, specifically formats for the arrangement of ideas in an argument. They seemed to operate under the assumption that students lack an understanding of how to structure an argument (and other expository texts) and, at the same time, assume that a structure can be identified and taught. Issues of audience, tone and purpose take a backseat to the learning of a formula for organizing an argument. The appeal of writing programs that scaffold writing in this way lies in the convenience for teaching. Here are the ingredients to an argument, plug them in. The educators seemed to believe that once students internalized the structures, then other features such as diction, conventional correctness, and rhetorical devices in writing could be addressed.

Another one of the multiple views of writing held by the educators in the Orange Grove School District focused on conventional correctness. For some, an understanding and facility with the conventions of writing, including spelling, grammar and punctuation, was foundational to good writing. Allison, the vice principal, and Kam, the director of Curriculum and Instruction, both highly valued knowledge of writing

conventions when they described their view of writing. Diana, an English teacher, lamented the fact that the CCSS-WS lacked an emphasis on grammar and conventions in the later grades. How much Diana and others might advocate for direct instruction in grammar and conventions is hard to determine, but it is clear this was a priority in their view of writing and writing instruction. In contrast, few studies have indicated that instruction in grammar and conventions is a central concern for secondary teachers (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Graham & Perin, 2007; Sperling & Freedman, 2001; Troia & Olinghouse, 2013). Despite these findings, there were some in the Orange Grove Unified school district who valued instruction in grammar and conventions. Their commitment to this aspect of writing made them less likely to fully embrace the changes brought on by the new standards. It does not seem likely that these teachers, who prioritize instruction in grammar and conventions, would be willing to abandon their practices to align themselves with the CCSS-WS.

This study brought to the surface the multi-layered views of the nature of writing within the Orange Grove School District, which allows for a more refined picture of the people on the ground who are tasked with implementing the new standards. Understanding the complexity of these views can be important to the process of designing and executing the latest reform as it provides insight into potential resistance or acceptance of the principles that underpin the new policies. Useful information about the beliefs and values of those who have a direct impact on how a reform will unfold is critical if there is a chance for measurable success (Honig, 2006). Understanding what educators value and believe about education and, in this case, writing, provides an

opportunity for the designers of reform to account for what beliefs are in place at the ground level and how they can be engaged with the goals of the current reform.

Writing Instruction

Just as there were varying views on the nature of writing, so too were there multiple approaches to writing instruction in the Orange Grove School District. Some of these approaches were naturally aligned with the CCSS-WS, some were a part of the historic instructional practices in a department, and others were brought about by the new standards. Many of the instructional practices related to writing, especially in the English department, were similar to what was reported by Graham and Perin (2007) in their review of research on adolescent writing: scaffolding, summarizing, and collaborative group work. In addition, some educators valued writing as a vehicle for thinking, which led them to advocate for writing across disciplines. Finally, as one might expect, there were some clear contrasts between the practices and priorities of the English and math departments.

The English teachers felt there was little need to change how they taught writing because they believed their practices were already aligned with the new standards. Their emphasis on literary analysis, which is one type of argumentative writing, led them to conclude that they were meeting standards ELA-LiteracyW.9-10.1 which calls for writing that develops an argument with textual evidence. The standards do not specify that an argument be related to literature, but the teachers at GVHS interpreted them this way. Spillane (2004) addresses the idea that when educators are challenged to respond to

changes brought about by reforms, they tend to view the changes through the lens of familiarity and ignore the ideas that do not fit neatly into their prior practices. This was the case for many of the English teachers at GVHS. They believed that their practices were aligned with the CCSS-WS and therefore, they did not need to make any changes in their writing instruction.

The administrators and some of the teachers at GVHS believed that writing was a vehicle for developing thinking. Though they did not detail what they meant by “thinking,” it was clear that they felt imbedding writing activities in the curriculum would deepen students’ understanding of curricular materials. I did not hear any teachers or administrators refer to particular theoretical propositions on how thinking is enhanced by writing, but they certainly held strong beliefs about it and may have based those beliefs on what they witnessed in the classroom, particularly in the math department. Chances are they were not aware of the body of research on writing to learn, writing in the disciplines and writing across the curriculum, but they certainly had an instinctive notion that writing was a useful tool for learning. Comments by the principal of GVHS and a math teacher reflect what researchers have argued occurs when writing is used as a tool for learning. As we saw in the Findings chapter, Jack, the principal, made the comment “When I write something down, I have to really know it. I have to be clear in my head, which doesn’t always happen, but writing it out forces me to be clear.” Though Jack may not have been familiar with Janet Emig’s work, he echoed the research she has done in this area. She has argued that in the process of writing, students employ a variety of cognitive skills such as organizing ideas, integrating information and reformulating

thoughts that enhance learning (Emig, 1977). More recent studies (Atasoy, 2013; Drabick, Weisber, Paul, & Bubier, 2007; Gingerich, Bugg, Doe, Rowland, Richards, Tompkin, McDaniel, 2014; Yildiz, 2012) have shown significant effects of writing on learning, confirming what earlier researchers have found. Elsa, a math teacher, also expressed what researchers have discovered about writing and learning.

They (students) have to show a deeper understanding. I think it goes back to the example of when you learn something and you understand it... But when you learn something, explain it to your neighbor that's a little bit different. It's the same thing, it's that extra one step that you not only know it, but I can now explain how I did it. You know, whether it's to a person or to a paper.

Here Elsa recognized that conceptual understanding is enhanced in the act of communicating an idea, and as research has shown, deepens understanding (Klein & Boscolo, 2016). There are many factors that come into play when using writing as a tool for learning, and it appeared that some of the educators in the Orange Grove district were cognizant of the basic value in the use of writing to learn.

While the idea of writing to learn was valued by some in the district, there was also talk of a related model for instruction: writing across the curriculum. Though there was little evidence of a policy to guide this in practice, it was mentioned several times in the interviews by both administrators and teachers. This idea also seemed to inform the CCSS-WS in the sense that students are expected to read rich texts and write in response to those texts in a variety of disciplines (corestandards.org). The underlying principle of

writing in all disciplines was a value shared by the educators in the district and the architects of the new standards. The most obvious evidence of writing across the curriculum in the district was the fact that the math teachers had begun to incorporate writing into their lessons. This was a new practice for nearly all of the math teachers and was a direct and natural outgrowth of the new standards. Though there wasn't a directive from the district office or the high school administrators, the math teachers made a concentrated effort to have students explain in writing what they understood about the underlying principles of the mathematical concepts they were learning. This incorporation of writing in disciplines that traditionally do not use writing as a tool for learning was a point at which the CCSS-WS and the beliefs of the educators in the district appeared to be compatible. Interestingly, neither the district educators nor the CCSS-WS placed as much emphasis on writing across the curriculum as they might have. If the intention of the CCSS architects was to rectify the effects of limiting writing instruction brought on by the NCLB, then it would seem reasonable that writing across the curriculum would be an area of greater focus.

While bringing writing across the curriculum to the forefront might in some ways improve the efficacy of the new standards in addressing the dearth of writing in American schools, it would be naïve to believe it could be a panacea. However, in the Orange Grove Unified school district writing for various discipline-specific purposes was clearly taking place. As mentioned above, the writing instruction in the math department focused on the clarity of explanations. Even though there was some initial tension associated with changing their instructional practices, the math teachers discovered through their

experiences in the classroom that students had an opportunity to deepen their understanding through writing explanations of mathematical concepts. The fact that the math teachers focused on the clarity of ideas rather than form or structure is evidence discipline-specific writing. The math teachers made it very clear that they differentiated themselves from the English department in that they were not trying to instruct students in how to write an essay about math. The goals for writing in the math department were specific to their curriculum. This view is in line with what Russell (1990) has argued about the myth of a single pedagogical solution to a complex set of problems. Recognition that writing as one instructional tool has broad application across curricular areas would help refine the goals of the current reform as well as reforms that will undoubtedly come in the future.

Because the English department is traditionally where most writing instruction in schools takes place, the English teachers responded to a different set of issues related to writing instruction than the math teachers. For the majority of the English teachers, there was resistance to the CCSS-WS privileging argumentative writing over other forms of writing. Though they recognized literary analysis as a form of argumentative writing, their opposition was grounded in the belief that literary fiction would have a diminished place in the curriculum. Diana described literary analysis as her “bread and butter,” which was a value shared by all of the English teachers. Consequently, when they were told by the district office that the curriculum would be reformed to reflect the 70-30 ratio of reading fiction to non-fiction, they felt that this would take time away from writing instruction and affect their practices directly. They believed that incorporating more non-

fiction reading would have the effect of overcrowding the curriculum because they were not willing to give up time for writing instruction.

A second issue for the English teachers was the fact that the new standards called for more argumentative writing based on multiple non-fiction sources. While the justification for the focus on argument was couched in the terms “college and career ready,” the English teachers felt that the most treasured part of their traditional curriculum, literary analysis, was threatened and were therefore quite resistant to implementing those elements of the new standards. Because the teachers were not involved in the decision to add to the curriculum, they were naturally resentful of this change which contributed further to their resistance. This type of resistance to the new standards could create a fissure in the full implementation of the standards and undermine their successful. The ripple effects of even a small amount of resistance could serve to maintain the fragmented nature of curriculum nationwide that the CCSS ostensibly attempts to address (Cohen, Peurach, Glazer, Gates, & Goldin, 2013). If the purpose of the CCSS is to focus and refine curriculum so that it prepares students for the work place and college, the response of teachers like the English teachers at GVHS to the changes wrought by the standards is critical to the achievement of the goals of the reform. Taking away a part of the curriculum that is held sacred by teachers will not garner the kind of positive response the architects seek, unless a compelling argument can be made for replacement components of the curriculum. In the case of the English teachers at GVHS, this did not happen.

CSS-WS

One of the aims of this study was to understand and characterize the beliefs about the nature of writing and writing instruction held by educators at various levels in the Orange Grove Unified School District. A second goal was to identify how those beliefs, based on epistemological stances, interacted with the educators' views of the CCSS-WS. Three issues arose that exemplified how the educators' beliefs impacted their response to the implementation of the CCSS-WS. No one single response characterized the district as a whole. While some of the educators held similar beliefs, there was a rather uneven response to the new standards across the district. Secondly, there was a mismatch between the views of the district office personnel and the teachers regarding the interpretation of the standards and how best to approach the implementation. Finally, it became clear that the key factor driving the curriculum to meet the new standards was the statewide assessments.

It would be naïve to think that all of the personnel across a school district would share a single response to any reform movement or make sense of the new policies in exactly the same ways. However, it is likely the goal of any implementation process to have educators' assimilate the new standards into their curricular practices in a coherent manner (Spillane, 2004). The reaction to the CCSS-WS across the Orange Grove School District can be characterized as uneven in light of the varied levels of engagement and enthusiasm for the new standards. Some in the district, particularly the district office personnel, dug in to the standards and focused their work on the best possible

implementation. Similarly, members of the math department, after some hesitation, seemed to come to value the use of writing in their curriculum. At the same time, though, many of the English teachers were quite resistant to the core tenets of the new standards and resisted the implementation. The uneven response to the implementation of the standards in the Orange Grove School District can be attributed to the varying needs of specific departments as well as individual educators' and their personal beliefs about writing and instruction. The math teachers felt the standards required students to be accountable for their learning and demonstrate that learning via written explanations. They seemed to embrace the ideas that the standards addressed something that was missing from their curriculum. In contrast, the English teachers felt that what they were doing prior to the infusion of the new standards was working just fine. They did not see a need to change the focus of their curriculum or shift their thinking about the priorities in writing instruction. Because the teachers in each respective department operated in a different context, their needs varied according to their instructional practices, and therefore their response to the new standards stood in contrast. These conditions related to the implementation of the CCSS-WS were consistent with research on policy implementation in the past four decades (R. E. Porter, Fusarelli, & Fusarelli, 2015). It appears that the architects of the CCSS did not sufficiently account for the varying contexts in which the implementation took place, nor did they anticipate the level of resistance from some quarters that might hamper a successful execution of their goals. My study indicates that not much has changed when it comes to reform implementation since the days of the NCLB.

The uneven response to the CCSS-WS was also seen in the mismatch between the district office personnel's understanding and interpretation of the standards and the teachers understanding of the standards. In their attempts to conscientiously abide by the standards and the recommendations of the Common Core Standards Initiative, the district office personnel made interpretations which guided policy changes that contrasted sharply with the teachers, particularly in the English department. This mismatch in interpretation of the standards can be seen most clearly in the attempts by the district curriculum director to mandate a ratio of 70% fiction to 30% non-fiction reading material in the English curriculum. As stated above, the English teachers balked at this change because they felt it was crowding the curriculum and taking time away from writing instruction. Susan Pimentel, the lead writer of the ELA standards, clarified that the 70/30 ratio for reading was intended to be across the disciplines, not exclusively English classes (Sapers, 2015). However, the district office held firm that this ratio should be in place for the English department.

A second issue that exposed a mismatch between the district office and the English teachers was related to the use of prepackaged writing programs. The district curriculum director and the TOAs who developed ELA curriculum were adamant that the district did not use writing "programs," but the English teachers clearly had been using at least two writing programs for some time, Jane Schaffer and ERWC. It is true that some of the teachers used modified versions of these two programs, but the programs were still essentially in place despite some vocabulary that teachers used that differed from that in

the programs. It was not made clear why the district office personnel hesitated to admit the use of packaged writing programs.

Though the math department generally embraced the new standards, there was still evidence of some mismatch with the district office. A few of the teachers felt that the implementation was moving too fast for both the teachers and the students. The emphasis on process over product was a new way of approaching curriculum and the math teachers felt they needed more professional development to effectively tackle the changes brought on by the new standards. Louie, a math teacher, felt that students were frustrated too because the new approaches to math problems were so unfamiliar. He observed that students were used to learning the steps to find a single answer for a problem and were confused and discouraged when they were expected to find multiple ways to arrive at the same answer. In addition, they were expected to explain the principles that informed the way they came to their answers. Louie felt that moving too rapidly with the implementation of the standards caused tension for teachers and students. This mismatch revealed that the district office personnel might have diminished the impact of the new standards by forcing change too hastily on a department that generally was very positive about the changes in curriculum.

In addition to the contrasting views of how the curriculum should change and at what pace, another area of mismatch was observed in the fact that the teachers were not conversant with the contents of the standards themselves. This circumstance was mentioned by the English teachers and the district office personnel. Selena, one of the

TOAs for language arts, stated that she and her colleague Brad spent much of their time breaking down the standards and studying their implications. However, the teachers felt that they were not given time to do a similar analysis. They felt that their teaching duties did not allow enough time to do a close examination of the standards and consider how they might impact their practices at the classroom level. The teachers' lack of a deep understanding of the standards seemed to be an important obstacle in the implementation process at GVHS. One of the implications of this observation is that the standards are easy to dismiss as either another transient reform or a repackaging of the same kind of reform veteran teachers have seen before. When teachers base their opinions on hearsay rather than their own deep analysis of the standards, it leaves room for misinterpretation or a dismissal of the standards and therefore a less successful implementation.

It became clear that the Common Core reform in general and the writing standards embedded in them elicited a response by some reminiscent of the main criticism of the NCLB. I found the narrowing of the curriculum based on the features included in the assessment was the most common criticism. The observation that districts and teachers focused on math and reading in response to the assessments associated with the NCLB is well-documented (Dee & Jacob, 2010), and it appears that the same type of response took place to some degree in the Orange Grove school district. Similar to the NCLB reform, when the current reform was rolled out, it appeared that, ultimately, the assessments (PARCC, SBACC, and CAASPP) were what drove the changes in curriculum. This situation was taken as an affront to the expertise of some of the teachers, created tension with the historic curricular practices, and served to narrow the curriculum

to focus on the skills that were included in the assessment. The fact that the assessments ultimately governed the contents of the curriculum suggested that the CCSS was perhaps just another iteration of reforms that have been attempted in the past, and may be in danger of a short shelf-life because of it.

In light of the various points of mismatch between the district office personnel's understanding and interpretation of the CCSS-WS with the teachers in the study, the resulting conflicts seemed to have had an effect on the quality of the implementation. The conflict between the district office personnel's sense of responsibility to implement the new standards and the English teacher's belief that what they were doing was already aligned, their feeling that their valued lessons were being threatened, and that their expertise was being ignored created what can be described as an adversarial relationship. Because Kam, Selena, and Brad invested a great deal of time and energy into understanding the standards and then developing curriculum to address the standards, they naturally developed a sense of ownership for the material they developed for insertion into the English curriculum. Two problems arose from their imposition of additions to the curriculum: the English teachers did not trust the expertise of the TOAs and they felt slighted when their opposition to the additions to the curriculum was ignored.

The fact that Selena, one of the TOAs, was a French teacher, created an obstacle for some of the English teachers. Even though Brad was an English teacher, they felt that Selena was the driving force behind the changes to the curriculum and some of the

“arbitrary” insertions of non-fiction pieces. It seemed that the English teachers believed Selena’s choices of works to include in the curriculum were not based on an understanding of how to construct a curriculum for English classes. The non-fiction pieces seemed to come “out of the blue” or had only some vague association with a particular theme. This was a strong point of contention for the English teachers.

Another interesting mismatch between the district office personnel and the English teachers was the talk about a “writing program.” The TOAs and the district curriculum director were adamant about the fact that the district had no formal writing program. This struck me as odd because Kam, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, made conflicting statements about elementary teachers using *Write from the Beginning* (a prepackaged program) and the need to be careful about how they characterize the use of the Jane Schaffer method and the ERWC curriculum. It appears that there was agreement among the district office personnel that officially there was no formal writing program, while at the same time recognizing that there had been historical use of these types of programs and some elements of the programs remained in place. I never could decipher the reason they wanted to be careful about the use of writing programs. I can only surmise that there had been a recent shift in their thinking about writing instruction, and they found programmatic instruction wanting.

The dynamics in the relationship between the district office personnel in the Orange Grove school district and the teachers at GVHS reflect what may be present in many school districts. As people move into district level positions, they sometimes

develop a sense of obligation to exhibit expertise, despite limited or no experience in the many disciplines they are responsible for. The district office personnel may also feel a greater sense of responsibility to effectively implement the new standards, and they seem to take on an identity imbued with authority, even though they may have less knowledge about a discipline than the classroom teachers they supervise. Teachers recognize this attempt to make decisions based on peripheral experience, and can become resentful of this unwarranted expertise in the face of their own genuine expertise. Teachers usually have a history of experience in their discipline, they have invested time and energy developing thoughtful lessons that correspond to a larger curriculum, and they have knowledge of the needs of their students. Naturally, there is resistance from teachers when someone from the district office (or the state) makes curricular decisions that strip away the teacher-developed curriculum that has evolved over time. As well, at times curricular decisions made at the district level make no sense in the context in which teachers work. This adds to their resentment when the latest reform is put in place, as the teachers begin to feel disenfranchised from creating effective curriculum. This resentment can be a factor in what constrains the implementation of a new set of standards or other reforms or at the very least, dampens enthusiasm for the reform.

There were distinct differences in the responses of the English teachers and the math teachers to the demands of the new standards. This difference can be attributed to the differing levels of impact on the curriculum in the respective disciplines. For the English teachers, the new standards added new material to the curriculum. As discussed earlier, the district office personnel interpreted the mandate to include a ratio of 70: 30

fiction-to-non-fiction as peculiar to the English department. This ratio required the English teachers to significantly change the contents of their curriculum. In contrast, the math teachers were only expected to add a new strategy to their teaching repertoire: writing. The level of resistance to the new standards differed between the two departments mainly because the English teachers felt their traditional curriculum was threatened, while the math teachers felt the new strategy of demanding written explanations of mathematical processes was a valuable tool, but not a major curricular change. The difference in impact on the two departments had a marked effect on how they responded to the CCSS.

My study is consistent with much previous literature which finds that implementation of new standards regarding writing tends to narrow instructional focus to those factors that produce the most positive outcomes on standardized assessment, typically formalist notions of correctness, despite beliefs by educators (and the literature) that other epistemological approaches have important value in producing good writing. The use of mass standardized testing of educational outcomes has inherent limitations, in that it is much easier to measure formalist factors than structuralist aspects in writing, and especially easier than dialogic dynamics. Thus this assessment strategy has a powerful effect on curriculum development and pedagogic strategies. Given that the contextual and political influences that impact the implementation of CCSS and other broad standards are unlikely to change, a need is identified to find mass assessment techniques that address the more difficult-to-assess epistemological approaches that are seen by educators as having important value in overall writing competencies. Alternately,

assessment approaches that do not rely on mass testing of educational outcomes (e.g. sampling of school or district students utilizing qualitative or rubric based assessment) should be developed and elevated to have similar funding and political impacts for each school.

Chapter 7: Implications for Future Research

One theoretical implication of this study is to validate the need for a more sociocultural approach to writing and writing assessment (which is an important factor in driving writing curriculum). An argument has been made that the CCSS and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium are primarily informed by a formalist approach which places the emphasis on teaching specific text structures and genres in writing instruction (Beach, 2011), while others have argued for a set of standards and assessments that are aligned with the most current research on writing instruction, a sociocultural approach (Behizadeh, 2014). My study adds to this conversation. In addition, my research provides new knowledge of how the CCSS are enacted in light of the beliefs and attitudes of those who are on the front lines of implementation.

One of the challenges in writing new curriculum standards is to construct them in a manner that is broad enough to apply to multiple contexts and reach as broad an audience as possible, while at the same time developing standards with enough specificity to be useful. To accomplish this balance it is important to consider the actors in the chain of implementation, the social contexts in which the actors operate, and the political climate surrounding the reform effort. A clear idea of the beliefs, values, and attitudes that educators hold about educational practices in general and their discipline specifically can help both in the design and implementation of standards reform. Future research of a broader context (state, region, or nation) of the common educational beliefs,

values and attitudes of potential actors in the implementation would serve to enhance the efficacy of future efforts to reform our educational system.

While my study focused on the response of the adults in the Orange Grove Unified School District to the CCSS-WS, it did not probe students' beliefs about writing, writing instruction and the CCSS-WS impact on their education. The intersection of beliefs between teachers and students about any new reform would lend additional light and be instructive for the implementation of that reform. It is one thing to have insight into what the adults in a school district believe, but we can't forget that their interactions with students are critical and may conflict with student beliefs and ways of adapting to change. The Common Core State Standards were rife with political implications and resistance in some communities was quite strong. I am not aware of any present research that examines how educators' beliefs interact with students' beliefs about the CCSS-WS.

It seems that the CCSS and their continued implementation are subject to the sway of political winds. This does not mean that there will be any shortage of reforms and movements to address the many needs of our educational institutions, and my hope is that in the design phases of future reform, consideration will be given to current research, the day to day realities of those who will be most affected by the reform, and the beliefs, values and attitudes held by those who are expected to participate in implementation.

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