Teachers' orientations towards writing

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Abstract: This study of 29 teachers from four states in the US investigated teachers' orientations towards writing and the influences on their beliefs. Through interviews about writing instruction, the researchers found significant differences between teachers in high and low-income schools. While teachers in high-income schools valued rhetorical style, developing voice, and reading-writing connections, teachers in low-income schools focused on grammar, mechanics and sentence structure. Teachers in high-income schools appear to be exercising more choice in curricular materials and valuing quality of writing beyond grammar and mechanics, whereas teachers in low-income schools are using specific curriculum mandated by the districts. Influences on teachers' orientations included school context, programs and materials, and assessments. The study raises concerns that students in low-income schools are missing out on authentic, challenging, and meaningful writing opportunities since the focus is on skills-based instruction. The findings point to the need for teachers to provide all students with opportunities to develop rhetorical style, voice, and reading-writing connections in addition to grammar, mechanics, and sentence structure.

Keywords: teachers, orientations, writing, beliefs, influences

1. Introduction

Applebee and Langer (2009) report that the technologies for creating texts and developing resources have shifted dramatically in the last 30 years. The National Commission on Writing in American Schools and Colleges (2003) finds that writing is the *Neglected "R"* and that there is a lack of a comprehensive policy on writing, not enough time devoted to writing, inadequate assessment of writing, and not enough professional development. Based on their nationwide survey of the writing practices of teachers in grades 4-6, Gilbert and Graham (2010) recommend that students need to spend more time writing, teachers need a to assign a broader range of writing activities such as persuasive and report writing, teachers need to devote more time to writing instruction, and teachers need to apply more evidence-based practices.

Concurrent with these recommendations about the need for an increased focus on writing, the contexts of schooling are changing to reflect an emphasis on standards and assessment with increasing demands for accountability. The passing of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) in the US in 2001 established increased accountability for states, teachers and students. While proponents of the law suggest that students are making progress, that the achievement gap is closing, and that the accountability system has resulted in under-performing schools being closed, others have suggested that the reality of NCLB is far different from the rhetoric (Gay, 2007), and that NCLB has exacerbated the differences in both learning and motivation among students who attend schools with differing resources (McCaslin, 2006).

Teachers play the key role in implementing standards, tests, and curriculum as they attempt to prepare students for a rapidly changing, global society. Therefore, it is important to document teachers' practices as well as the beliefs, values, and underlying philosophies that guide their instructional decisions (Borg, 2006). Few studies have examined teachers' orientations towards writing or the potential differences between beliefs of teachers who are in high-income schools versus teachers who teach in low-income schools within the current contexts. In addition, there is a need to understand what influences teachers' orientations.

The purpose of this study is to understand how current policy contexts are influencing teachers' orientations towards writing in high-income schools (schools with fewer than 25% students on free lunch) versus low-income schools (more than 75% students on free lunch). Further, data documenting teacher's orientations in schools with differing resources can shed light on policies that may be affecting their orientations.

2. Literature review

2.1 Equity Issues in US Education

Since the 1980s educational researchers have documented inequities in access to high-quality education between students in high-income and low-income schools. For example, Anyon's (1981) study of different schools describes how in the working-class school students experienced fragmented knowledge with a focus on acquiring basic skills, in middle class schools there was focus on recognizing rules, and in the affluent schools students had more exposure to progressive philosophies that provided opportunities to ask questions and build on their own experiences. In his visits to 60 schools, Kozol (2005) documented the high concentration of African American and Latino students in inner cities, and stated that schools in urban areas have become worse in the last 50 years. Lupton's (2005) qualitative study of four schools concluded that schools in the poorest neighborhoods provide a lower quality of education than those in more affluent neighborhoods. Although poverty does not necessarily prevent academic achievement, it does limit opportunities for academic success (Green & Anyon, 2010). To a certain extent, this explains why low-income students continue to score poorly on standardized tests (Lipman, 2004). Thirty years after Anyon's study, Luke (2010) reminds us that current policies reinforce differences in the types of curriculum in different schools:

> Anyon's focus on the construction of distinctive epistemological dispositions has direct relevance to current policy debates over scripted and test-driven instruction. A key lesson is that social class reproduction is not just about limited access to high and low stakes, canonical and revisionist versions of dominant ideological knowledge. It is about how the enacted curriculum, in tandem with overall school ethos effectively structures and codes knowledge differently, in effect constituting different epistemic stances, dispositions and attitudes towards what will count as knowledge. The key policies of scripted, standardized pedagogy risk offering working-class, cultural and linguistic minority students precisely what Anyon presciently described: an enacted curriculum of basic skills, rule recognition and compliance. (pp. 179-180)

Like Luke, Hursh (2005) maintains that the growth of high-stakes testing and increased accountability have contributed to lowered expectations and quality of education rather than achieving the goals set forth by policies such as *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB).

The federal policy was implemented across the US in 2001. To receive federal funding states were required to (a) establish academic content standards, (b) administer standards-based assessments in reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8, (c) employ a single statewide accountability system that measures and reports adequate yearly progress (AYP) of all schools, (d) identify schools for improvement or corrective action, and (e) require teachers to be highly qualified in their subject area (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). The policies and related practices had a number of unintended consequences including lowering teacher morale (Darling-Hammond, 2007), affecting student learning and motivation (McCaslin, 2006), narrowing the curriculum (Center on

Education Policy, 2007), and limiting teachers' abilities to address individual needs (Harper, Platt, Naranjo & Boynton, 2007). Paul (2004) argues that the law is particularly detrimental to Latino and African American students, by relegating them to more special education classes and testing them in ways that are culturally insensitive.

Literacy instruction within the context of high-stakes testing continues to reflect this differential access in the present policy context of NCLB. Cummins (2007) found that Reading First schools, those that have received federal funding to target low-income students, have adopted scripted, teacher-centered curriculum with systematic phonics instruction. He further argues that the curriculum adopted in Reading First schools does not reflect the research that has found that reading engagement rather than skills-based instruction is the most important predictor of reading success (Guthrie, 2004; Long & Gove, 2003). Studies in reading achievement consistently show that higher level questioning, high engagement, and active learning are more effective than routine skills practice or continual explicit phonics instruction (Taboada & Guthrie, 2006; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson & Rodriguez, 2003). Students in urban schools have higher achievement when they are engaged in authentic, challenging work rather than skill-driven tasks (Teale & Gambrell, 2007). While the research on reading instruction demonstrates that students in urban, low-income schools are receiving instruction that focuses more on skills than engagement (Dutro, 2010), little research has investigated differences in the quality of writing instruction in current policy contexts (Gilbert & Graham, 2010; McCarthey, 2008). However, Applebee and Langer (2009) suggest that high-stakes testing, with its on-demand writing tasks, may be restricting students' opportunities to engage in revision processes and write more extended texts. One step towards understanding Applebee and Langer's argument about potential differences in quality of instruction is to examine teachers' attitudes and beliefs about writing that may shape their approaches.

2.2 Teachers' Orientations

As part of the larger construct of teacher cognition, Borg (2006) described theoretical orientations as belief systems and philosophical principles that develop expectations about students and guide decisions about classroom practices. However, definitions of what constitutes an orientation toward writing have not been clearly explicated. Graham, Harris, MacArthur, and Fink (2002) have come the closest to defining orientations by developing an instrument to measure primary grade teachers' theoretical orientations about writing instruction. Their analysis of responses from a nationwide sample of primary grade teachers yielded three distinct dimensions, including beliefs about the role of correctness in students' writing, about explicit instruction, and about natural learning methods. Correctness in writing included copying good models, using correct spelling, labeling grammatical functions, writing a single draft and correcting non-standard English. Explicit writing instruction included studying words, practicing, and teaching the strategies of planning and revising. Natural learning methods included teaching grammar only as the need arises, having students

respond to each-others' writing, prioritizing the composing process over the product, and a belief that students would learn conventions over time. Their study suggested that teachers' orientations were related to classroom writing practices in a predictable and reliable manner. However, even when teachers have claimed to share the same orientation toward writing such as "process writing," they have had different interpretations of the philosophy and practices of that approach (Lipson, Mosenthal, Daniels, & Woodside-Jiron, 2000). In addition, variations in students' abilities and lack of motivation can create challenges that affect teachers' orientations towards writing (Troia & Maddox, 2004).

What is the relationship between teachers' instruction and their views of writing? Troia, Lin, Cohen and Monroe (2011) found that knowledge, beliefs, and values including self-efficacy beliefs and theoretical orientations were one of three factors influencing instructional practices in writing (the other two factors were professional development and personal context variables). Teachers' writing instruction appears to conform to implicit theories according to Berry (2006) who found that some teachers believed a structural approach establishing sequenced, individualized instruction was more effective for special education students while other teachers took a relational approach valuing shared activities and choice. A study of British primary school teachers found there were differences in theoretical orientations between effective teachers and a comparison sample (Poulson, Avramidis Fox, Medwell, & Wray, 2001). Evans (2007) found that collaboration among sixth-grade teachers to develop common assessments, rubrics and exemplars affected their beliefs about students and standards-based writing programs. Their collaboration was an effective tool for professional improvement and changing teachers' orientations.

In contrast to orientations, which tend to reflect systems or theories, the construct of teachers' beliefs tends to be less systematic and organized around specific principles. For example, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has drawn from a variety of research and theoretical frameworks to establish their position statement about teacher beliefs. The statement lays out several principles including, writing can be taught, writing is a process, writing serves many purposes, writing is a tool for thinking, reading and writing are related, assessment involves complex human judgment, composing is embedded in social relationships, and conventions are important for readers and writers ("NCTE Beliefs", 2004). Fang's (1996) review of the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices noted mixed results. While some studies found that consistency between teachers' beliefs and their behaviors in the classroom, others found that the complexities of classroom life including student characteristics and administrative mandates affected teachers' practices and led to inconsistencies between beliefs and practices.

The studies on teachers' orientations suggest that it is an important construct to study because orientations affect practice. Yet, teachers' orientations are not always consistent with their practices due to features such as student abilities, class composition, school context, and social influences (Reutzel & Sudweeks, 2008). Since

federal policies have shifted to prioritize reading over writing and establishing state-wide assessments, these contextual factors may also influence teachers' orientations.

2.3 Contextual Factors

While many states have developed assessments to measure students' progress in writing, the scores do not contribute to whether schools make adequate yearly progress (AYP) since only reading and math scores were considered through 2007. Although writing assessments do not directly affect schools' accountability, the overall policy context of NCLB and state writing standards may affect teachers' writing practices. Hillocks' (2002) study of curriculum and testing in four states found that state standards and prompts in state writing tests influenced teachers' instruction, restricting the types of assignments and the types of texts students wrote. Therefore, it is important to consider the larger policy contexts with the accompanying accountability systems as potential factors in affecting teachers' orientations.

Many districts have adopted commercial reading programs in efforts to comply with state standards. In states such as California (Pease-Alvarez, cited in Cummins, 2007), only scripted programs with an intensive phonics basis have been approved. Textbook publishers have also produced materials in writing that many districts have approved, and in some cases, mandated (McCarthey & Ro, 2011). The National Center for Education and the Economy developed a writing program, *America's Choice: Writer's Advantage*, which offers a sequenced writing curriculum (National Center for Education and the Economy). The program includes "Rituals and Routines" for teaching specific skills and includes both "Genre" and "Author" Studies with lessons and rubrics. *Success for All* (Slavin &Madden, 2001) includes a separate writing component along with its reading program. Calkins and colleagues (2003, 2006) developed *Units of Study* with a focus on specific genres to provide systematic writing instruction in grades K-6. The Six-Trait model (ideas, word choice, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions), which was developed by teachers from rubrics to score student work (Spandel, 2005), has been developed into a specific curriculum--*Write Traits* (Spandel & Hicks, 2004) and published by Harcourt. *Step Up to Writing* (Auman, nd) claims to be a "multisensory" approach to writing that provides a common language, critical thinking, and writing processes. Aligned with Six Traits and State Standards, it includes examples, worksheets, and rubrics. Specific cards with lessons for genres are included using a color-coding system. For example, an expository format uses the following cues: green for *go* to select your topic, yellow to *slow down* and give reasons, read to *stop* and explain, and green for conclusions to *go back* to topic. Specific techniques such as the "Four Square Writing Method" (Gould & Gould, 1999) that are aligned with specific genres as well as state standards have also proliferated. The Painted Essay™ (Leddy, 2003) is a tool for students to focus on specific parts of an essay with colors indicating beginning, middle, and end. This proliferation of programs, materials, and information about writing may have an effect on teachers' orientations.

Understanding the role of materials in teachers' orientations can contribute to understanding one of the contextual features that have an impact on teachers.

The current study drew on the recent work of Graham et al. (2002) to gain an understanding of teachers' orientations towards writing in the current policy context in light of the National Commission's (2003) call to increase focus on writing instruction. Through interviews with teachers in select states in the US, the study can provide data on the concerns and issues related to writing instruction that teachers are grappling with. The study can also contribute to our understanding of contextual factors that inform teachers' theories and practices. The study was undertaken with the following assumptions: First, that policy contexts including assessments and curricular materials influence instruction. Second, that orientations (teachers' beliefs and views of writing) are related to and can provide insights into instruction. Third, based on the literature on equity issues in the US, there may be differences between teachers' orientations in high and low-income schools.

3. Methods

This study was part of a larger study examining teachers' writing instruction in relation to the US national policy *No Child Left Behind*. McCarthey (2008) found that NCLB did have an effect on the amount and quality of writing instruction that teachers experienced in two states. Four approaches to writing instruction occurred in 29 classrooms studied: writer's workshop, traditional skills, genre-based, and hybrid/eclectic (McCarthey & Ro, 2011). The current study extends this work by investigating teachers' orientations and focusing on differences between high-income and low-income schools in four states. The research questions for this study were: What are teachers' orientations towards writing instruction? Are there differences between teachers who teach in high-income (schools with fewer than 25% of students on free or reduced lunch) versus low-income (schools with more than 75% of students on free or reduced lunch) schools? What factors are influencing teachers' orientations?

3.1 State and School Contexts

The four states of Illinois, Utah, Vermont and West Virginia were selected because all had state standards and a state writing assessment. However, they represented diverse geographic settings; had different stances towards NCLB (e.g., Utah had considered opting out of the NCLB money on state versus federal government control issues); and had different histories of assessing writing (e.g., Vermont used portfolio assessment previous to NCLB). Schools that were located in different neighborhoods were selected purposefully to understand what role demographics might play in teachers' views. Brief descriptions of the state and school contexts are included.

Utah schools are held accountable under two systems—one for NCLB, using data from subgroups as required by federal law, and the other from U-PASS, that compares an individual's progress from year to year. All students take criterion-referenced tests

(CRTs) to meet the state standards outlined in the Utah Core Curriculum. Teachers in two schools in the same district participated in the study: *Belleview* (All names of schools and teachers are pseudonyms) was a high-income school, which was located in a middle-to upper-middle class neighborhood; and *Richardson* was a low-income school located in a combined residential-industrial area with modest homes and apartment complexes.

The Illinois Learning Standards for English Language Arts were developed from the 1985 State Goals. The U.S. Department of Education approved Illinois's plan for compliance with NCLB in 2003 and all districts use the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) as the measure of AYP. Three schools participated: *Bailey*, a high-income school located in a wealthy suburb of a major city; *Park*, a low-income school located in an "urban fringe" of a large city, and *King,* another low-income school also located near a large city.

In 2005, Vermont adopted the New England Common Assessment tool to meet the goals of NCLB. Students are tested in reading in grades 3-8 and writing at grades 5 and 8 in accordance with the Grade Level Expectations and the Vermont Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities. Local assessments including portfolios can be used to supplement the criterion-referenced tests. *Bridge School*, a high-income school, was located in a rural area about an hour from a major university.

West Virginia used the criterion-referenced test, West Virginia Education Standards Test (WESTEST), to measure achievement of the West Virginia Content Standards and Objectives. Two schools participated: *Lake School* was a high-income school located in a town near a major university, and *Mountain School*, was a low-income, rural school. Table 1 provides the demographics of the school as well as information about testing and Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). Table 1 displays the demographic school data.

Table 1. State and School Demographics

State	School	Racial Background	% Students on Free/Reduced Lunch	Accountability System	Annual Yearly Progress (AYP)
Illinois	Bailey (Suburban)	89% White, 4% Asian, 4%Hispanic, 1% Black	3% (high-income)	Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) Illinois State Standards	92% made AYP in reading
Illinois	Park (urban fringe)	88% Black, 4% White, 2% Hispanic 2% Asian 4% other	99% (low-income)		59% made AYP in 2004-2005; but not 2005-2006 reconstruction

Illinois	King (urban fringe)	49% Black 45% Hispanic, 5% White	96% (low-income)		48% did not make AYP; reconstruction
Utah	Belleview (city)	76% White, 19% Asian, 3%Hispanic, 1%American Indian 1% Black; 11% LEP	18% (high-income)	2 systems U-PASS Criterion referenced tests Utah Core Curriculum	92% made AYP in reading
Utah	Richardson (residential-industrial)	53% Hispanic 22% White 13% Asian 9% Black 3% American Indian 3% other 48% LEP	88% (low-income)		2 of 3 years did not make AYP 52% passing
Vermont	Bridge (Rural)	97% White; 3% Asian, Black or Hispanic	26% (high-income)	New England Common Assessment; Grade Level Expectations Vermont Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities	74% made AYP in reading
West Virginia	Lake (near city with university)	95% White 2% Black 2% Asian 1% Hispanic	17% (high income)	West Virginia Education Standards Test (WESTEST)	87% made AYP in reading
West Virginia	Mountain (rural)	95% White 5% Black fewer than 1% Asian, Native American or Hispanic	68% (low income)		Made AYP

3.2 Selection Process and Participants

The primary researcher selected districts and schools by first examining data provided by states on the internet to look for contrasts in income levels. She contacted colleagues at universities and school districts to recommend schools that met the criteria of having a large number of students from either high or low-income backgrounds. Next, she contacted districts with schools that had either a large percentage of students who were on free or reduced lunch (75% or more) or few students on free or reduced lunch (25% or less), and explained the study to the district official who made decisions about research.

Third grade teachers were selected because NCLB requires state testing of all students beginning in third grade. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments and state-by-state comparisons begin at the fourth-grade level; thus, fourth-grade has been a popular target for research (Allington & Johnston, 2002). Combining third and fourth grade teachers in a school provided a larger sample of teachers at each school. Once the district personnel and principals agreed, all third and fourth grade teachers at those schools were invited to participate in the study in hopes of getting a range of writing philosophies and practices. All participants were volunteers and were paid $50 for participation. Although the sample is too small to make generalizations about teachers in their states, the teachers were representative of their schools; almost all of the teachers at the third and fourth grade level at each of the eight schools volunteered.

The 29 participating teachers are represented in Table 2. Fifteen teachers were from high-income schools (fewer than 25% students on free lunch) and fourteen teachers were from low-income schools (more than 75% on free lunch). There were twenty-six female participants, three males; twenty-seven White and two African American teachers. Most were experienced teachers with only four teachers having five or fewer years of teaching.

Table 2. Teacher Demographics

Teacher Grade level	Ethnicity, Gender	Highest Degree	Years Teaching
Utah: High- income school			
Marcy, fourth	White, female	MA	29
Lucy, fourth	White, female	MA + 40 (credits)	12
Ruth, fourth	White, female	MS	19
Daniel, third	White, male	MA	21
Sarah, third	White, female	MA equivalent	22
Utah: Low-income school			
Amy, fourth	White, female	MA	23

Kristen, fourth	White, female	MA + 40 (credits)	26
Susan, third	White, female	BA	10
James, third	White, male	BS	5
Illinois: High-income school			
Jackie, fourth	White, female	MA	8
Sally, third	White, female	MA	14
Tom, third	White, male	MA	9
Illinois: Low-income schools			
Sharon, fourth	White, female	BSE	16
Rhonda, fourth	White, female	BA	2
Dana, fourth	White, female	BA	3
Olene, fourth	African American, female	MA	1 as certified
Shauna, fourth	African American, female	BA	20
Brenda, fourth	White, female	BS	14
West Virginia: High-income schools			
Carla, fourth	White, female	BS+	33
Connie, third	White, female	MA	25
Alice, fourth	White, female	Masters	7
West Virginia: Low-income schools			
Anna, fourth	White, female	BA+	8
Mary, fourth	White, female	Masters +	31
Wanda, third	White, female	Masters +	5
Cynthia, third	White, female	BS	8
Vermont: High-income school			
Andrea, fourth	White, female	BA	34
Jill, third	White, female	BA+	33
Sherry, third	White, female	BA+	20
Tierney, fourth	White, female	Masters+	19

3.3 Data Sources

The larger study included interviews with teachers, observations of language arts instruction, and interviews with administrators or instructional leaders. Teachers also completed a demographic form with questions about years of experience and degrees earned. This aspect of the study consisted of a 45-minute semi-structured interview protocol that consisted of questions focused on teachers' curriculum, teachers' writing instruction, and the influences of policies and professional development on their writing instruction. Teachers brought samples of student writing from one high

achieving, one middle achieving, and one low-achieving student to discuss the types of instruction and assessment conducted. (See Appendix A). The interview protocol began with questions about the lesson observed to provide a meaningful context for teachers' responses before focusing on larger questions of curriculum. Activities associated with writing assignments and opportunities to discuss writing elicited information about conferences, small group work, genres of instruction and strategy use. Questions focused on student work provided a context for teachers to discuss their views of writing, individual writers, as well as strategies they would use for teaching students. The final section posed questions about policies, assessment, and views towards NCLB that provided an overall context for understanding teachers' theoretical orientations towards writing. Teachers were specifically asked to describe the influences on their writing practices.

3.4 Data Analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used for analyzing the data. Two researchers (university professor and graduate assistant) began with methods suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) that were appropriate for qualitative inquiry. To instantiate the underlying issue of teachers' theoretical orientations, the researchers used guiding questions to begin analysis: How do teachers describe their writing instruction? On what aspects of writing do teachers focus? What are their underlying views of writing? What are their underlying views of the writer? To analyze the interviews, which were transcribed verbatim by a professional, the researchers created detailed charts that consisted of key words and quotations from the 29 interviews in each of three sections: (a) curriculum including opportunities and activities for writing (b) student work and (c) context using keywords and quotations. The researchers then combined individual teacher charts by school and state using the categories of action/practice, focus of instruction, implicit definition of writing, view of the writer, and influences on instruction.

The researchers then conducted a systematic grouping of beliefs that underlay teachers' instructional choices and beliefs about writing. Key words were identified and the researchers used the following categories: (a) *Developing Structure* was a term that came from the teachers, but the researchers implemented the category to refer to organization including references to "sequencing ideas," "putting things in order" or "using an introduction and conclusion" or "writing a 5-paragraph essay." Teachers also referred to tools they used to teach "structure" including Four-Square or other graphic organizers. (b) *Rhetorical Style* displayed a focus on language and ideas including such terms as "leads," "elaborating ideas," "descriptive language, "use of metaphor," "dialogue," or "writer's craft." (c) *Voice* was a term that teachers used; the closest definition was tied to Spandel's (2005) rubrics where students "express their opinions, emotions, and beliefs." (d) *Reading-Writing Connections* referred to talk about supporting students in connecting reading to writing; it included phrases such as "getting ideas from books and incorporating them into their writing," or "I talk about

the lead in this book so they can use that in their writing." (e) *Grammar and Mechanics* included references to "grammar," "punctuation," "capitalization," and "spelling." These terms were particularly prevalent in discussions about students' writing samples. (f) *Sentence Structure* was a phrase that teachers used to represent a focus on writing "complete sentences," i.e. those with a subject and predicate. The researchers then counted the occurrences of the terms on each teacher's chart. For example, Teacher 1's keywords - "word choice," "leads," "voice," and "organization" - would count for "Rhetorical Style" "Voice" and "Developing Structure," but not for "Grammar/Mechanics." Teacher 2's keywords - "sentence structure," "spelling," and "punctuation" - would count for "Sentence Structure" and "Grammar/Mechanics." Teacher 3's keywords - "voice," "word choice," "sentence structure" - would count for "Rhetorical Style" and "Voice," and "Sentence Structure," but not "Grammar/Mechanics." (Since the interview was semi-structured, each teacher did not necessarily bring up the topics; therefore, terms were only counted when the teachers used them.) The researchers then went back to the transcripts to conduct a search of keywords to ensure that the count was accurate.

Researchers then noted how many teachers from low-income schools and how many from high-income schools used the terms from each category. (These were not done blind: Researchers knew which teachers belonged to which group—a potential limitation of the study). Noting both the similarities across groups (references to Developing Structure) as well as the differences between groups, the researchers then calculated percentages of teachers who used keywords.

Fisher Exact tests were then used to test the differences between the two groups on the five features of writing investigated. Statistical analysis was applied to these multiple separated 2X2 tables one by one. The Fisher's Exact Test was used since 25% of the cells of the table had expected counts less than 5. The null hypothesis was that the response (yes or no) for each writing facet (RS: Rhetorical style; Voice: Voice; RWC: Reading-Writing Connections; GM: Grammar/Mechanics; SS: Sentence Structure) was independent of the income (high or low) of the school at which the teacher taught.

The researchers used examples from the interviews to support (or disconfirm) the patterns, and selected representative quotations. Finally, the researchers applied the framework of Graham et al (2002) to see the ways in which the identified categories cohered into a theoretical orientation, and how those matched with the constructs of correct writing, natural learning methods, and explicit instruction. For example, teachers who focused on Grammar and Mechanics and Sentence Structure had much in common with Graham's construct of correct writing. Teachers who focused more on Rhetorical Style, Voice, and Reading-Writing Connections had more in common with natural learning methods.

To address the question of influences on instruction, the researchers focused on the context section of the analytic charts. The researchers used key words and quotations to create the categories of (a) school context including student demographics and teaching English language learners, (b) programs and materials, and (c) policies including

rubrics, assessment and testing. For each identified theme, representative quotations from the interviews were used to provide evidence of influences on orientations.

4.   Findings and discussion

In answering the research questions: What are teachers' orientations towards teaching writing, the researchers identified one theme, "Developing Structure," that cut across the 29 teachers, and identified some differences between teachers who taught in high-income schools and those who taught in low-income schools.

4.1   Developing Structure

In this analysis *developing structure* refers to "organization," "sequencing ideas," "using topic sentences," and/or "writing a five-paragraph essay." Developing structure may involve the use of graphic organizers and other organizational tools in composing different parts of a piece of writing. Ninety percent of teachers (26 of 29) mentioned structure as an important aspect of writing; however, there were differences in terms of how they discussed teaching it. Several teachers discussed whether their students learned organization through exposure to literature or from having peers comment or teachers respond to their writing. Ruth (UT, HI) pointed out that she taught different kinds of stories because she wanted the students to see different ways of structuring one's writing. She said, "They [students] are reading picture books to look at the structure, and then we're going to read *Dominic* by William Steig, which follows this structure very closely but it's in a novel form so it's a longer story." Marcy (UT, HI) wanted students to notice the way peers started their writing and suggested students think about, "Does it have a strong beginning?" She had students gather together to share their work, emphasizing how to respond, "I'm trying to get the kids to comment in a positive way . . . or they can ask questions if they don't understand something, then the author needs to make it clear." Andrea (VT, HI) noted the lack of organization in one of her student's examples and said, "Yes, and this little girl does struggle with her organization in her writing. And also, this little girl doesn't have like an ending piece." She used "the painted essay" to help the student see how to organize her essay better.

Many teachers tended to use specific formats such as a five-paragraph essay, a painted essay, and an extended response format. In many cases the teachers used graphic organizers to ensure that students got the mental representation of the structures they were teaching. Sally (IL, HI) indicated that she made "sure the children know how to write a 5-paragraph paper." In addition, she pointed out that this was carried out within the framework of the *Step Up to Writing program* that had started about 2 years before. Cynthia (WV, LI) provides another example of teachers following a specific structure. She said, "There is a form that we get that we work with towards the end of third grade and it's called 3.8 paragraph. It's kind of a beginning topic, the details, and then the conclusion – just the basics behind that." Connie (WV, HI) believed that the four-square format was the best way to teach organization, "We just started doing this

four-square thing last year and it's so far the best way to teach it that I have ever seen. *Much* easier, because it is much more directed."

Anna (WV, LI) pointed out that while explicit teaching of structure is beneficial to all students, it is students from low socioeconomic backgrounds that need more of it. She said:

> Our population needs structure. And that's why I think we are falling behind, and our writing hasn't been to the level it needs to be, you know, because our kids need to be told "here is an organizational tool to use" . . . We have very low income population, lot of free and reduced lunch, a lot of, you know, broken homes… They don't have a lot of support at home.

Sharon (IL, LI) shared the view that students needed specific formats to teach organization. She said, "Our children come in, and writing is difficult for them. When you go to the writing, they use a lot of the four-square writing, which helps 'cause our kids seem to need more of an organizer to get them to write and to organize their thoughts."

In sum, the majority of the teachers included structure in their writing instruction, believing it was one of the most important aspects of students' writing. Teachers' descriptions of the need for "structure" appears to align with Graham and colleagues' (2002) construct of explicit instruction in which teachers believe they need to teach strategies, and that students need opportunities to practice as well as specific instruction to learn to write. However, differences in orientations between teachers who taught in different settings were evident in an analysis of other features of writing.

4.2 Differences between High and Low-Income Schools

The major research question of: Are there differences between teachers' orientations in high and low-income schools was subdivided in order to analyze the following categories: (a) developing rhetorical style, (b) fostering voice, (c) highlighting reading-writing connections, (d) emphasizing grammar and mechanics, and (e) focusing on sentence construction.

The qualitative data indicated that the focus of the teachers from high-income schools seemed to align with Graham and colleagues' (2002) construct of natural learning methods. The teachers did not focus on grammar except in the context of students' writing, and they focused more on the composing process with expectations that students would complete more than one draft. This orientation was reflected in their talk about three features: developing rhetorical style, voice, and reading/writing connections.

4.2.1 Developing rhetorical style

By rhetorical style we refer to terms teachers used such as "development of ideas," "elaboration of ideas," "use of dialogue," "metaphorical language," and "word choice." These terms are linked by a focus on language features that go beyond grammar and punctuation. When analyzing teachers' interviews about the inclusion of

rhetorical styles or features in their writing instruction and students' learning, we found that 86% (13 of 15) of teachers from high-income schools focused on this feature of writing, compared to 42% (6 out of 14) of teachers from low income-schools who mentioned any one of these features. There was a significant difference between the teachers in high-income and low-income schools on the feature of rhetorical style (RS). Fisher's exact test showed that the odds for the teachers at high-income schools to focus on rhetorical style was 8.7 (95% CI (1.4, 53.8)) times the odds for the teachers at low-income schools to do so (p=.02).

The qualitative analysis supports this finding by pointing out that teachers from high-income schools focused on students' ideas. For example, Marcy (UT, HI) said, "But for my low kids, that's probably the struggle, is the ideas. I use literature to help them get ideas. I try to read a book. I used to do a news story almost every day." Similarly, Lucy (UT, HI) used texts to get students to generate ideas: "I am going to do a mini lesson . . . . Focus is on developing ideas . . . . So we start with ideas, then organization, and then move to voice." Ruth (UT, HI) added that ideas need to be developed as students provide more details. She said, "We can go into the writing details, like you've got the character who's got to be fleshed out and described." In addition to developing ideas and details, some teachers pointed out that it is important that students learn to use a variety of leads or hooks. Andrea (VT, HI) provided examples in which students had used various leads:

> And just looking for different hooks that the children started with. So I have one little boy here. He started with a quote. "What kind of land do we want? That is what Solomon asked his father when they were searching for land." So then, it kind of leads us into the name of the book and then the background information. I have another little boy here that started with, "Timber! Oh, I was so involved watching Solomon cutting down trees." So then, it just goes into the background information about how they cut their trees and culled the land. So he started with the sound. . . So we've done a unit on trying to utilize different kinds of hooks in our writing.

"Word choice" was another feature of rhetorical style that teachers from high-income schools discussed. Jackie (IL, HI) indicated that she discouraged students from using dry words, "not just pretty dry and straight-forward, but it's choosing maybe some more unusual words instead of saying 'said,' it's 'yelled.'" Similarly, Sarah (UT, HI) stressed that it is important that students use interesting synonyms in their writing; thus, she encouraged students to use a thesaurus:

> I'm getting kids to look at a thesaurus as a reference tool . . . I changed all the words, so it was great, great, great. Out of the five sentences, there were five times we used "great" as an adjective . . . We looked up the word "great." And we found other words that would go with that word that you could use instead of great.

Lucy (UT, HI) provided an example in which one of her students had used rich and clear descriptive words. Initially, the student had written the following sentence: "We rented a car and went to our hotel." However, after being encouraged to develop it more, she ended up with this sentence: "The car we rented was a new, silver, comfy

van. Our new van was not the best ever, but it was a step up from our old, red, filthy, broken family car."

4.2.2 Fostering voice

Voice includes the ways in which students feature themselves in writing by using the first-person or by the manner in which students express their opinions, emotions, and beliefs about a topic (Spandel, 2005; Sperling & Appleman, 2011). Sixty percent of the teachers (9 of 15) from high-income schools reported focusing on voice, while only 14% (2 of 14) teachers from low-income schools mentioned voice in their talk about writing. Fisher's exact test showed that the odds for the teachers at high income schools to focus on Voice was 9.0 (95% (CI 1.5, 55.5)) times of that for the teachers from low-income schools to do so (p=.02).

The qualitative data provide some examples of the value teachers from high-income schools placed on voice. Jackie (IL, HI) said, "To me, voice in a 4th grader is being able to get a sense more of who's writing the piece, that this is not just pretty dry and straight-forward." Sarah (UT, HI) echoed a similar view, "Probably, the one thing I look at more than anything for me is voice, because I think that's so subjective, and that's the hardest thing to teach." Tierney (VT, HI) read aloud a student's text in which the author provided details and shared her opinion and feelings about what she liked as an example of including voice.

Marcy (UT, HI) expressed the view that it is difficult to teach voice, but used activities to help students infuse voice into their writing. For example, she used literature to assist students to see how writers incorporate voice in authentic and meaningful conversations. She said:

> The kids pick up on the language of what I want them to start talking about when they're in groups. Do you see a good beginning? Or you see the writer's voice? You can't make comments like 'I liked it – it was good.' I try to get them to be more specific about that kind of thing.

Like Marcy, Lucy (UT, HI) indicated that she also read texts to students to encourage students to think about how voice was used by the characters to express their opinions and feelings. One of the books she used, *Voices in the Park* (Browne, 1998), featured four people visiting the park: the bossy woman, the frustrated man, the lonely boy, and the vivacious girl. As the story unfolds each of these characters presents his or her own voice and perspective about the park that are infused in the landscape and seasons. Lucy wanted to make the point that students could use different voices even if they wrote about the same topic.

Several teachers were blending voice with other features such as creativity, word choice and leads. For example, Sarah (UT, HI) said, "I think voice comes with creativity, and I see the kids that give themselves permission to take off and do this, not Randy, who is still thinking outwardly. But kids like Sharon and Rebecca, who just pull

– who just fall into their imagination and go with it. And this is a vehicle for that." Lucy (UT, HI) added the role of word choice in bringing out one's voice about a topic:

> And we just finished the whole class [inaudible] and listened to Lavar Burton on tape. And he's so fabulous, and we read it. And then, they followed along and we talked about it, and they really got the voice perception, where before, I don't even think they realized that, like what made the story more interesting or what words did he use? What were some of the stories, you know, that he brought to life through those characters?

Furthermore, some teachers commented that the students used exclamations and questions to lead readers into understanding how writers position themselves in relation to the text and audience. Andrea (VT, HI) shared how some of her students used "leads" with different sentence constructions to express voice and to engage readers. The teachers who talked about voice found it central to writing.

4.2.3 Highlighting reading-writing connections

Our findings revealed that while 50% of teachers (7 out of 14) from low-income schools incorporated activities in which reading was explicitly connected to their writing instruction, it was mainly the teachers from high-income schools (80% or 12 out of 15) who did so. However, this was not a statistically significant difference (Fisher's exact test, p=.13).

The qualitative analysis, however, provides examples of teachers' use of literature for writing instruction. Lucy (UT, HI) reported that she used the book *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Golden, 1997) because, "There's just some really good, excellent writing in that book, so vivid and so wonderful. You start to kind of see that come alive in there, a little piece." Furthermore, some teachers indicated that they used literature for explicit instruction of certain writing features. Marcy (UT, HI) indicated that literature helped her with the teaching of the writing traits. She said, "I can use literature that has good examples of all of those things [six traits]. Five years ago I don't think I ever talked about word choice, or I didn't talk about voice and getting your personality into it. I never talked about leads. I use literature more as good models for my kids in their writing." Andrea (VT, HI) reported that she encouraged the students to identify figurative language used in some of the texts and to apply it in their own writing, "We've also been working on similes and personification, and I think the children are doing really well with that. If I'm reading them a book, somebody will say, 'Look! That's personification' or something like that."

Not only did the teachers use print materials, they also considered other forms of media such as the internet and storytelling. Jackie (IL, HI) encouraged her students to integrate the internet into her teaching of writing. She said, "I might have them [students] read some material on the internet or additional material and choose something for them to write an essay about. What did you enjoy learning about colonial America? So we do that, trying to incorporate to other subjects, but still reach for those same standards in writing." Other teachers also incorporated reading and writing into content area subjects. Sherry (VT, HI) said, "We write during reading. We

write during math. We write during the content areas and also write during a specific writing time, which is what you observed today." Carla (WV, HI) echoed this integration, "I think that they can learn reading also through social studies and writing and all the other things. So it's not just that this is history and nothing else." Most of the time the integration of writing into content-area subjects occurred when teachers were using thematic units. They expressed the view that writing and reading cannot be separated if students are going to be effective and successful writers.

The emphasis by high-income teachers on rhetorical style and voice were statistically significant as well as supported by the qualitative analysis. While the emphasis on reading-writing connections between the two groups did not have statistical significance, the examples from the teachers from high-income schools showed the ways in which they valued and integrated literature. Thus, their orientations towards writing were more in line with NCTE's position on effective writing (2004) than on skills-focused orientation. In addition, their views reflected some of the evidence-based practices such as creativity/imagery instruction, strategy instruction, and using models of teaching writing that improve student writing (Graham, McKeown, Kiuhare, & Harris, 2012; Graham & Perin, 2007).

In contrast, the low-income schools tended to align with Graham and colleagues' (2002) description of "correctness" with a focus on lower-level skills. Teachers in the low-income schools reflected a view of writing as a set of skills needed to be mastered before moving onto more complex constructions. This orientation was reflected in their focus on two aspects of writing: grammar/mechanics and sentence construction. According to Graham et al.'s meta-analysis, grammar instruction does not have a significant effect on the quality of student writing.

4.2.4 Emphasizing grammar and mechanics

Only 26% (4 of 15) of the teachers in high-income schools discussed a need for focusing on grammar and developing writing conventions as a major part of teaching writing to their students, whereas in low-income schools this was one of the dominant themes. The majority (71%) of the teachers in low-income schools (10 out of 14) indicated that in order for students to write well they needed to master grammar and punctuation. Fisher's exact test showed that the odds for the teachers from high-income schools to focus on Grammar/Mechanics is .15 times, (95% CI (.03, .74), the odds for the teachers at low-income schools (p=.03).

The qualitative data provides examples of the ways in which teachers from low-income schools tended to focus on grammar and mechanics. Rhonda (IL, LI) cited a student who had effective grammar and punctuation as one of her good writers. She said, "My highest writer is Lamaya. She has really good grammar skills. She likes to write a lot of realistic fiction, or just fiction . . . With her, it's just a matter of, you know, cleaning up the punctuation, and that's all." Susan (UT, LI) expressed a similar view, "I'm looking probably much more towards spelling and punctuation and

complete sentences and things like that." Likewise, Shauna (IL, LI) said, "I always look at the sentences and make sure they have good punctuation, grammar, spelling of the sentences that they're writing, punctuation, to make sure that the sentences make sense." When she described a student she considered to be a poor writer she made no mention of meaning, but explained that the student "has some problems with a lot of grammar. You see, he spelled 'friends' wrong. He didn't put the 'e' on 'make.' He doesn't put periods really at the end of his sentences."

When asked what makes good writers different from poor writers, Cynthia's (WV, LI) reply was that poor writers cannot use basic writing conventions properly: "They don't even have periods or capitals so that is [how] my low and high differ." Mary (WV, LI) indicated that she spent most of the writing instruction time focusing on editing, "I usually start out with interactive edit where they make corrections, things that have to do with grammar." She did not make any mention of the ideas that the students were trying to convey.

However, it is important to point out that whereas the majority of the teachers from low-income schools emphasized writing conventions, there were a few who did not feel constrained by these writing features. For example, Amy (UT, LI), who followed a writer's workshop format, made no mention of grammar or punctuation. For her, writing is about students exploring their ideas. She indicated that she encouraged her students to write freely: "Write whatever is on your mind. I'm not going to go back through and edit everything. I'm not going to use that for my coaching plays." In fact, she explained that this approach is contrary to her earlier approach to writing instruction where she used to spend a lot of time doing "Spelling, worksheets . . . copying down the sentence and putting on a period, exclamation point, or question mark." Susan (UT, LI) stressed that in addition to using appropriate conventions such as capitalization, punctuation, and spelling, good writers also need to focus on the message or content: "They [good writers] are more aware of the subtleties in what an author has presented on paper."

4.2.5 Focusing on sentence structure

By "sentence structure" the teachers seemed to mean forming complete sentences with a subject and predicate, and understanding parts of speech to use them appropriately in writing. Focusing on "run on sentences" was also part of the definition of "sentence structure." The analysis shows that the majority (79%) of the teachers from low-income schools (11 out of 14 teachers) considered teaching sentence construction as important. Fisher's exact test showed that the odds for the teachers from high-income schools to focus on Sentence Structure was .07 times (95% CI (.01, .4)) the odds for the teachers from low-income schools (p <.02).

The qualitative analysis provides examples of how the teachers considered and taught sentence structure. To Kristen (UT, LI) sentence construction was so important that she spent one day of the week focusing on it. She reported that she encouraged the

students to do sentence diagramming: "And one day it's just diagramming sentences on the white board, and they could do that all day. They love to diagram sentences." Shauna (IL, LI) explained that sentence construction is important, especially helping students to identify and reduce "run-on sentences." When talking about some of the differences in the writing of good and poor writers, she pointed out that run-on sentences were more common among poor writers. She illustrated this point by using one of her poor writers: "This is one of my students, Timothy. He had some problems with a lot of grammar . ... He has a lot of run-on sentences." James (UT, LI) echoed a similar view: "The students who haven't mastered the language as much write a lot of run-on sentences. .. So if you flip through their writing, a lot of the writing sounds the same because they're using that same vocabulary over and over again."

Olene (IL, LI) felt that the number of sentences counted, especially in the early stages of writing development. She explained, "Each paragraph must have at least five sentences to make a paragraph even though the standard may be three." According to Mary (WV, LI) students need to focus on five sentences and not "worry about paragraphs, or indenting" at least in the initial stages of writing. She further explained that once she is satisfied that the students have properly written five sentences they can then start working on "one paragraph and then we will slowly move up to the five paragraphs."

Another concern of some of the teachers was the smooth flow of sentences. Dana (IL, LI) pointed out that while most of her students were able to write complete sentences and knew where one sentence started and where it ended, she was worried that they were struggling with the flow of sentences because of their weakness in using transitions. Olene (IL, LI) pointed out that most of her students "don't use it [transition] because I think it's new."

4.2.6 Summary

Both the quantitative data and the qualitative data demonstrate that teachers in high-income schools placed value on different features of writing than teachers in low-income schools. The differences in orientation may be explained in terms of the demographics of student populations, i.e., teachers in low-income schools felt that students needed to master grammar and punctuation and sentence structure before they could add voice or be concerned with elaborating ideas, while teachers in high-income schools felt that students had already mastered grammar and could construct sentences. Our data do not necessarily account for why teachers in low-income and high-income schools had differing orientations. However, our analysis suggests that the changing contexts of student demographics, curricular programs and materials, and assessments shaped teachers' orientations.

4.3 Influences on Teachers' Orientations

To answer the question: What shaped teachers' orientations towards writing, the researchers identified three categories of influences: (a) School Context including changing demographics and increasing numbers of ELLS, (b) Programs and Materials, and (c) Policies and Assessment.

4.3.1 School context

One of the major influences on teachers' orientations towards writing was the school context including the status as a high or low-income school, and the increasing number of English language learners (ELLs) in the school. Most teachers brought up the topic of the demographics of the students they taught and how the population affected their teaching. Teachers in high-income schools felt sheltered from some of the pressures of their colleagues in other schools and noted that their students were quite prepared for tests. For example, Marcy (UT, HI) stated, " The kids, when they come here, are very prepared," while her colleague, Ruth, said, "I don't (feel pressure) because it's a high-achieving school. For the most part they always do fine." Tom (IL, HI) described his school demographics in this way, "We're a Wonder Bread school here. For the most part here, everybody is pretty with it, the families are intact. We don't have that many problems."

In contrast, teachers in low-income schools felt increased pressure to pass tests rather than engage in thoughtful writing instruction. Dana (IL, LI) taught in a low-income school on the "watch list" and described how it affected her teaching:

> Being on the watch list and being in reconstruction, you know, people think, oh, this is a terrible school . . . And it just puts a bad picture out of what we really do here . . . And especially the lower you go, there's more you need to do, so you're more focused on getting ready, doing all these reconstruction plans and all these things. And you don't have much time to focus on the teaching of the skills.

The contrasts in school settings affected teachers' morale, which, in turn, seemed to influence their orientations towards students and instruction. In addition, the changing demographics with the increased number of English language learners in schools influenced teachers' beliefs. Almost half (48%) of the teachers (14 out of 29) noted the increased number of English Language Learners (ELLs) in their classrooms. Almost all of the low-income schools had a significant number of ELLS, while only one high-income school, Belleview, had ELLs. Teachers' ideas about addressing students' needs varied from having low expectations to being uncertain to being supportive. For example, Amy (UT, LI) expressed the view that she did not expect ELLs to do well in writing because of their ELL status. For her, being an ELL was an automatic barrier to high academic performance illustrated in her comment about one of the students whom she described as one of her best students: "The reason I'm calling her medium, she's very bright, but she's a second-language child." Cynthia (WV, LI) shared this view when she stated she would use the same strategies to help ELLs as she would struggling writers in

general, "the ESL strategies and materials work very well with some of our struggling readers, because they are just good strategies. So, we are using those as we need to." While some classroom teachers might share her views, researchers who focus on teaching ELLs are suggesting that using the same strategies with ELLS as struggling writers is a misconception that is detrimental to ELLs (Harper & de Jong, 2007).

Several of the teachers felt at a loss as to how to address the needs of ELLs, but some teachers showed respect for cultural and linguistic resources that ELLs brought into the classroom. For example, when talking about how he was using literature to teach writing, James (UT, LI) indicated that he tried to "contextualize the literature and the writing for them [ELLs] much more to bring out their background knowledge so they feel more comfortable." In her thematic unit about dragons, Sarah (UT, HI) encouraged the students to draw from their knowledge of dragons in their culture and incorporate it into their writing. She said:

> I have non-English-speaking kids, especially from Korea, that come, but also Taiwan and China, and you know, so New Year's is great, dragons from the East. They have all kinds of, like I said, attributes, and they can speak to that. . . I mean, the more—it's just what kids are made of, you know? Building on students' cultural knowledge.

In addition, some of the teachers described the activities they used to support the writing development of ELLs. Most of the activities involved scaffolding the students through the use of graphic organizers and other tools. Kristen (UT, LI) used specific tools to help her ELLs, saying:

> I try to involve all the senses: taste and sight and sound. And I do a lot of visual. And so, it helps second-language learners, if they don't know what a word means, if they see a picture of it, or if they taste it, they can make an association with it. We write every single day. We either do journal writing or we do a response to something that's happening in the environment.

Whereas most of the teachers indicated that they did not have adequate preparation for teaching ELLs, James (UT, LI) was the only one who mentioned that he was an ESL certified teacher. He explained that this background was helping him with teaching ELLs, "I think I'm up-to-date on current practices. I've read a lot of research and I'm very willing to try things if I feel like the research supports the purpose of using certain practices in your classroom."

The teachers also described their frustrations with the way in which ELLs were assessed. They indicated that they did not think that it was fair for the students to be measured according to the same standards as other students especially if they had just arrived. Marcy (UT, HI) argued that "It's not fair that kids that arrive from China are tested 2 days after they arrive and they're averaged in our scores . . . It's not testing the same kids." Susan (UT, LI) complained that testing ELLs when they are not ready does not help to improve writing instruction. She said:

> I have to give them 3rd grade, and I know that they're going into this test, and they're not able to do it. Their sophistication of language, their understanding of our language and things, they're not there yet, and I know they're going to go in with a disadvantage.

In summary, teachers believed that the increase in the number of ELLs influenced their teaching of writing, and they varied in their views for addressing the needs. While some had developed activities and strategies to work with ELLs, others felt that they were not prepared adequately. Most teachers agreed that they were unhappy that ELLs' scores counted towards AYP and felt the assessment measures were inadequate. The findings link to Harper and de Jong's (2004) argument that English language learners are the fastest growing population in the US, and that few teachers have the knowledge and skills to address ELLs' needs.

4.3.2 Programs and materials

Another contextual factor that influenced teachers' orientations towards writing was the programs and materials they used. Teachers often cited particular programs that they used or named books that influenced their views of writing. For example, teachers in Utah mentioned Six Traits as having a powerful effect on their teaching. Marcy (HI) said, "I think I do a better job at – because of the six traits. I can teach – these are more specific to me than just having them do writing plans." In Vermont, teachers mentioned the "Painted Essay" as a method that influenced their instruction. Tierney (HI) stated, "Painted Essay is really an organizational tool that the school has been trained in, but it's really a way for children to organize their writing into an introductory paragraph that has a hook, background information, depending on the genre [inaudible] writing." Her use of this tool affected the ways in which she thought about her instruction. In West Virginia schools, several teachers used the "Four Square Writing Method" (Gould & Gould, 1999) and believed that had a significant effect on their instruction. Connie (HI) used a number of materials but liked the Four Square saying, "I have all kinds of books on how to write a paragraph and how to write a story . . . I have tried different ways to do it and I just think with this way they see the big picture with it, with the four squares. They see what the end result is going to be and you can break it up." Teachers in the high-income Illinois school used the *Step-Up to Writing* program and mentioned that as an influence on their work. Sally said:

> We work with a program called *Step Up to Writing*. And district-wide we've kind of embraced that, which is new the past few years. It helps more than anything to develop a common language so that kids see the colors and they realize what you're expecting of them, so that every year they're not having to learn a new term necessarily for what you're expecting.

In the low-income schools in Illinois, teachers were mandated to use particular writing programs: *America's Choice* in one of the schools and a basal reading program in the other. Dana's description of her teaching of writing reflected the scripted nature of the program. She said:

> *America's Choice*, so it's all about artifacts and children being able to look around the room and use the information on the wall to help them. So we have our writing section, and it has rubrics that they use with narrative writing we have, to make sure you follow these steps and just write down there. We have the writing process, with the first step.

> Then, what do you do after that? And then, we have ways to begin. We have ways to begin a story.

The influence of materials on teachers' orientations was reflected in the ways teachers talked about writing. Whether it was *Six Traits*, *Step up to Writing*, or *America's Choice,* teachers tended to use the language of the program in descriptions of their teaching. The materials tend to have embedded messages about what aspects of writing are important. For example, *Six Traits* (Spandel, 2005) focuses on the elements of "good writing" including ideas, word choice, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions. Companies and research laboratories have become affiliated with Six Traits to market resources, lesson plans, and rubrics:

> The 6+1 Trait® Writing framework is a powerful way to learn and use a common language to refer to characteristics of writing as well as create a common vision of what 'good' writing looks like. Teachers and students can use the 6+1 Trait model to pinpoint areas of strength and weakness as they continue to focus on improved writing. (Education North West)

Whereas 6+1 Traits describes itself as having a "framework," other resources such as *Step Up to Writing* (Auman, nd), which integrates the six traits with specific models of texts, and *America's Choice* describe themselves as all-inclusive programs that teach writing. Implicit in the programs is that teachers need lesson plans, models, worksheets and rubrics to teach writing. While the programs include "process models" for prewriting, composing, and revising (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1994), the programs vary in terms of how much they provide a specific script for teachers to follow. In their appeal to provide explicit instruction, they appear to share a view of writing as a list of steps to follow and traits to emulate. From the analysis it appears that these models are affecting teachers' beliefs about writing instruction.

However, what was also evident from the interviews with teachers was that some schools provided teachers with choices about the materials they used, while others imposed a specific curriculum. While the teachers in the high-income schools in Utah, Vermont, Illinois, and West Virginia often came together as school communities and talked about the curriculum, teachers in low-income school in Illinois were mandated to use particular programs such as *Writer's Advantage*, the writing component of America's Choice. The role of choice in materials was also reflected in the overall influences of policies and standards on teachers' orientations.

4.3.3 Rubrics and assessments

Rubrics and assessments embedded within the larger policies of State Standards and NCLB also influenced teachers' orientations. Rubrics have been recommended for reducing variation in grading practices, making judgments about whether students have mastered specific skills, and evaluating the effectiveness of a program (Spandel, 2006). In the Illinois high-income school, the teachers met together in grade level teams to develop their own rubrics to reduce variation in grading. Jackie (IL, HI) explained,

> Yes, in creating this [rubric] really liberated me because I really tried to get away from saying, "I really like that," because – although that's great – it's meaningless and it doesn't help them improve, or to see what's weak, and it doesn't help me being more objective in what I'm reading. So we worked in the very beginning a lot with blind papers – giving someone else papers and saying, "how would you score this?"

Teachers in Vermont also developed rubrics for each of their genres that they shared with the students. The rubrics came from the State Standards, "Great Expectations" and Tierney found that they strongly influenced her teaching; she said, "And [I] have sort of used it [Standards] to really dictate what I'm doing."

In several schools, rubrics were not just guidelines but were an integral part of the writing instruction. Sharon (IL, LI) indicated that her reliance on the rubric was largely due to the packaged program the school was following: "I'm not crazy about the *America's Choice* writing program . . . They have their own structure they want you to follow." Like Sharon, Dana (IL, LI) reported that the writing program had a significant impact on her use of rubrics:

> Yeah, they had that in there. *America's Choice*, they give you like the first 30 days where you're supposed to do it first, and then, they give you ideas for rubrics and things. And then, you do it with the kids, too, tell them what you think an A paper would look like, so then, they know. Like with this, you're supposed to do it with them, so they'll know exactly what is expected of them.

The idea that rubrics helped some of the teachers to check off important points in their writing instruction was also echoed by Olene (IL, LI). She explained that she sat down with the students and helped them see what had been included and what had been omitted, "I've given them rubrics in the past, and I'm looking for this, I'm looking for this, and I check that off, and I sit there with them and I say, 'Do you have this or do you have that?'" Anna (WV, LI) described a similar practice "So…and we have a rubric that works. How we score the writing, so we pretty much teach the way that they want to score…you know…like this is what they expect to see…. So this is what we teach the kids to put in their writing."

Rubrics, whether developed by teachers in a school or implemented as part of a packaged program, were part of a trend towards increased use of assessment and testing in writing. To be in compliance with *No Child Left Behind*, states had to develop statewide assessment systems. The four states studied all had State Writing Standards and writing tests that appeared to influence teachers' approaches to writing (McCarthey & Ro, 2011). These assessments also influenced teachers' views of writing. Even when students scored well on the tests, teachers felt that assessments mattered. Carla (WV, HI) stated, "We always do fairly well on the writing assessments . . .It's a big push to do well and something that we feel is important." Teachers did not necessarily have negative views of the tests, but they did find that it affected how they thought about writing. Carla elaborated:

> In the writing assessment the students are graded in, I think, six areas. They are graded on things like using transitions; having a beginning, middle, and end; using interesting vocabulary; using more complex sentences. For some students, in my opinion, it is a little

> demanding for some 4th grade students, but on the other hand I can't deny that it has been helpful to everybody. So even though it is a lot of work for the teacher, because I'll meet with the students individually, and we do a lot of proof reading and rewriting. It is a lot of work and very time consuming, but I have to say I have seen results. I think the kids are a lot better writers. And just because they are starting it in lower grades I have seen a lot of definite change.

Some teachers changed their curriculum to do certain writing tasks after the state tests. For example, Connie (WV, LI) said, "There are some things that we will do after the test that I can't really do before and really spend some time on." The state tests also affected teachers' morale and willingness to teach outside the curriculum. Kristen (UT, LI) said, "It (state tests) affects the morale of the teachers here. It affects how teachers teach, because if I was a younger teacher, I would be worried." She explained that she would be worried about losing her job if the school did not meet AYP. Shauna (IL, LI) spent most of her time preparing students for the reading portion of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT), and noted that little of the writing response portion counted, "The reason we don't focus as much on the writing is because we're looking at the ISAT, and the ISAT—their response counts as only like 7%, something like that." Therefore, she did not spend much time on writing, and, the time she spent was on the response section of the test.

The data from the interviews indicates that school context, programs and materials, and the larger context of policies and assessments influenced teachers' beliefs about writing instruction. This analysis indicates that teachers' orientations do not occur in a vacuum; that is, contextual features such as school demographics, materials they have access to, and the larger social and political contexts shape their beliefs.

5. Conclusion

From the analysis of teachers' interviews about writing instruction, it is clear that teachers shared the view that providing structure for students' writing was important. Teachers embraced ideas such as teaching students to organize their writing, to sequence it, and to use topic sentences. Many teachers had adopted the use of graphic organizers and other formats to specifically teach organization. The emphasis on structure builds on Graham et al's (2002) finding that most teachers find a need for explicit instruction in writing. Organization appears to be one of these aspects of explicit instruction that is shared by teachers. However, the interview data suggest that teachers vary in how they enact this view—while some teachers believed that using models from literature could provide the support students need, others found that specific graphic organizers and formats such as "Painted Essay" were necessary. This finding suggests that becoming more explicit in teaching writing is cutting across groups, and that procedural facilitation of writing is gaining some momentum in line with evidence-based practice of scaffolding (Graham & Perin, 2007). However, there is a continuum of teachers' beliefs about the role of structure and explicit instruction in learning to write.

The analysis also found that teachers in different school settings placed value on different elements of writing. Developing rhetorical style, fostering voice, and highlighting reading-writing connections were important to teachers at high-income schools. Teachers' beliefs that these were the important aspects of writing and instruction seem aligned with a natural learning orientation (Graham et al., 2002), and have some relationship to aspects of the process writing approaches that focus on providing frequent opportunities to write for an audience in a supportive environment (Graham & Perin, 2007). These features also align with effective practices such as creativity/imagery instruction that are important for elementary students (Graham et al., 2002). In contrast, teachers in low-income schools tended to emphasize grammar and mechanics and sentence construction, aspects that are more aligned with "the correctness" orientation (Graham et al., 2002). This orientation harkens back to the skill and drill focus criticized by many (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1994) in which practicing conventions supersedes the process of planning, drafting and revising with support from teachers. This orientation is in striking contrast to effective practices such as teaching strategies for planning and revising, having students write increasingly more complex sentences, developing inquiry, or providing models for writing in a variety of genres (Graham et al, 2012; Graham & Perin, 2007).

The contrast between what the teachers in high-income versus low-income schools valued in writing instruction raises concerns about the differing expectations that teachers have for students in schools located in different neighborhoods. On the one hand, one might argue that teachers in the low-income schools were addressing the perceived needs of their students. The demographic data show that students in the low-income schools were more ethnically and linguistically diverse than their counterparts in high-income schools that served primary white students who lived in the suburbs. On the other hand, the data suggest that teachers in the low-income schools are reinforcing a basic skills orientation using scripted curriculum (e.g., America's Choice) that resembles the teacher-centered reading curriculum in Reading First schools (Cummins, 2007); teachers in high-income schools appear to be exercising more choice in curricular materials, and valuing quality of writing beyond grammar and mechanics. This raises a concern that students in low-income schools are missing out on an authentic, challenging writing curriculum, similar to a reading curriculum that is high quality and engaging (Taylor et al, 2003; Teale & Gambrell, 2007).

Teachers in both high and low-income schools cited their populations as an important influence on their instruction. The teachers who had ELLs, for example, discussed how they struggled to meet their needs in writing. Therefore, there are a variety of factors that might account for differences between teachers' orientations in high and low-income schools. However, the findings raise concerns that students in low-income schools might be receiving the types of writing instruction that Luke (2010) fears—scripted, basic skills-oriented that will simply reinforce disparities among curriculum in different schools (Anyon, 1981). The data point to the need to consider student demographics and help new and practicing teachers understand the needs of

students from increasingly diverse backgrounds. The findings also point to the need for assisting teachers in considering a broader range of qualities of writing: All students should have opportunities to write in different genres for audiences and get support for considering rhetorical style, voice and reading -writing connections in addition to grammar, mechanics, and sentence structure. Providing these opportunities will align with evidence-based practices that have the potential for all students to succeed in writing (Graham & Perin, 2007).

The finding that demographics, materials, and assessments influence teachers' orientations towards writing links with previous studies that noted the role of context in shaping teachers' orientations (Berry, 2006; Reutzel & Sudweeks, 2008; Troia, Lin, Cohen & Monroe, 2011; Troia & Maddox, 2004). It updates and extends this research by identifying some of the trends in writing instruction including the use of frameworks such as Six Traits (Spandel, 2005) and materials that teachers rely on including specific formats for writing. The plethora of books and materials that claim to promote qualities of "good writing" are having an effect on how teachers think about writing. Therefore, we need to conduct closer analyses of the textbooks including the underlying assumptions as well as the activities promoted to teach writing.

The interviews with teachers demonstrated that various types of assessments from rubrics to state assessments are influencing teachers' views of writing. The increased use of rubrics indicates that teachers are looking for ways to judge writing in a more systematic way (Spandel, 2006), even if the rubrics themselves are limiting (Wilson, 2007). The study supports Evans (2007) who found that collaboration on standards and rubrics affected teachers' orientations. Teachers were also influenced by the state assessments as they pointed out how they often align their instruction towards the assessments, or teach more authentic writing *after* the state tests. This suggest that the overarching policy of *No Child Left Behind* with its emphasis on meeting standards may not directly influence teachers' orientations, but indirectly shapes them through increased pressure on teachers, the need to comply with State Standards, and a focus on testing (McCarthey, 2008; McCarthey & Ro, 2011).

The study points out some of the limitations of Graham et al.'s (2002) instrument for measuring orientations by showing that teachers may have more nuanced beliefs about writing than those captured by a survey. It also suggests that more studies need to look at the relationship between teachers' orientations and their writing practices. The NCTE framework of beliefs may be a starting point to examine how teachers use these to build their practices. In addition, research is needed on how professional development might intervene to allow teachers to offer engaging writing activities to *all* students whether they are in low or high-income schools.

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APPENDIX A

Teacher Interview

A. Demographic Information

Use Form: degrees earned, years of experience and years of teaching in the particular school

B. Curriculum
1. Tell me about the lesson I observed today. What are the goals?
2. How does it fit into your language arts curriculum for the year?
3. What are your goals for your language arts curriculum?
4. What opportunities do students have to write in this classroom? How often? What genres? Why did you select those activities/genres?
5. How often do you talk to students about their writing?
6. How often do students share their writing with other students? How does that work?
7. Where do your ideas for writing instruction come from?

C. Student Work

Let's look at three examples of writing from three students (one whom you consider an above average writer, one whom you consider an average writer, one whom you consider below average writer).
1. Please tell me about each student's writing.
2. In what genre are they writing? Why this genre?
3. What were your goals for the assignment?
4. What are the strengths of this student's writing? Weaknesses?
5. How will you work with this student on his/her writing?

D. Policy
1. How has your writing instruction changed over the last 5 years?
2. What have been the significant influences on your instruction?
3. What effects has No Child Left Behind had on your teaching of reading?
4. What effects has No Child Left Behind had on your teaching of writing?
5. What effects has it had on other subject areas such as art, social studies or science?
6. What effects (benefits? disadvantages?) do you see No Child Left Behind having on children?
7. How would you describe the state's perspective on NCLB? What effects has the state's perspective had on your attitudes towards No Child Left Behind?
8. Will your students be taking a state or district test this year? In what subjects? How much time will you spend preparing students for the test? What types of preparation do you do?
9. Is there a state assessment of writing? District assessment? How about your own assessment of writing?
10. Are there any other assessments related to No Child Left Behind that you give? If so, how do you prepare students for those tests?