A Cross-Case Analysis of Two Teachers' Use of Writing Conferences
to Support the Development of Second Grade Writers

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Education)
in The University of Michigan
2012

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For Fos

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the thoughtful mentoring my committee members provided during the process of designing, analyzing, and representing my research in this dissertation. I feel honored to have had such a talented, intelligent, and critical group of highly regarded scholars supporting me in the process. Their perspectives and experiences not only enriched the dissertation, but also my overall understanding about what it means to conduct robust and meaningful instructional research.

Dr. Debby Keller-Cohen's critical eye and assistance in learning to accurately represent classroom interactions enabled me to provide clear images of what I learned during my time in classrooms for my readers. In addition to providing a strong foundation in the use of classroom observation tools during my graduate studies, Dr. Joanne Carlisle posed challenging questions throughout the process and pushed me to maintain focus in my representation of the work. Dr. Susan Florio-Ruane's thoughtful reading and feedback encouraged me to step back from the data to identify bigger issues and questions about teaching and learning. Because of her input, I was able to craft the dissertation into usable scholarship about practice. Finally, my dissertation chair and advisor, Annemarie Palincsar, graciously took on many roles in my journey as a graduate student. In moments where I was confused or frustrated, her generous mentoring communicated that she believed in me and my work. She has helped me to see how my experiences as a classroom teacher can enrich my research and always reminded me that my identities as a teacher and teacher educator are to be appreciated and honored. My work with Annemarie has molded me into the scholar and teacher educator I am, and to be mentored by her was an honor too great for words.

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Abstract

Despite widespread acknowledgement that the ability to write is integral to full participation in schools, workplaces, and society, there is overwhelming evidence that students are in need of more effective writing instruction. This dissertation study responds to scholars' urgent calls to revise the ways in which writing is taught to better prepare students in the U.S. for the writing demands they will encounter in the future. One form of writing instruction that has received significant attention is "the writing conference," in which teachers and students confer about a piece of the student's writing. Despite its popularity, we actually know little about the conduct of these conferences and how students experience them.

This case study investigated two second-grade teachers' use of writing conferences and explored these interactions from the perspective of the children. The study was conducted in the classrooms of two teachers identified by district leaders and teacher educators as committed, skillful teachers of writing who used a workshop approach, which includes writing conferences, in daily writing instruction. The teachers' backgrounds, curricula, and resources varied across contexts. The multiple data sources included: video of conferences, field notes, interviews with teachers and children, and artifacts. These data were collected daily across two writing units in each site. Data analysis consisted of three parts: the application of grounded theory to identify broad patterns and trends; the use of an analytical tool representing a popular framework for conferring; and the use of comparative analysis to identify confirming and disconfirming evidence across data sources. A cross-case analysis was conducted to identify themes from the individual case studies.

Findings speak to four factors that interact to yield high-quality conferences; including: the curricula and materials teachers used influenced their practices in distinct ways; the participation structures inherent in the workshop approach supported and interfered with the enactment of writing conferences; establishing a shared problem space – in the limited time available in conferences – was challenging; and the explicitness and precision of teachers' language influenced what sense children made of the exchange with the teacher.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Recent attention in the educational reform literature has focused squarely on the need for close investigations of instruction attending to interactions of teachers, students, and materials in classroom contexts (Cohen, Raudenbush, & Ball, 2003; Raudenbush, 2008). This interaction is at the center of the dissertation study reported in this manuscript. Specifically, I investigated the instructional dynamic unfolding in the course of writing conferences, as conducted by two teachers of writing, in second grade classrooms.

Writing conferences are an instructional event in which a teacher and student discuss and review the student's writing to help the child grow as a writer; they epitomize the complex instruction that Cohen, Raudenbush, and Ball (2003) describe. Writing conferences require teachers to quickly integrate knowledge about writing, the writer, and pedagogy in order to capitalize on what the child's talk and writing are revealing. While the ability to make this instructional context fruitful for young writers is challenging, the opportunities for teachers to differentiate writing instruction and understand the individual needs of young writers through this structure make it worthy of investigation.

This dissertation study demonstrates the value of using multiple methods to understand the discourse moves, teaching practices, and student uptake that occur during writing conferences that occur within the context of daily writing workshops. Specifically, I investigate the teaching practices of two teachers of writing and how these practices shape learning opportunities for students.

A Need for Increased Focus on the Teaching of Writing

*Writing is the gateway to success in school and beyond. Writing helps
students read, solve problems, and understand concepts in every part of
the curriculum. It is the currency of the new workplace and global
economy, yet writing is a skill that cannot be learned on the spot. Writing
matters, and learning to write well can open a door to the world.
(National Writing Project, 2003)*

Despite widespread acknowledgement that the ability to write is integral to
full participation in schools, workplaces, and society, there is overwhelming
evidence that students are sorely in need of effective writing instruction. Results
from the NAEP writing test reveal that a staggering 70% of students in 4th – 12th
grade are considered "low-achieving writers" (Persky, Daane, & Jin, 2003).
Moreover, since the implementation of No Child Left Behind, which focused
almost exclusively on reading instruction, writing scores in 4th and 7th grade have
declined. Further research shows that nearly one-third of high school graduates
are not suitably prepared for the demands of college-level composition courses
(ACT, 2006).

In 2007, scholars issued an urgent call for overhauling the ways in which
writing is taught in middle and high school to better prepare students in the U.S.
for the writing demands of college and careers (Graham & Perin, 2007). If we are
to take such calls seriously, then we must consider the ways in which teachers
provide instruction that supports writers' development throughout K-16 schooling
– from emergent writing to discipline-specific writing. Despite the widespread
acknowledgement of the urgency to support students in the U.S. to become more
capable writers, research and professional development efforts focused on
writing have decreased since the enactment of No Child Left Behind and
Reading First (Graham, Harris, & MacArthur, 2002; McCarthey, 2008).

Purpose of this Study

The workshop approach, in which children approach writing in the same
way professional authors do – through interaction in writing communities as they
rehearse, draft, revise, seek feedback, edit, and publish their work – has become

a major form of writing instruction throughout the nation. Currently, the five largest school districts in the U.S. have adopted workshop teaching as *the* method for teaching writing. Furthermore, the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP), a professional development provider, supports upwards of 15,000 educators in the implementation of writing workshop each year (TCRWP, personal communication, October 14, 2010). Schools across the nation have embraced this model of writing instruction, albeit implemented in various ways across the nation.

Teachers using a workshop model ideally spend 30-45 minutes of instructional time each day engaging in writing conferences during which they facilitate conferences with individual students and together review writing in progress. The teacher uses this context to help the child improve his or her writing, to supplement the writer's knowledge, and to promote writing development. However, our understanding of what elements of conferences support student learning is lean; there is little empirical evidence regarding the specific teaching practices involved in conferring or how this interaction influences children's writing development. The teaching of writing cannot improve without significant attention to the practices teachers are employing during this potentially powerful learning opportunity (Freedman, 2010). This study aims to shed light on the ways in which two teachers use one-on-one writing conferences as an instructional vehicle to transform children's writing abilities. By broadening our understanding of what occurs in this context, I hope to inform interventions on teaching and contribute to theory on writing instruction in the primary grades.

During the 2010-2011 school year, I investigated the use of writing conferences in two second grade classrooms. The purpose of this qualitative, case study was to provide a deeper understanding of the nature of writing conferences as an instructional context inside of the writing workshop. Specifically, it aimed to investigate two second-grade teachers' use of writing conferences and explore the writing conference from the perspective of the children.

Study Design

The study reported in this dissertation attempts to address two important research questions:

Question one: How do two teachers of writing use writing conferences to facilitate children's growth as writers?

Question two: How do children make sense of learning opportunities presented in writing conferences?

This research was conducted in the classrooms of two teachers who were identified by district leaders and teacher educators as committed, skillful teachers of writing who used a workshop approach to daily writing instruction. The teachers' backgrounds, curriculum, and resources for teaching varied across contexts. I drew from multiple data sources to investigate how teachers use writing conferences to advance the knowledge and skill of young writers and investigate how young children make sense of the interactions that occur in writing conferences. These included: video of daily writing conferences, field notes, observation record forms, learning conversations with children, interviews with teachers, and classroom artifacts representative of teaching and learning. These data were collected daily across two writing units in each of the two sites. Data analysis consisted of three parts: first, through the application of grounded theory to identify broad patterns and trends; second, using an analytical tool that represents a popular instructional framework for conferring; and finally, through comparative analysis to identify confirming and disconfirming evidence across data sources. A cross-case analysis was conducted following stage three to lift larger themes from the fine-grained case studies using grounded theory.

The Story of this Dissertation

Throughout my time as a graduate student, I have striven to engage in research projects that are located at the intersection of theory and practice.

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Hence, it is not surprising that this dissertation was conceived from challenges I experienced as I supported teachers learning to provide writing instruction using the workshop model. Time and time again, principals and teachers approached me to discuss professional development opportunities to improve conferring in writing classrooms. The support I provided largely drew upon my own experiences as a teacher of writing and popular professional texts. As much as teachers told me that the sessions I conducted on conferring helped them to confer better with writers, I still felt as if I was not providing the targeted support they needed to learn to confer well. As any budding researcher would do, I turned to empirical studies to supplement my knowledge of the work entailed in writing conferences. Although I could find plenty of research addressing reading instruction, studies about writing instruction using a workshop approach to writing were limited; further, the few studies of conferring that did exist did not analyze the actual work of teachers in a way that I found applicable to my work as a teacher educator in pre-service literacy methods courses and an instructional consultant to school districts. I began to think that, if the existing professional texts and empirical research would not enable me to provide the kind of transformative professional development experiences these teachers needed, then I had just identified a possible line of inquiry for my own research.

Overview of Dissertation Chapters

In the chapters that follow, I use interviews with teachers, analytical tools based on widely recognized models of writing conferences, artifacts documenting the work of teachers and children, conversations with children about their learning, and videotapes of over 270 individual writing conferences to address the two research questions informing the design and conduct of this study.

In chapter two, the literature review, I present pertinent studies and historical context to identify the theoretical underpinnings informing the study and provide the reader with an understanding of the conversation to which this dissertation study contributes. The literature review is not meant to be

exhaustive, but rather is targeted for the purpose of constructing the argument for the current research.

Chapter three provides a detailed overview of the methods for the study. Given the complex nature of conducting research in classroom settings, it also describes particular challenges or limitations that contributed to the ways in which data were collected at each of the two study sites.

In chapters four and five, I tell the story of conferring in Ms. Spencer's class and Ms. Hanson's class, respectively. To honor the complex relationship between teaching and learning, findings from both research questions are presented in individual cases representing the conferences conducted by each teacher participant. Although the chapters are organized similarly – according to research subquestions from the first research question with findings addressing the second research question woven throughout – each chapter raises issues about conferring that remained unique to the individual teacher.

Chapter six attempts to rise above the detailed findings presented in chapter four and chapter five. In the true spirit of grounded theory, I look across cases to identify and discuss four major themes that surfaced from the study. These include: the influence of curriculum and materials, the influence of the participations structures imbedded in the writing workshop model, the challenge of establishing a shared problem space, and the enactment of conferences.

Chapter seven concludes the dissertation. I present implications surfaced by the investigation, limitations of the study, and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

In Chapter 2, I review literature specific to writing instruction to familiarize the reader with the research informing the design and conduct of this investigation. Further, I identify contemporary conversations about writing conferences to which this study contributes. This chapter is organized in six sections. I begin with a description of my process for reviewing the literature and decisions regarding which studies would be included. I then begin the review with an overview of cognitive and sociocultural studies of writing that inform the conceptual framework of this study. Next, I share suggestions researchers have identified about opportunities children need for learning to write. I provide background about one particular approach and context for the teaching of writing, writing workshop. Then, I review studies specific to the use of writing conferences in elementary writing workshops. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a discussion of how this dissertation study enhances the field's understanding about writing conferences as an instructional event through a practice-based focus.

Literature Review Method

It is difficult to identify how and when the formal review of literature for this dissertation study began. In the course of my graduate studies, I had read and reviewed multiple resources reporting on writing research. My understanding of many landmark studies and research trends informed the review in a way that is challenging to document, yet important to identify. In what follows, I trace how I accessed and identified pertinent literatures, as well as how I made decisions regarding what to include in this chapter.

At each stage in the literature review process, I attempted to hone in on research and other resources that were specific to the age level I intended to study – second graders. However, I recognized early on that I needed to be more inclusive in my review of studies and began to use search terms such as *early writing*, *primary writing*, and *elementary writing.* These terms rejected studies relating to emergent writing, middle school writing, and high school and college composition. I accessed many studies across the developmental spectrum; while these studies informed my broader understanding of writing conferences and writing instruction, they have not been included in this review.

My main strategies for identifying literature pertinent to this study included: consulting handbooks of writing research (e.g. Bazerman, 2008; Beard, Myhill, Riley, & Nystrand, 2009), reviewing resources included in studies about writing conferring that I had identified in early searches (e.g. Freedman, 1982; McCarthey, 1989; McCarthey, 1994), and searching relevant, peer-reviewed journals (e.g*., Elementary School Journal*, *Journal of Literacy Research, Language Arts, Reading Research Quarterly, Written Communication*). My initial searches aimed to provide a broad understand of landmark, empirical studies that have influenced the study and teaching of writing. This led me to further explore the influences of the cognitive and sociocultural perspectives on the study of writing and writing instruction.

Although my experiences teaching writing at the elementary level and conducting action research in my classroom provided me with a basic understanding of the needs of young writers and the ways teachers can support their development, I consulted the same resources identified above, and researched prominent theories of teaching and learning that were surfacing in handbook chapters and journal articles. Most notably, these included the work of Vygotsky and Bruner.

Because writing conferences are nested within the writing workshop structure, I searched the literature for empirical studies about elementary writing instruction using a workshop model. Once again, I returned to the resources I identified early on in my literature searches. I was struck by the limited amount of

empirical research about the use of writing workshop as an approach to teaching writing in elementary classrooms despite its ongoing presence in classrooms today. As such, I turned to websites of professional organizations such as NCTE and The National Writing Project in an attempt to identify additional empirical studies that have not been widely cited. These searches confirmed my suspicion that there was a scarcity of contemporary research about the writing workshop and more specifically, writing conferences.

Because of my involvement in ongoing professional development in the area of writing, I was aware of multiple professional texts dominating contemporary conversations about writing instruction. Interestingly, writing about writing workshop has been dominated by early pioneers of writing instruction and their protégées who have become leading authors of professional texts used by teachers and teacher educators. McCarthey (2008) has argued that the lack of interest in writing research can be attributed to the passage of No Child Left Behind. Conversely, Dyson (n.d.) suggests that, although writing workshop has become a "permanent part of elementary school discourse," it had a "limited life in the academy" because researchers did not attend to question regarding its use with different learners and in different contexts, nor address the theoretical frames specific to literacy development (Dyson, n.d., para 3). As such, it is not altogether surprising that I found locating robust, empirical studies specific to writing instruction with elementary-aged students to be challenging.

Still, we cannot deny the influence that early pioneers of writing instruction, such as Don Murray, Donald Graves, and Lucy Calkins, have had. We must honor the ways in which their work has informed mainstream professional texts and professional development that aims to support teachers in implementing a workshop approach to writing. Thus, I reviewed professional texts and videos that represented the ideas authors emphasized through the decades (e.g. Calkins, 1986; Calkins, 1994; Calkins, 2003; Calkins, Hartman & White, 2005; Calkins, Harwayne, & Mitchell, 1987; Graves, 1983, 2003; Graves & Hansen, 1988; Harwayne & Calkins, 1987; Hartman & Calkins, 2008). This review helped me to understand how even among like-minded individuals, the

instruction occurring inside writing workshops has become more targeted, deliberate, and aligned with the standards movement.

My experiences searching for studies of writing conferences differed from that of my search for literature specific to writing workshop. Searches using the term *writing conferences* in googlescholar and JStor revealed multiple empirical studies about writing conferences. These studies ranged across grade levels (e.g. early childhood through college) and participation structures. For example, Daiute and colleagues (Daiute, Campbell, Griffin, Reddy, & Tivnan 1993; Daiute & Dalton, 1993) investigated the use of peer conferences and Fitzgerald and Stamm (1990) investigated the use of group conferences. Again, although the studies of writing conferences in college composition courses advanced my understanding of how the field has viewed writing conferences, they are not featured in this literature review because they did not feature teacher/child conferences as conceived in writing workshop approaches. Studies of group conferences (e.g. Fitzgerald & Stamm, 1990) have also been omitted. Instead, I present studies that illustrate dominant conversations in most recent empirical research about writing conferences. As with the writing workshop review, there has not been much empirical research regarding writing conferences in the last decade; as such, the section of this literature review that focuses on writing conferences also includes thinking gleaned from the cross-decade review of professional texts and videos of writing conferences. This is not meant to be a formal, historical review of the changes in conferences as represented by the professional texts and videos, but rather a small window into the change in trends over the years.

Cognitive Influences on Writing

Contemporary research on writing began with the study of the processes and subprocesses of writing from a cognitive perspective. Cognitive process models (e.g. Hayes, 2000; Hayes & Flower, 1980; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986; Zimmerman & Riesemberg, 1997) portray writing as a complex, recursive process requiring the writer to simultaneously coordinate multiple subprocesses

such as planning, organizing, goal setting, translating, reading, revising, and editing. Further studies (Needles & Knapp, 1994; Scardamelia, Bereiter & Goelman, 1982) emphasize the integrated use of multiple types of knowledge (e.g. content, procedural, and discourse) during the writing process. This line of inquiry proved useful to increasing the field's awareness of the processes deployed by expert writers.

Subsequent research on writing considered the influence of context on cognition – specifically, the role of context on self-regulation (Burns, 2001), the ways writers use rhetorical moves in considering their audience (Ryder, Vander Lei, & Roen, 1999; Wollman-Bonilla, 2001), and children's conceptions of what it means to be an expert writer (Kos & Maslowski, 2001). These studies advanced our understanding of the: writing process, habits of skilled writers, and challenges that impede success in writing.

Expert/Novice Studies of Young Writers

In the section below, I discuss how three main processes of writing – planning, text production, and revising (Hayes and Flower, 1980) – are influenced by task schemata, working memory resources, and long term memory. The discussion focuses on early writers' processes as they learn to write and provides insight regarding the differences between expert and novice writers with special attention to the three broad cognitive processes involved in writing.

Planning

Hayes's (1996) revised version of the Hayes and Flower (1980) model of writing mentioned above calls specific attention to the role of how the writer conceives of the tasks that are entailed in writing to coordinate writing processes. In the planning process, task schemata strongly differ between expert writers and young children (McCutchen, Teske, & Bankston, 2008). In contrast to adults, young children often neglect the planning stage of writing. They pay little attention to pre-writing or conceptual planning. In fact, they are often shocked to

hear that writers devote a considerable amount of time to planning before composing (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). Young writers often select topics without thought and let the story unfold as they write; in fact, many children orally tell what they are writing as they create print representations on a page (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; McCutchen, 1988). In contrast, more experienced writers collect ideas and brainstorm with others prior to producing text (Burns, 2001). Whereas adults view planning and text production as two separate tasks, young writers struggle to separate the tasks of planning and writing (McCutchen et al., 2008).

Text Production

Children's early literacy experiences are largely organized around oral discourse, specifically conversation. Turn-taking is a feature of conversation that often aids speakers in adding more or elaborating on the spoken word. Through interaction, children are prompted to provide more information. In contrast, writing is viewed as an individual process in which writers compose without such prompting. Accordingly, young writers' texts are often written as single turns. Their texts are often thin and incomplete (McCutchen et al., 2008). There is strong evidence that young children's interactions with others (e.g. peers, tutors, teachers) around their writing support them in producing longer and more complete texts (Daiute & Dalton, 1983). Hence, much writing instruction aims to create writing communities in which children can collaborate and receive feedback from others (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983).

Genre and topic familiarity strongly influence young writer's abilities. As a result of exposure to an abundance of narrative text at a young age, most children implicitly learn the features and structures of narrative (Sulzby, 1985). Young writers do not apply this knowledge as strategically as more experienced writers might, yet it becomes part of the knowledge telling strategy as they write (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). There is also strong evidence that young writers with more thorough knowledge about their writing topics produce higher quality texts than children with limited knowledge (McCutchen, 1986).

Revision

According to Hayes (1996), there are three key processes entailed in revision: critical reading, reflection, and text production. Critical reading requires the reader to identify the problem. Reflection involves classifying the problem and proposing a solution, and text production is the actual application of the solution. Young writers generally transfer their thoughts to the page with little or no intention to revise. As writers gain experience and start to engage in the revision process, they do not revise for meaning; instead they focus primarily on mechanics (Calkins, 1987; Graves, 1983). Over time, revision becomes a more flexible process and children begin to attend to the content and structure of their writing. Children's limited interest and ability to revise is related to the high cognitive demand of the processes of revision, although interventions such as procedural facilitation have been documented as an effected method to help children evaluate their work in preparation to revise (Scardamelia & Bereiter, 1983). McCutchen et al. (2008) concluded that a writer's ability to revise is largely determined by his ability to read critically. Most young writers have yet to develop this ability.

Instructional Implications

The cognitive theories and process models cited above have been particularly productive in identifying how strategy instruction and organizational structures for planning, drafting, and revising benefits both typical and atypical learners (Englert, Raphael, Anderson, Anthony & Stevens, 1991; Fitzgerald & Teasley, 1986; Graham, MacArthur, & Schwartz, 1995). While many studies have been informed by this perspective, two programs of research - Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD; Harris & Graham, 1996) and Cognitive Strategy Instruction in Writing (CSIW; Englert, et al., 1991) - were widely researched to provide the field with evidence to support the use of strategy instruction in writing.

SRSD is perhaps the most widely featured instructional model grounded in the cognitive perspective. Harris and Graham (1996) argue that the mere involvement in social activities to support writing do not help children develop the strategies and skills necessary to engage in the writing process. Thus, SRSD aims to teach children the cognitive processes necessary in writing through modeling, memorization of the multiple steps involved in the strategy, and autonomous application of the strategies; further, the approach supports children in monitoring their progress as writers (Graham et al., 2006). Over 25 studies investigating the use of SRSD in a variety of contexts and grade levels have been conducted (Graham & Harris, 2003) and the combined effect sizes suggest that the explicit teaching of the strategies attended to in the program influence children's abilities to self-regulate in the writing process (Graham & Perin, 2006). In Graham and MacArthur's study of SRSD to teach revision of persuasive texts, the instructional approach was found to increase children's abilities to revise their texts, as well as their self-efficacy (Graham & MacArthur, 1988). Findings from more recent quasi-experimental studies conducted by Graham and colleagues have indicated that children taught using SRSD outperform children in control groups on post-test measure of writing. For example, in their study of SRSD to support third-graders story and persuasive essay writing, children produced longer, more complete texts than their peers who did not receive SRSD instruction (Graham, et al., 2005). While the creators of SRSD have conducted an abundance of experimental and quasi-experimental studies to investigate the effects of the instructional model, most studies, if not all, have targeted atypical learners.

Although the creators of CSIW place its roots in sociocognitive theory (Englert & Mariage, 2003) because of the emphasis placed on the apprenticeship model and social mediators, the CSIW stresses the importance of teacher modeling of cognitive processes while writing and emphasizes providing access to various procedural facilitators (e.g. mnemonic devices, sequences for planning, and graphic organizers) to assist children to use the cognitive strategies supportive of writing expository text. CSIW aims to give children

access to the often-invisible inner thoughts and process of writers. Findings of the use of CSIW with intermediate grade students revealed that children in CSIW classrooms outperformed comparison children in the production of organized text that aligned with features of a give genre (Anderson, Raphael, Englert & Stevens, 1991). However, the program was ineffective in classrooms where the tools were given and used by children without the benefit of social interaction. This particular finding speaks to the creators' location of the intervention in the sociocognitive perspective as it underscores the importance of creating learning communities that embrace social interaction and support the acquisition of the discipline-specific discourse of writing.

Sociocultural Influences on Writing

Sociocultural perspectives on children's writing focus on the influence of context in the conceptualization and conventionalization of writing. Heath and Delpit's research on the influence of context on literacy writ large are important contributions to consider as we study the development of young writers.

Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) ethnographic study of the literacy practices of two culturally different communities sheds light on the importance of considering the influence of context on literacy development. Her study explores the ways in which children from two different communities learn to use language in their home and communities and the ways in which their use of language differs from the language majority's ways of speaking, While the communities of Roadville and Trackton have established patterns of language use related to written print, these patterns do not always align with the discourse of formal schooling. The experiences of the children from Roadville (e.g. bed time stories, socialization that values literacy, plentiful amounts of books in their homes) prepare them for the literacy demands of early elementary school, but not beyond. The experiences of the children of Trackton (limited experiences with print and limited models of reading and writing) do not position them to engage with the discourse of school even in the early elementary years. Despite the differing experiences of these two groups of children, the misalignment of their home literacies with

school-based literacies, influences their success as readers and writers throughout their schooling. Heath's work highlights the important role of schools in supporting children from other cultures in acquiring the means and tools to participate fully in school-based literacies.

Children's backgrounds and experiences with print strongly influence their understanding of what it means to write. Delpit (1998) argues that it is the role of schools to provide instruction that allows children from non-dominant cultures to successfully participate in the "culture of power." Thus, as we consider the writing development of children from a sociocultural perspective, it is important to acknowledge the "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1992) that children bring to their learning. These include cultural, linguistic, and social capital.

Concerned about the cognitive writing models' exclusion of power structure and classroom dynamics from the conversation, many researchers have sought to conduct research in authentic classroom settings (e.g. Cooper & Holzman, 1989; Dyson, 1993; McCarthey, 1994; Schultz, 1994). Research shows that writing shapes children's social status with classrooms. Children's selection of topics and characters, as well as their willingness to share their stories, is strongly influenced by what their peers view as acceptable (Dyson, 1993; Schultz, 1994). Further, children's writing is also influenced by popular media, for example, through the depiction of gender roles (Dyson, 1994; 1999). As we construct contexts in which young writers learn, it is important to consider how the contexts we shape can potentially feed power dynamics and shape peer relations.

Supporting Early Writers

Instruction is the most powerful intervention on young children's abilities to read and write (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Accordingly, we cannot solely rely on rich environments that promote the acquisition of writing development to meet the needs of all learners in the diverse school contexts of today. Instead, young writers need to be engaged in deliberate learning opportunities that allow for both exploration and targeted instruction.

Oral language serves as a foundational resource in learning to write. It is imperative that early writing instruction, even beyond the emergent years when children are approximating writing through scribbles, drawing, letter strings, and labels, builds upon and links writing with oral language development. Gee (2008) reminds us of the importance of using a child's primary discourse, that of the home and community, to support his development of a secondary discourse, that of the school setting. Further, as mentioned above, Heath (1983) and Delpit (1998) warn us of the importance of considering the possible misalignments of the language and literacy practices, including the emphasis and ways of interacting with print, of home and school.

We also must consider how models of what it means to write and the presence of various representations of texts impact a child's ability to learn to write. Imagine learning to ride a bike without ever seeing someone pedal down the street in front of you. While bike riding and writing require distinctive skill sets and knowledge, this comparison helps us to see how models help learners understand their overall aim. As such, developing writers need to not only see writers at work with access to their inner-thoughts and processes (Englert et al., 1991; Schneider, 1997), but they also need access to exemplars of particular genres and the application of processes and techniques. Scholars (e.g. Dean, 2008; Hillocks, 2006) emphasize the integral role of model texts, often referred to as "mentor texts" by teachers, in writing development. In a study of the use of models in three genres – suspense stories, restaurant reviews, and "concrete fiction" – Bereiter and Scardamelia (1984) found that participants, ranging from third grade to college, benefited from the use of models in classrooms to supplement their understanding of language elements and content.

Children also need opportunities to learn and write in a wide array of genres. According to Duke & Roberts (2010), writers engage in different processes when composing texts of different genres. Further, children demonstrate varied abilities to compose across genres. Given the demands of real-world writing that children will encounter in the world, it is important to not

only expose learners to a variety of genres, but to also provide instruction that enables children to produce texts in those genres.

Support for young writers can take multiple forms and pathways. While knowledge about what to teach is important, we must also consider how to teach children in ways that encourage their development as writers. Children need opportunities for social interaction to support literacy development (Vygotsky, 1978). Several studies have demonstrated the importance of creating contexts in which children learn to compose as a community of writers (Dyson, 1989; Schultz, 1994; Gere & Abbott, 1985; Harris, Graham & Mason, 2006; Stevens, Madden, Slavin & Farnish, 1987). For example, in a quasi-experimental study of the use of Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition, which emphasizes the use of peer editing and revision in heterogeneous groups with third and fourth graders, Stevens et al. (1987) determined that the experimental group's organization of their writing on post-intervention writing samples was significantly better than those of the control group. However, the same findings did not hold true in the area of writing conventions (e.g., used of punctuation, capitalization).

Although researchers have found social contexts and collaboration in writing classrooms to be supportive of children's development, Lensmire (1994) underscores the importance of teacher involvement and oversight of such interactions based on his study of third graders' use of peer and group conferences. Findings revealed a considerable amount of bullying occurred in such interactions.

Interactions with teachers that aim to meet the developmental needs of individual children further support writing development. Vygotsky posits that teaching leads development, and thus social interaction between learners and more knowledgeable others is necessary to guide and promote development. Further, Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development – "the distance between the actual development level…and the level of potential development determined through problem solving under adult guidance…" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86) stresses the need to provide opportunities for children to engage with the writing process in ways that are more sophisticated - yet still within reach -

because of the support provided by a more knowledgeable other. Above all, it is imperative that the teacher and child participate alongside one another, as the more knowledgeable other enables the learner to achieve a task that might have been difficult, or impossible, without assistance (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006). This support can be provided through varying participation structures (e.g. whole group, small group, one-one-one), modifying the complexity of the task and what is required of the learner, or providing instructional scaffolding.

Bruner (1996) extended this notion of learning in the company of more capable others through "scaffolding." Teachers of writing provide many types of scaffolding that support children in engaging in more complex tasks and processes with the ultimate goal of building the capacity to function as self-regulated independent writers. Bruner also emphasized the repeated teaching of concepts that support children's development over time at increasing levels of complexity. An example of this in writing would be a teacher's initial introduction to adding details by adding important elements to pictures that children have drawn. As children's encoding abilities become more secure, a teacher may revisit the goal of adding details by teaching children specific ways to add description or thought to enhance a text.

The role of talk in supporting children's learning is well documented (Echevarría, 1996; Goldenberg, 1992; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Patthey-Chavez, Clark, & Gallimore, 1995). Rooted in constructivist theory of language development, the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978; Vygostsky, 1989) and scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976), *instructional conversations* (Tharp & Gallimore, 1983) closely mirror the type of interactions that occur during writing conferences – interactions where the teacher is positioned as a facilitator of meaningful, content-focused interactions with students. Instructional conversations differ from traditional forms of pedagogy in which the teacher transmits knowledge to students; instead, teachers and students engage in one-on-one contextualized exchanges with the intent of creating meaning together to advance the child's understanding (Tharp & Gallimore, 1983). Scholars have used the structure of instructional conversations to inform research and practice

specific to reading comprehension instruction (e.g. Duke & Pearson, 2002, Goldenberg, 1992; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Patthey-Chavez, Clark, & Gallimore, 1995) methods of instruction for English language learners (e.g. Echevarría, 1996; Perez, 1996; Saunders & Goldenberg, 1991) and teacher education specific to writing instruction (Florio-Ruane, 1991).

Specific to writing, teacher-student talk, similar to that which occurs during instructional conversations, is useful in helping children negotiate the complexities of the writing process. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) stress the integral role talk can play to help children monitor the writing process. In addition, Cox (1994) argues that the act of rereading and problem solving about the writing piece benefits young writers. These are the very types of interactions that occur in teacher-student writing conference, and this connection is worthy of further inquiry.

Writing Workshop

Writing workshop as an instructional context and approach to the teaching of writing was fueled by research studies about how writers develop, as well as ethnographic studies specific to the teaching of the process-approach to writing. Emig (1971) and Graves (1981) investigated how students worked through the process of completing writing tasks. While Emig's work centered on the writing process of high school students and professional writers (Emig, 1971), Graves (1981) observed early elementary-aged children at Atkinson School in New Hampshire. Findings from the Atkinson Study informed our understanding of the recursive, rather than sequential, nature of the writing process. Pioneers of writing instruction, Donald Graves, Lucy Calkins, and Nancy Atwell, conducted ethnographic studies to closely investigate the use of the process-approach to writing in classrooms (e.g. Calkins, 1983; Graves, 1981). While their findings strongly influenced the structure of the writing workshop in classrooms (Fisher, 1995), they also ignited the movement to bring the workshop structure of professional writers to elementary classrooms (Dyson, n.d.).

Despite methodological concerns about Graves' investigation[1], his study of young writers and accessible recommendations for writing instruction provided teachers with a method for approaching elementary writing instruction that focused on process; this approach is still widely used in classrooms today (Shanahan & Neuman, 1997). In the workshop approach, young writers approach writing in the ways that professional authors do. That is, within their writing communities, they: rehearse, draft, revise, seek feedback, edit, and publish their work (Rowe, 2008). Collaboration with teachers and peers gives these writers opportunities to develop the habits of mind and skills of writers (Larson & Maier, 2000) Importantly, the workshop approach to writing incorporates the knowledge, skills, and experiences that children bring to the classroom while providing the opportunity for developing new understanding (Wade & Moje, 2000).

Unlike traditional forms of writing instruction that emphasize the end product, the process-approach[2] to writing emphasizes the writing process or the stages writers work through to convey meaning to an audience. While these stages vary across different writing programs and curricular settings, they typically attend to: planning, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. Further, this approach to writing allows children to work at their own pace under the guidance of the teacher who models, guides, and supports learners' ability to write until they can function independently (Boone, Farney, & Zulauf, 1996).

Informed by the whole-language movement of 1980's, in which scholars emphasized the important role of immersing children in meaningful, purposeful opportunities to interact authentically with print, early writing workshops provided children with protected, daily time in which they would work through the writing process to produce texts about topics of their own choosing. These workshops emphasized the importance of developing a community of writers. These

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[1] Dyson (n.d.) identifies the main methodological weakness in Graves' Atkinson study as a misalignment of what he claimed as the purpose of the study and his true intentions. She argues that the main issue was that - as opposed to being a study that investigated the development of young writers - it was an attempt to bring the way in which journalists and professional writers work into elementary classrooms.
[2] Applebee (2000) found that 51% of teachers report using a process-approach to writing instruction, although there is not a strong evidence base supporting its use (Berninger, 2008).

traditional writing workshops did not emphasize explicit instruction, but rather emphasized engaging in the process with and alongside students to help build their view of themselves as capable writers.

While implementation of writing workshop varies across contexts and is influenced by standards and curriculum - among other factors - Graves' and Calkins' early work identified key features necessary for effective workshops. These included: time, ownership and choice, instruction, demonstration, modeling, purpose, and responsibility. Writers need a sustained amount of time each day to engage in the writing process (Calkins, 2003; Graves, 1983). Children need to have ownership and choice over what they are working on each day, as well as the topics they choose to write about (Calkins & Harwayne, 1987). Writing teachers need to demonstrate the habits of good writers, as opposed to simply assigning writing work. Teachers should serve as writing role models and share their work, as well as the work of published authors and children, as exemplars. Children are responsible and held accountable for their work during the workshop. Most importantly, children need to have authentic purposes for reading and writing and carry out the real work of authors (Calkins, 1986). Once again, these features are interpreted and employed in a variety of ways by teachers across the nation (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2007).

Writing workshop in the 21st century has shifted to target more direct and explicit teaching of skills and techniques for writing while maintaining focus on the writing process. An additional emphasis has been placed on genre-study as well (Farnan & Dahl, 2003). There is some speculation that NCLB has shaped what current writing instruction looks like (McCarthey, 2008), yet the professional literature predating NCLB (e.g. Calkins, 1994; Fletcher & Portalupi, 1998) began to emphasize the importance of explicit teaching in the writing workshop and provided teachers with models for delivering targeted instruction in whole group mini-lessons and one-on-one conferences long before the changes to educational legislation. However, NCLB's and Reading First's emphasis on reading instruction and assessment over writing, as well as the introduction of content and performance standards are likely explanations for the dearth of

research on writing instruction in the early 21st century (Graham, Harris, & MacArthur, 2002; McCarthey, 2008; Strickland, Bodino, Buchan, Jones, Nelson & Rosen, 2001).

Writing Conferences

According to Calkins (1986), there are three parts to a typical writing workshop. The workshop begins with a *mini-lesson* during which the children and teacher gather as a writing community and the teacher presents a short lesson to address specific aspects of the writing process. Children are then dismissed to their individual work spaces for *independent writing*. During this time, children work on their individual texts at their own pace. As children write independently, the teacher conducts individual writing conferences with students to address both the content and process of their writing. As independent writing time comes to an end, the writing community gathers once again for *share* their work from the day.

As noted, writing conferences are an instructional event nested within the writing workshop. They provide an opportunity for teachers to engage with children's writing as readers and provide targeted feedback. Early instantiations of conferences emphasized the dialogic nature – a back and forth between teacher and student – necessary to come to shared understanding of what the child thought needed to be further developed or addressed in his or her writing. The early work of Graves, Calkins, and Murray encouraged teachers to "follow the child" during conferences (Graves, 1983). In this form, children were viewed as the leaders of their conferences; they spoke and teachers responded in attempt to support their development through conversation (Lensmire, 1993). However, in the same way that the overall writing workshop shifted to provide more targeted instruction, conferences have as well. Writing about conferences in the 21st century emphasize the teacher's role in identifying the needs of the writer and the importance of providing explicit instruction that supports the child's learning of processes, strategies, and techniques that are transferable to future writing (e.g. Calkins et al., 2005; Hartman & Calkins, 2007). The goal of writing conferences has shifted; not only are teachers conferring with children to help

them write with clarity for their readers, but also to convey and teach transferable mechanisms to enhance future writing. Instructional approaches extend beyond talk, and now focus more squarely on the role of explicit modeling, guided practice, and clear instructional explanations. This change is evident in the review of professional texts specific to the teaching of writing workshop. Professional texts authored by Calkins, among others, now make suggestions for possible topics of conferences and provide rubrics and guides to support teachers in assessing children's writing to demonstrate growth. More weight has been placed on the ways in which targeted instruction specific to standards is supporting the writer's development than the role of talk as accountability and assessment began to dominate conversations about teaching and learning.

The most widely cited and used instructional framework for conducted writing conferences is attributed to Calkins. She and her colleagues at the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project have collaborated to articulate the structure and methods conducive to leading writing conferences. While there is no empirical research base for the framework, her team has worked to refine the framework and its components in their ongoing work with teachers. IN the following section I characterize Calkins' conference model and provide descriptions of particular components. [3]

Calkins' Framework for Conferring

Calkins' model for conferring includes a well-organized structure to be deliberately enacted while teaching. Such structure allows teachers and children to take advantage of the predictable routine and focus squarely on the content of the conference. The structure has four steps: Research, Decide, Teach, and Link.

Research. Each conference begins with a research phase. Through conversation and in-the-moment analysis of the child's work, the teacher gathers information

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[3] This framework will be further discussed in subsequent chapters as it served as the basis for the analytical tool used to analyze video data. The selection of this framework for use in this research does not imply that it is a standard for conferring.

about the writer's process and the writing topic. Additionally, the teacher identifies on thing the child has done well and provides the child with a detailed and generative compliment to reinforce either a strategy or technique the child has applied as a writer. For example, after noticing that a child has effectively used dialogue in her story, the teacher might comment, "Wow, Emilia. You did something so smart as a writer in this part. You used dialogue to show us how your character was feeling. When you wrote, *This is the worst day ever. I just want to curl up in a ball and hide*, it really helped me to see that your character was very upset about what happened in art class." Calkins warns that compliments serve a purpose beyond making a child feel good; they identify and reinforce the work the writer has been doing to confirm that it is a strategy or technique worth repeating.

Decide. The next phase of the writing conferences is not shared with the writer; it occurs within the mind of the teacher. Based on information gathered during the *research* phase, the teacher now must *decide* what and how she will teach the child to move him or her forward as a writer. It is nearly impossible to capture this phase of the conference without pausing the interaction to ask the teacher what she is thinking. For this reason, the analytical tool created for viewing conferences in this study uses a teacher's articulation of a clear teaching focus or "teaching point" (Calkins, 2003) to represent what occurs during the phase. A "teaching point" identifies not only the purpose of the conference (i.e. what the child will learn), but also how the child will accomplish the particular task. In many ways, a teaching point is similar to a thorough articulation of the purpose of the interaction.[4] Calkins stresses that teachers should focus on only one or two aspects of the child's writing as to not overwhelm the learner.

Teach. After making a decision about how to proceed in the conference, the teacher begins the next phase of the conference – *teaching*. Calkins likens this phase to an individualized mini-lesson where teachers connect the teaching to

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[4] Scholars have identified the importance of reviewing the purpose/goal and value of lessons with children as feature of high-quality instruction (e.g. Brophy & Good, 1986; Good & Brophy, 2000; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998).

what the child already knows, teaches the child something new using an array of methods, and provides an opportunity for the child to either try what was taught in the presence of the teacher or discusses how he or she will use it once the teacher moves on to confer with another child. Within the *teach* phase, Calkins emphasizes the need for using succinct, clear language when articulating the teaching point and providing instruction relating to this single focus.

She outlines four teaching methods: (1) *guided practice;* (2) *demonstration;* (3) *explicitly telling and showing an example*; and (4) *inquiry*. Each of these methods begins with the teacher restating the teaching point. In *guided practice*, the teacher then guides the student in practicing the teaching point with precise and lean prompts while narrating what the child is doing to reinforce the action associated with the strategy or technique of focus. In *demonstration,* the teacher models how to use a strategy or technique while thinking aloud about what she is doing as she models. She then provides the opportunity for the child to either practice what has been demonstrated or modeled, or discusses how the child will use it. In *explicitly telling and showing an example,* the teacher explains a targeted strategy or technique and shares an example of how it has been used. This example generally comes from a published text, the teacher's writing, or a classmate's writing. After sharing the model with the child, the teacher provides an opportunity for the child to engage with the strategy or technique. Finally, in *inquiry* conferences, the teacher and child together engage in studying a text or model to identify principles that the child can apply to his or her own writing. This method is rarely used with writers in the primary grades and was not observed during this study. For this reason, it was not included in the analytical tool.

Link. The final phase of a conference *links* what has occurred in the interaction to plans for moving forward. Within this phase, the teacher restates the teaching point using language consistent with that of the conference and positions the writer to return to his work with a plan for implementing what was taught during the conference.

Power and Authority in Writing Conferences

The preponderance of studies about writing conferences in the elementary school occurred at a time when writing conferences were viewed as conversational interactions to support children's growth as writers as opposed to opportunities for targeted, differentiated instruction for learners. The dominant theoretical lens brought to this research focused on constructs such as power, agency and authority. Below, I highlight a few of these studies in an attempt to provide the reader with an understanding of the dominant discourse in research about writing conferences. [5]The studies are not exhaustive in nature, but rather have been selected to illustrate the emphasis on the issues of power associated with conferences.

McCarthey (1994) conducted a month-long study in a fifth/sixth grade classroom that investigated what four students internalized from the writing instruction provided by their teacher during conferences. During this time, she conducted interviews with the students and teacher, videotaped and took field notes on instruction, gathered samples of student writing, and observed writing conferences that students conducted with first-graders. While her findings revealed that three students appropriated language and content from the conferences in their writing, she questioned the role of teacher and the ways in which authoritative discourse might have been at play. McCarthey shares three cases of conferences with children where the teacher, in spite of her somewhat authoritative approach, establishes a shared understanding with the children. She contrasts these three cases with a conference that demonstrates how the teacher ignores the child's attempts to suggest topics that the teacher does not view as important. McCarthey suggests that the teacher and child fail to reach a shared understanding because of a lack of emphasis on negotiating with the child. This study also illuminated the ways in which writing conferences are a

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[5] As previously discussed, the current policy arena and funding sources have emphasized the study of reading as opposed to writing. While these studies may not appear to be the most current work on this topic, current day investigations and publications reporting such work in the area of writing, specifically writing conferences, is scant.

socially constructed, literacy event managed by the teacher. McCarthey suggests that the mismatch between one student's understanding of the workshop approach and her teacher's expectations likely influenced the child's ability to communicate with her teacher in the context of a writing conference.

Another study of writing instruction conducted by Daiute and colleagues (Daiute, Campbell, Griffin, Reddy, &Tivnan, 1993) examined teacher-student and student-student interactions during a writing unit in a third grade class. Analyses of turn-taking in 32 teacher-student conferences revealed that the teacher spoke almost four times more than children in teacher-student conferences. They observed that, when teacher discourse dominates conversation, issues of power and status can influence children's uptake. Further, the teacher's inclination to drive conversation negatively influenced children's ability to profit from these interactions.

Lensmire's (1993) close study of conferences he conducted with one third-grade student drew our attention toward the importance of considering the ways in which teachers shape children's conscious and unconscious intentions for writing and how frequently children's intentions are difficult to pursue, encourage, or redirect because they are not shared by the teacher. In this study, Lensmire described his thinking and interactions with a writer after reading her text; a text that he viewed as containing an attack on an unpopular child in class. While Lensmire viewed the text as mean spirited, the child claimed that it was fictional and that she simply wanted to use the name of a child from the class. Lensmire refused to let the child share her story with the class until she revised it to make it more appropriate for the class by altering the beginning and changing the name of the classmate. Lensmire's reflections about the interactions suggested that he felt conflicted in many ways. He suggested that his interpretation of the text and the interactions he had with the child led him to a place where he did not "follow the child," but rather took a stance that rejected treating the child's writing as a fictional text as opposed to potential source of classroom conflict. Lensmire's close study of this case brought to light the importance of considering the ways in which teacher response in conferences affects meaning and values of texts in

the classroom community as a whole, not just for individual writers. Had Lensmire allowed the child to share the unrevised story with the class, it could have negatively affected the larger context for learning that had been established in his classroom. Although interactions with students about their writing can be powerful, teachers must carefully consider and take responsibility for the ways in which their responses influence the overall learning community and need to strike a balance between where power lies in conferences – in the minds and talk of children or teachers.

Each of these studies helps us to understand that although teacher-student writing conferences might be a potentially powerful approach to support children's writing development, they require a coordinated, purposeful exchange of ideas between a teacher and student. Florio-Ruane (1991) has argued that we have had a very simple view of teacher-child interactions during conferences. She urges us to include other factors that influence learning, including: the relationships among the teacher, the student, the materials, and the context to enable teachers "to create *with* learners…so that literacy learning can be socially mediated in ways that ultimately set the learner free to be his or her *own* teacher" (emphasis added, p. 384).

In many ways, this dissertation study responds to Florio-Ruane's call in that it centrally focuses on instruction – the interaction of the teacher, student, and materials in a classroom context (Cohen, Raudenbush, & Ball, 2003) – during writing conferences. While studies of conferring that have focused on power, agency, and authorization have enriched the field's understanding of challenges and considerations of the use of writing conferences, they have contributed little to our knowledge about the teaching and learning aspects of conferences. This investigation attempts to shed light on what is entailed for the teacher and learner during the enactment of conferences and thus bring a new angle to this work.

The Practice Movement

This dissertation study is also influenced by recent calls by scholars of teacher education to attend to professional practices of teaching in research (Ball

and Forzani, 2007; Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005). Ball and Forzani (2009) advocate shifting teacher preparation focus from an emphasis on beliefs, knowledge, and orientation to "high-leverage practices" for teaching, that is, "tasks and activities that are essential for skillful beginning teachers to understand, take responsibility for, and be prepared to carry out in order to enact their core instructional responsibilities" (p.504)

Facilitating learning through conversation requires adept, in-the-moment application of knowledge about writing, teaching practices, and the individual writer. This type of intentional, interactive teaching that responds directly to the needs of the learner is complicated; in many ways, conferring with writers is nearly as complex as composing. In fact, Graves called teaching and writing "twin crafts" for their similar complexities. Teachers must recognize the message of the writer, understand the processes that are supporting and limiting his progress, and provide instruction using methods that meet the needs of the individual. Hence, writing conferences are an ideal context in which to study practice.

While many researchers have engaged in the study of teaching, few have engaged in the study of the practices necessary for skillful teaching. To illustrate in the field of writing instruction, Cognitive Strategy Instruction in Writing (CSIW) (Englert, et al., 1991) was a program of research occurring with and alongside classroom teachers to assist children to use the cognitive strategies supportive of writing expository text. CSIW made important contributions to our understanding of the curriculum (e.g. access to procedural facilitators such as mnemonic devices, sequences for planning, and graphic organizers). As previously described, teacher modeling of cognitive processes while writing was a key feature, yet the CSIW studies did not focus on the important aspects of modeling to which a teacher must attend to for it to be useful to learners. The practice movement requires researchers to take up fine-grained questions that are unique and new in order to enrich our understanding of practices. This dissertation study makes a foray into such an approach for studying elementary writing instruction.

CHAPTER 3
METHODS

The work of classroom teachers is multifaceted and dynamic (Ball, 1993; Cohen, 1990; Leinhardt & Steele, 2005). As such, the study of teaching calls for a method that acknowledges the complex nature of teachers' work. Case study, which examines "a phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Merriam, 1998, p. 27) is an appropriate research method to investigate conferencing, the phenomenon, across two contexts for teaching writing.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology informing the case study. I begin by restating the purpose of the study and outlining the research questions. Next, I describe the study participants and data sources. Finally, the chapter culminates with detailed descriptions of the data collection and analysis procedures.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide a deeper understanding of the nature of writing conferences as an instructional context for young writers. Two overarching research questions with corresponding sub-questions guided the investigation and informed the treatment of the data.

1. How do two teachers of writing use writing conferences to facilitate children's growth as writers?

    a. What is the frequency and duration of writing conferences?

    b. What is the instructional focus of writing conferences?

    c. What instructional methods are teachers using during writing conferences?

d. How does the teacher differentiate instruction as a function of the children's profiles as writers?

e. How do the answers to these questions vary as a function of genre?

2. How do children make sense of learning opportunities presented in writing conferences?

   a. What is the relationship between the organization of the conference and children's perceptions of what they have learned?

   b. What is the relationship between what the teacher identifies as her instructional goal and what children believes they have learned?

   c. What is the relationship between the instructional method the teacher employs in the conference and what the children articulate as having learned?

   d. What is the relationship between the level of explicitness of the instruction and children's perceptions of what they have been taught?

Participants

In the following section, I outline how the two teacher participants were selected and provide a brief description of the participants and their respective school sites. Further information about the teacher, the classroom context, and the curriculum will be reported in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

Participant Selection

I began by targeting primary grade teachers of writing who were reputed to be teacher leaders in their districts and committed to conducting Writing Workshop on a daily basis. I contacted university teacher educators, professors of literacy, building principals, district literacy specialists and coordinators who identified and nominated possible participants. I initiated contact with teachers after receiving recommendations. In this email, I introduced myself, briefly

described the study, and asked if they would be willing to meet to further discuss possible participation. Ten teachers responded, and I met with each of them to discuss the project and confirm that they conducted a writing workshop on a daily basis. Ultimately, two teachers were selected based on (1) interest; (2) scheduling; and (3) grade level[6].

Teacher Participants and School Sites

Two second-grade teachers from different school districts in southeast Michigan agreed to participate in the study. The teachers brought a wealth of experience teaching writing to their instruction. Further, they were committed to providing daily opportunities for children to participate in writing using a Writing Workshop model.

Ms. Hanson and Ms. Spencer [7] were tenured teachers in their respective school districts. Both teachers received initial teacher certification through traditional four-year teacher education programs. Ms. Hanson had twenty-two years of teaching experience including nine years in second grade and experience in special education as a self-contained upper-elementary teacher, resource room teacher, and teacher consultant. Ms. Spencer had taught for twelve years with five years of experience teaching second grade. She looped from first grade to second grade with her students three times, including the year of the study.

Ms. Hanson taught at Pearlman Elementary School, a district magnet school for English language learners (ELLs) in a large university town. Teachers at Pearlman received special training in order to provide accessible and robust instruction for ELLs in their classrooms; specialists, translators, and tutors provided additional support under a pull-out model. Ms. Hanson's school served

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[6] In early study design, I planned to look at either first or second grade teachers, but after observing possible participants, it became evident that the ways in which first and second grade teachers were supporting writers during writing conferences differed greatly because of the writer's development. Thus, I decided to narrow the study to only focus on second grade teachers of writing.
All names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

over ninety English language learners, and 20% of the student population received free and reduced lunch.

Table 3.1:

District and School Demographics

Teacher	School	School Population	ELLs	F/R Lunch
Ms. Hanson	Pearlman Elementary	402	24%	20%
Ms. Spencer	Bernstein Elementary	654	6.8%	14.5%

Ms. Spencer taught at Bernstein Elementary School in a suburb of southeast Michigan. Only 14.5 % of the students at Bernstein elementary received free and reduced lunch. While still small, the population of English language learners in this school district doubled in the past ten years. District and school demographics are summarized in Table 3.1.

Prior to this study, I did not know or have contact with Ms. Spencer. She had been a mentor teacher for the university's teacher education program years ago, but we had never met. In contrast, Ms. Hanson had served as a mentor teacher for students in a literacy methods course that I taught three years ago. In this capacity, I worked closely with teachers to coordinate activities to enrich the teaching interns' experience at Pearlman Elementary and had engaged in multiple professional conversations with her.

Further information about each participant and corresponding context will be discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. At first blush, the teachers and contexts appear more similar than different. However, the contexts bring their own sets of differences in curriculum, levels of support for teachers, and expectations regarding how curriculum is implemented. Further, training, backgrounds, and experiences of the teacher participants also differed. These factors are worthy of exploring as they undoubtedly influence teachers' enactment of writing conference to support young writers.

Child Participants

While this dissertation provides a fine-grained view of conferences led by the two teacher participants, it is further enhanced by the participation of the children in each setting. Three children in Ms. Spencer's class did not participate in the study, while all of Ms. Hanson's second graders were permitted to be videotaped and have conversations with me in my role as an instructional researcher.

Data Sources

I drew from multiple data sources to investigate how teachers use writing conferences to advance the knowledge and skill of young writers and to investigate how young children make sense of the interactions that occur in writing conferences. These included: video of daily writing conferences, field notes and observation record forms, learning conversations with children, interviews with teachers, and classroom artifacts representative of teaching and learning.

Video of Daily Writing Conferences

I video-recorded all conferences conducted by each teacher over the course of two writing units: narrative and expository. Narrative writing was selected for two reasons. First, teachers express more comfort and knowledge working with narrative texts than other genres. Second, young children typically possess fairly developed schema about the narrative genre (Applebee, 1978; Bruner, 1990; Mandler & Johnson, 1977). The decision to collect video data of conferences during an expository unit was responsive to multiple calls for increased attention to expository genre in primary classrooms (Culter & Graham, 2008). Due to district curricular demands, each teacher taught a sub-genre under each of these categories. Ms. Hanson conducted units focused on "how-to" writing (e.g. procedural texts) and "many moments" - collections of small moments (i.e. topical collections of short focused vignettes that serve as a taking off point for more sophisticated personal narrative writing). Ms. Spencer led units focused on writing news articles and realistic fiction stories. This design allowed

for cross-case analysis of conferring within - and between – genres, although differences noted across genre were limited. In total, data collection yielded a video corpus of 274 total writing conferences, 82 for Ms. Hanson and 192 for Ms. Spencer.

Fieldnotes and Observation Record Form

Since writing conferences are nested within the overall writing workshop, I also documented, with the use of field notes and an observation form, descriptions of the antecedent and subsequent events to the writing conference. The observation form can be found in Appendix A. The observation record form provided at-a-glance information helpful in accounting for and organizing data. Such notes were also useful references while conversing with children following the conferences and conducting teacher interviews. Further, these notes enhanced video viewing and analysis in cases where the quality of audio was less than ideal.

Learning Conversations

Engaging students as informants has been documented to be an effective method to understand teaching from a learner's perspective (Palincsar, Magnusson, Collins, & Cutter, 2001). On days when children engaged in a writing conference, select students participated in learning conversations with me (Fraser, 2010) designed to assess their understanding of the instruction provided by their teachers. In both informal conversations and formal interviews, teachers identified children to participate in the learning conversations. Per the design of the study, these children were typically those whom the teachers were struggling to support either throughout the academic year, during the particular unit, or with respect to specific aspects of the writing process. On days when teachers had not selected children or in cases where the conference with the selected child occurred in a timeframe that made conducting the learning conference difficult (e.g. the conference was held in the last few minutes of independent writing time or prior to the teacher's call for children to work with partners), I attempted to

conduct a learning conversation with another child who had a conference that day.

During these quick learning conversations, I asked students the following set of questions: (a) What did you talk about during your conference? (b)What did you learn? (c)What are you going to do next/tomorrow? (d)What would be helpful to improving your writing? The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. The learning conversation protocol is located in Appendix B. In total, data collection yielded 19 learning conversations in Ms. Hanson's class and 37 learning conversations in Ms. Spencer's class.

Teacher Interviews

I applied a semi-structured interview protocol to interview teachers. Interview sessions following unit implementation also included a stimulated recall interview. Stimulated recall has been documented as an effective method for accessing teachers' cognitions about planning behaviors, instructional moves, and content (Peterson & Clark, 1978). The teacher was shown four short clips from conferences that had corresponding data from learning conversations and was asked to narrate her thinking about pivotal instructional moves and decision points. I identified two types of video clips: (1) episodes where the information from the student learning confirmation confirmed that the learner interpreted the teaching appropriately; and (2) episodes where the teachers goals are unclear or where the teaching enactment does not align with the stated goals. These points of misalignment have been documented as effective sites for investigating instructional decisions (Aguirre & Speer, 2000)[8]. In the post-implementation interviews, I also posed questions about the use of materials, planning and assessment processes and typicality of the observed workshops. Approximately half of the interviews were transcribed for analysis by an outside transcriber for a cost of $215, and I transcribed the remaining interviews. Interview protocols are located in Appendix C.

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[8] Stimulated recall interviews only occurred with Ms. Spencer because of limited time and access to Ms. Hanson during the unit. This is further discussed later in this chapter, as well as in Chapter 5.

Artifacts

I collected concrete evidence that represents teaching and learning in each classroom in order to gain a deep understanding of the context in which writing conferences are nested. These included photos of anchor charts, copies of mentor texts used in the workshop, teachers' conference notes, and children's writing on days they participated in conferences and learning conversations. I also collected copies of final publications for each child in the class at the conclusion of each of the writing units.

Data Collection

Data Collection: Ms. Spencer's Class

I collected data during Ms. Spencer's realistic fiction unit from January 5, 2011 – February 15, 2011. The unit consisted of 26 days of instruction. Writing workshop was canceled by the teacher on two days; she was sick one day, and school was cancelled due to inclement weather on another day. As a result, the unit spanned more weeks than Ms. Spencer had anticipated.

Prior to beginning to videotape, I interviewed Ms. Spencer during her planning period to gather information about the routines and norms of her instruction during writing time. She also shared thoughts about her students' writing abilities and identified children who struggled as writers in various ways (e.g. difficulty organizing thoughts, lack of productivity, encoding challenges). Ms. Spencer explained that she identifies the children with whom she will confer prior to the lesson and records the names on a post-it for reference during the workshop. She offered to leave the post-it with these names on her clip board for me to see before I began taping each day. She also suggested that she place a star next to names of children that would serve as informants during the learning conversations. In many cases, these were children we discussed during interviews or informal conversations.

The writing workshop was typically split into three parts in Ms. Spencer's classroom. During the first part, the mini-lesson, children gathered on the rug. I

positioned myself in a child's desk at the edge of the rug to complete the observation record form and take field notes. After the mini-lesson, children were released to their seats for independent writing. While Ms. Spencer outfitted herself with the lapel microphone, I positioned the video camera to capture the general area of the room where she would be working. As soon as she turned the microphone on, I began recording. All conferences, with the exception of those conducted with children whose parents had not given consent to participate, were recorded, and I strived to keep both the teacher and child in the video frame.

After Ms. Spencer had conferred with the child who would have the learning conversation that day, I typically assessed the extent to which I would be interrupting the child's progress, especially in cases where the conferences had jump-started the writer's productivity, and made a decision about when to conduct the learning conversation. These typically occurred within 15 minutes of the conference. At times, I was unable to conduct the learning conversation with the child Ms. Spencer had identified because of timing challenges. For example, on some days the children went directly to specials classes after writing workshop. If the end of the workshop time was approaching, and Ms. Spencer had not yet met with the identified child, I would conduct a learning conversation with another writer who had a conference that day. When I first began conducting learning conversations with the children, I explained to them that I was interested in learning about the conference they had with Ms. Spencer that day and followed the learning conversation protocol. Children did not always respond to questions I posed, so I often found the need to rephrase them. Over time, children became increasingly comfortable in these interactions; in fact, many children would ask when they could "have a turn" talking with me about their writing.

For the most part, writing workshop always concluded with a share session. Ms. Spencer varied the way in which she conducted the share as well as the location, so I positioned myself toward the outer edge of the classroom to complete the observation record form and take field notes. When the workshop

concluded, I photographed students' work, as well as any anchor charts or mentor text Ms. Spencer used during the mini-lesson or conferences.

Ms. Spencer and I met biweekly to discuss her teaching and the children's progress. On many occasions, Ms. Spencer would make comments about her instruction or what she was noticing about the children as writers to me. When this occurred, I jotted these down on the observation record form and further elaborated in field notes after completing data collection for the day. At the conclusion of the unit, I also conducted a semi-structured interview.

Data collection for Ms. Spencer's news article unit began March 23, 2011 and concluded on April 15, 2011. During this timeframe, writing workshop was cancelled once. The data collection process was identical to that of the realistic fiction unit, although because of scheduling issues, Ms. Spencer and I were unable to meet as often to debrief her teaching as often as we had during the first unit. Instead, we had brief conversations almost daily during transition times. Children also had more opportunities to work with partners during this unit; as a result, there were fewer teacher-student writing conferences.

Data Collection: Ms. Hanson's Class

Data collection for the procedural writing unit in Ms. Hanson's second-grade class began on April 13, 2011 and concluded on May 12, 2011. While we were scheduled to begin data collection at the same time I was collecting data in Ms. Spencer's class, the schedule needed to be adjusted to account for student teaching requirements of a teaching intern in Ms. Hanson's class. This pushed back data collection nearly three months.

At the start of the unit, Ms. Hanson explained that although the children wrote independently each day of the week, she did not conduct a mini-lesson or conferences on Mondays. Due to district requirements, she was required to lead small group word-study lessons at the start of each week. In order to accommodate for this, she had children continue to work on their writing from the current unit of study each Monday as she conducted these small group lessons.

Prior to my first day in the classroom, Ms. Hanson and I met to discuss the class' expectations and routines for writing workshop. During this time, she shared information about the writers in her classroom and identified children who have experienced challenges as writers throughout the year. She also commented on behaviors and dispositions toward learning that have interfered with some children's progress.

Ms. Hanson's writing workshop consisted of two parts: (1) a mini-lesson during which children gathered on the rug, frequently with their writing folders in hand, as she taught a short lesson for the day; and (2) independent writing with teacher-student conferences. During the mini-lesson, I positioned myself in a desk at the edge of the rug where the children gathered and completed the observation record form and took field notes. At the end of each mini-lesson, Ms. Hanson typically announced the children who were on her "conference list" for the day. As they transitioned, I moved the video camera to an appropriate spot in the classroom. As Ms. Hanson adjusted the lapel microphone, gathered her belongings, and began to confer, I started to collect video.

I used the on-going informal conversations Ms. Hanson and I were having about children in the classroom, as well as her initial reflections about their writing progress, to select children for the learning conversations. On average, Ms. Hanson conferred with fewer children than Ms. Spencer, so there were days when I conducted learning conversations with children whom Ms. Hanson had not identified because no other children had qualified for learning conversations.

Ms. Hanson's classroom was a very quiet workspace, so children were initially hesitant to speak during the learning conversations. As my presence and the conversations became increasingly regular, they were more open to sharing their thoughts. To begin the conversations, I always explained that I was interested in learning about the conference they had that day with Ms. Hanson and then followed the protocol outlined in Appendix B. Different from the interactions in Ms. Spencer's class, many of the children made statements about how their teacher "did a really good job" or commented about how "helpful" the

conferences were; in many ways, it seemed as if they were under the impression that I was evaluating her.

I attempted to conduct bi-weekly interviews with Ms. Hanson, though this was often disrupted by the school schedule (i.e. field trips and assemblies) and other circumstances. While I did conduct a formal initial and final interview for the unit, our other meetings were short and often informal. Ms. Hanson did not participate in stimulated recall interviews during the study.

Data collection for the second unit in Ms. Hanson's classroom, "Authors as Mentors," did not represent the typical delivery of curriculum or writing instruction for Ms. Hanson. Not only was she under pressure to complete the unit as end-of-year school activities took place, but she also had a family emergency early in the unit[9]. The unit was shortened and lasted 9 days. Learning conversations with children were conducted exactly as they were during the previous unit. Due to Ms. Hanson's family emergency, we did not have any formal time to connect during the actual unit; however, initial and final interviews were conducted.

Data Set

During independent writing time, both teachers often used a variety of participation structures to support student learning. These included one-on-one conferences, small group discussions during which students in the same area of the classroom engaged in conversation with the teacher and their peers about their writing, and partnered conferences during which the teacher met with two

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[9] Early on in my data collection, Ms. Hanson shared with me that her sister was in the final stages in her fight against Stage 4 cancer. She wanted me to be aware that this might affect her teaching and scheduling should she be called away to share final moments with her sister. She also wanted to emphasize that she did not typically take personal phone calls during the day. As an instructional researcher and a teacher educator who was well aware of Ms. Hanson's reputation in the school and district, I knew this was not the norm for her. There were days when I also knew there must have been some development as her teaching was not typical of what I had seen in the past. As individuals functioning in school contexts, we must be aware of such situations not only how they inform the claims one might make about a teacher's instruction, but also to consider how these happenings need to shape our interactions with teachers as people.

children who were working together to revise their individual writing. The analyses for this investigation were applied to one-on-one conferences only.

Further, it is common place during the writing workshop for teachers to informally monitor student progress and provide children with feedback and encouragement as they transition from one conference to another. These interactions typically lack the depth and focus of one-on-one conferences. For the purpose of this study, only one-on-one interactions between the teacher and a student that lasted for one minute or longer are included in the data corpus of writing conferences.

Table 3.2.

Total conferences by teacher and unit.

TEACHER	UNIT	TOTAL CONFERENCES	PAIRED CONFERENCES
Spencer	Realistic Fiction	116	22
Spencer	News Articles	76	15
Hanson	How-to Writing	47	13
Hanson	Authors as Mentors - Many Moments	35	6

Recall that the total number of conducted and captured conferences was 274. Table 3.2 outlines the number of conferences by teacher and writing unit. Further, the number of paired conferences (i.e. conferences that have corresponding learning conversations with children) is also presented by writing unit.

Data Analysis

In the following section, I elaborate the analyses to provide a more thorough description of the selected methods. Broadly, data analysis was designed to describe the teaching practice of two teachers of writing during one-on-one writing conferences and students' understanding of these interactions.

Table 3.3 overviews research questions and sub-questions, data sources, and methods of data analysis.

Table 3.3:

Table of research questions related to coding and analyses

Research Questions	Data Sources	Analysis
Research Question #1: *How do two teachers of writing use writing conferences to facilitate children's growth as writers?*		
What is the frequency and duration of writing conferences?	Observation record forms	Calculate mean, standard deviation and range to represent frequency and duration. Explore patterns and trends for frequency of conferences.
	Video	
What is the instructional focus of writing conferences?	Observation record forms	Conduct content analysis using coding schemes informed by patterns that emerged from the study and existing research, Hayes & Flower (1980) and McCarthey (1989, 1994) investigating, for example, what stage of the writing process teachers address (e.g. planning, organization, revision), what substance within the stage teachers address (e.g. generating ideas for personal narrative by thinking of an important place and something that happened there), and to what extent the teacher addresses the writing processes in a linear versus iterative way.
	Video	
	Teacher interviews	
What instructional activity are teachers and children engaged in during writing conferences?	Video	Apply Conference Analysis Tool as a form of content analysis.
	Transcripts of select conferences	
	Artifacts from conferences (teacher notes, models, mentor texts)	
	Teacher interviews	
How does the teacher differentiate instruction as a function of the children's profiles as writers?	Video	Compare frequency, duration, focus and process analyses in relationship to writing profiles of students as identified by teachers. Compare teachers' account of how they differentiate with video.
	Observation record forms	
	Teacher interviews	

How do teachers identify the instructional focus and instructional activity for individual writing conferences?	Teacher interviews	Use grounded theory to identify categories of data teachers use (e.g. observations, previous conferences, student writing) and factors teachers consider when determining the instructional focus and activity.
	Stimulated recall interviews	
How do the answers to these questions vary as a function of genre?	All of the above	Compare information gathered in previous questions across genre.

Research Question #2: How do children make sense of learning opportunities presented in writing conferences?		
What is the relationship between the organization of the conference and children's perceptions of what they have learned?	Video	Analyze paired conferences using Conference Analysis Tool. Compare use of Calkins' framework with children's perceptions from learning conversations.
	Learning Conversations with children	
What is the relationship between what the teacher identifies as her instructional goal and what the children believe they haves learned?	Learning conversations	Triangulate data from video, interviews, and learning conversations.
	Stimulated recall interviews with teachers on selective cases	
	Learning conversations with children	
What is the relationship between the instructional method the teacher employs in the conference and what the children articulate as having learned?	Video	Identify instructional methods through analysis using the CAT and grounded theory for methods that are not represented in the tool. Compare with children's perceptions from learning conversations.
	Learning conversations with children	
What is the relationship between the level of explicitness of the instruction and children's perceptions of what they have been taught?	Video transcripts	Analyze discourse focusing on the explicitness of teacher language. Compare with children's perceptions from learning conversations.
	Learning conversations with children	

Data were treated in three stages. At the completion of data collection, all data were catalogued in a spreadsheet and organized by participant, writing unit, date, data source, and mode of instruction (e.g. mini-lesson or conference) when applicable. I drafted memos to reflect my thinking about the "story line" of the investigation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 106), incorporate theory derived from the literature, and document my on-going interpretation of the analyses throughout each of the three stages of data analysis. Observation record forms, field notes, interviews, and video data were reviewed on a macro-level to create summaries that overviewed what occurred during instruction and both document my thinking about aspects of the data that I found both interesting or puzzling while remaining in interaction with the data. This process of open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) enabled me to explore patterns and trends to determine subsequent steps in the data analysis.

Design and Application of the Conference Analysis Tool

Conference Analysis Tool Design. Stage two of data analysis involved the development and use of an analytical tool to treat the video data. In this capacity, I aimed to conduct a finer-grained analysis of paired conferences (i.e. conferences with corresponding learning conversations) to investigate the overlap between a framework for conferring and the conferences facilitated by the two teachers in this study. As described in Chapter 2, there is a scarcity of research specific to the instructional practices in teacher-student writing conferences. In recent years, the landscape is such that instructional researchers have dominated defining and articulating the work of teachers in writing conferences. Calkins' approach to conferring is one that is widely recognized and implemented by teachers, school administrators, and professional development providers. Thus, I designed an analytical tool to represent her popular frame for conferring that is commonplace in elementary classrooms across the nation.

Although the framework for conferring that Calkins and colleagues (Calkins, Hartman & White, 2005) propose has not been empirically studied, it grew out of countless hours working in classrooms with children and teachers in

attempt to provide teachers with a structure for approaching conferences. The design of the Conference Analysis Tool (CAT) was informed by multiple texts authored by Calkins and colleagues to capture their most current thinking about conferences. Roughly, the CAT decomposes Calkins' suggested architecture for conferring (i.e. research, decide, teach, link), as well as the conferences classifications she puts forth (i.e. content, expectation, spelling/conventions, process and quality of good writing). After unpacking the elements of each conference, I solicited feedback from a number of professionals (professors of literacy, teacher educators, professional development providers, and classroom teachers) to ensure I was accurately interpreting Calkins' proposed architecture. Next, I met with an outside coder to pilot and refine the tool. In some cases, the explanations and examples provided by Calkins in her descriptions were not particularly specific. While the outside coder and I noted this, we did not alter the tool or code book because I did not want it to be clouded by alternative interpretations that did not reflect Calkins' thinking about conferences. The CAT and guide are located in Appendix D and Appendix E.

Inter-coder reliability. I enlisted the assistance of the same independent rater to confirm the clarity of my analytical tool and method. We both independently coded a sample of conferences representing 20% of the paired conference/learning conversation data corpus. This sample included randomly selected paired conferences from each teacher and each unit of study. After we each independently coded a sample of twelve conferences, I calculate Cohen's Kappa to assess the inter-rater reliability for individual items identified in the tool. Inter-coder reliability was calculated for item sub-headings (e.g. Research: Identifies what the child is doing well); there was insufficient power to determine the reliability of items listed below subheadings (e.g. Feedback was detailed).

Kappa coefficients greater than .80 are considered to be in almost perfect agreement and those greater than .60 are considered to be of substantial agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Table 3.4:

Inter-rater reliability for the CAT

Item	Cohen's Kappa
Research: Gathers information about the writing topic	.625 (.020)
Research: Gathers information about the writer's process	1.000 (.001)
Research: Identifies what the child is doing well	1.000 (.001)
Decide: Identifies and articulates a teaching point for the conference	1.000 (.001)
Teach: Provides instruction	.625 (.030)
Teach: Focuses on teaching point	.750 (.007)
Link: Restates teaching point	1.000 (.001)
Link: Positions writer to move forward	.800 (.005)
Organized according to Calkins' conference architecture	1.000 (.001)
Conference classification	.646 (.001)
Stage in writing process	.467 (.025)

Cohen's Kappa for each item is presented in Table 3.4. The Kappa coefficient was greater than .60 for all items except for "stage in the writing process." Hypotheses about the limited agreement for "stage in the writing process" will be presented in Chapter 4.

Data treatment. Because I was not only interested in looking at the ways in which teachers utilized conferences to support young writers, but also how these writers interpreted the teaching that occurred during conferences, I only analyzed paired conferences. I applied the analytical tool to 56 paired conferences – 19 from Ms. Hanson's teaching and 37 from Ms. Spencer's teaching. As previously mentioned, this subset of the total video corpus included all video of conferences

that had corresponding learning conversations. After completing that stage of the analysis, I did a frequency count for each of the features listed in the analytical tool. Many of these counts in conjunction with other data sources are featured in the subsequent findings chapters.

Comparative Analysis of Data and Memos

In Stage 3 of the data analysis, I attempted to integrate the themes and concepts that had emerged through analyses occurring in Stage 1 and Stage 2. Guided by the study's research questions and sub-questions, I looked across data sources for confirming and contradictory evidence to triangulate the data and increase the validity of claims. In many cases, this process required a closer look at actual discourse from conferences, so I conducted discourse analysis that focused the extent to which teachers explicitly named what was being addressed in conferences and how explicit their language use was within their pedagogical approach. In addition, I returned to and compared memos I had drafted throughout the different stages of analysis to explore the strength of early claim in relation to evidence presented in the data.

Member Checking

Engaging in member checking is a common way of establishing validity in qualitative research. Both participants were offered the opportunity to read and respond to the chapters in which their teaching is featured.

CHAPTER 4
CONFERRING IN MS. SPENCER'S CLASSROOM

In Chapter 4, I provide a thorough description of the teacher, writing curriculum, and classroom context in which the study occurred. Then, I report findings specific to the frequency of conferences, instructional foci of conferences, instructional methods used by the teacher in conferences, and the ways in which the teacher differentiated instruction during conferences as a function of children's profiles as writers. Findings that speak to cross-genre comparisons, as well as the sense children make of learning opportunities presented in conferences are woven within these sections in order to provide a more interrelated understanding of the work of the teacher and the sense-making of the children.   Findings are particularly interesting with respect to the role of explicitness in relationship to children's perceptions of what they have learned, the teacher's use of methods such as "flooding," modeling, and referring to a mentor text, as well as how conferences vary based on children's profiles as writers.

Research Context
Ms. Spencer

As described in Chapter 3, Ms. Spencer was a second grade teacher in a self-contained classroom at a suburban school in southeast Michigan. Spencer earned her BA in elementary education with certifications in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science, and has been a classroom teacher for 12 years. She began her career as a long-term substitute in a fourth grade classroom, and since then has been teaching in either first grade, second grade, or in a split

first/second grade classroom. The study occurred during Ms. Spencer's fifth year teaching second grade.

Although Ms. Spencer earned her Master's in Reading in 2002, she realized that her skills and knowledge were better applied in her own classroom as she questioned how persuasive she could be while working with other teachers. She has remained involved in committee work at the school district level serving as the English Language Arts committee chair and English Language Arts committee representative.

During the year of data collection, Ms. Spencer was teaching in a second grade class; however, in the previous year, she had been the first grade teacher of the majority of her students. All but two students - one who had transferred from a different school and another whose parents had requested to have him placed in her classroom - had been her students for well over one and a half academic years when data collection began.

In conversation, Spencer presented as a teacher who was concerned with helping her students develop not only a love of learning with a keen focus on reading and writing, but also the ability to approach the world as independently minded individuals who exhibit deep care for others. She maintained high expectations for what her students were capable of achieving and communicated this to them in daily classroom life. Ms. Spencer also exhibited extremely high expectations for herself as a teacher. She took it upon herself to seek out professional texts to support her to become a better teacher and yearned to engage in conversations about teaching practice – whether her own or others – to build her own understanding of how she could best support her students. In informal conversations, Ms. Spencer frequently referred to regular meetings she had with a parent of one of her students, who taught elementary school at another school in southeast Michigan. She spoke fondly of these conversations, always stressing how Leah, her parent-teacher colleague, forced her to look critically at her pedagogy. Moreover, she took it upon herself to refine her teaching by looking to popular professional texts to support current challenges she was facing. Specific to writing instruction, Ms. Spencer often looked to texts

authored by Ralph Fletcher or Regie Routman as key resources. She took pride in the fact that she looked to "researchers" when she was puzzled about issues about teaching and learning.

Writing Curriculum and Materials

Throughout my time in Ms. Spencer's classroom, she frequently referred to the district curriculum and her obligation to fulfill the curricular requirements of the district. She also referenced the Michigan Grade Level Content Expectations, herein referred to as GLCEs, as a reference that supported her understanding of the content for which she was responsible.

The Michigan English Language Arts standards overview instructional goals and inform assessments for teachers, while the GLCEs serve as supplemental set of grade level targets that provide more specific guidance for teachers regarding what they should be teaching at particular grade levels. Ms. Spencer often referred to the GLCEs as what she was "hired to cover." However, she explained that because she had been teaching for quite some time, it was not challenging for her to supplement what was required of her by the state.[10]

Ms. Spencer's School District used 6+1 Trait® Writing to drive elementary writing assessment and instruction. 6+1 Trait® Writing is a commercially available system of assessing writing based on seven targeted traits: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation. The system was created to provide a lens for teachers not only to assess writing, but also to teach their students to do the same. Annual district writing assessments were scored according to the 6+1 Traits Writing rubrics, and teachers were expected to use "the traits" to inform their writing instruction. In Ms. Spencer's classroom, the "traits" were referred to seamlessly through the day in both reading and writing instruction. Children often highlighted an author's "good word choice" as a text was being read aloud, referred to finding their

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[10] My experiences working as a teacher educator and professional development provider in the state of Michigan leave me with the understanding that, although the state has defined standards that are supplemented with more detailed grade level expectations in the GLCEs, teachers interpret the GLCEs as the state standards instead of the supplemental materials they are intended to be.

"voice" as they crafted new texts in writing workshop, and explored how the "sentence fluency" of a text they were reading influenced their comprehension. Field notes suggested that Ms. Spencer's students had appropriated the language from the 6+1 Traits program.

The district curriculum outlined two goals for second grade writing: (1) *writing includes six essential traits of writing*, and (2) *uses writing process* and identified 4 genres teachers should teach children to write – realistic fiction, news articles, poetry, and essays. In addition to the 6+1 traits assessment system and related professional texts, little specific guidance for each genre was shared with teachers. For example, the curriculum for realistic fiction read:

> *Write a story using the genre characteristics of realistic fiction in which:*
> - *the characters and events may be based on real life*
> - *the problem is solved in a realistic way*
>
> (School District Curriculum, 2005)

For the other genre in which this study was situated, news articles, the curriculum guide read:

> *Write a news article for an outside audience about a classroom event. Use a descriptive organizational pattern. Use a graph, diagram and /or chart (as applicable) to enhance understanding.*
>
> (School District Curriculum, 2005)

As a result of this lean guidance from the district, teachers took it upon themselves to develop their own approach to covering the curriculum and teaching to state standards. Teachers received little support to acquire the specialized knowledge necessary for teaching writing or to develop the practices that best serve the needs of their students. As a result, writing instruction varied across the school.

In the case of curriculum, Ms. Spencer commented about how she felt the need to "read up" on what she was teaching to supplement her own understanding. While she felt like there are a handful of professional texts that have enhanced her knowledge about realistic fiction, she voiced her concern on multiple occasions about not feeling prepared to teach her students to write news articles. She used an article from The Michigan Reading Association to help

guide her planning and instruction, but still did not feel altogether prepared. In an interview early on in the news articles unit, she said, "The second grade teachers can't even agree on what a news article is, so how the heck do I teach it?" She communicated her frustration and confusion about how to define the genre and interpret its features and rhetorical devices and the effect on her ability to teach throughout the unit.

Spencer described her approach to writing as dually focused. She explained that her units alternate between a "product" unit, and a "process" unit. During "product" units, she focuses on genre. Children are required to produce products in a specific genre. During a process unit, she focuses on "trait work" that can be applied across genre. For example, she argued that, when teaching children how to add details to a text, they can learn to do that in any genre. Ms. Spencer identified the units during which data collection occurred as "product" units. While the study was situated in two "product" units, pilot data revealed that beyond requiring children to compose in a particular genre during "product" units and allowing them the freedom to choose the genre during "process" units, other features of instruction remained the same (e.g. instructional moves and instructional foci).

Classroom Context

The richness of the context that Ms. Spencer has created for young literacy learners is manifest in many ways. Print is visible throughout the room including chart paper representations of the class' thinking from recent discussions about Eve Bunting's *Smoky Night* hanging on the walls, texts organized by genre available for browsing and lending, and writing paper and utensils abound. Beyond the physical elements one might see, a visitor would hear a considerable amount of chatter that emphasizes how deeply the children in this classroom care about reading and writing. "Can we have extra time for writing today?" "This book really reminds me of the one we read in first grade about friendship. Both of them have bullies, and the kids think about how to deal with them." "I want to try out the flip-o-rama. That was a really cool feature of that

science book we saw." "Last night before I went to bed, I was thinking about what my readers will really want to know about the topic." The majority of the children in this classroom see themselves as writers. In fact, when I did some in-role dramatized interviews with the children and told them we were going to pretend they were writers and talk for a bit, one student quickly reminded me that they "*are* writers." From that day forward, I used the phrase "professional writers," because saying "published writers" would not even work. These children had been publishing their writing since they entered elementary school two years prior.

A Look Inside Ms. Spencer's Classroom

The following section describes activities and structures to support literacy learning in Ms. Spencer's classroom. Further, it serves as an overview of each component of the writing workshop (e.g. mini-lesson, independent writing with conferences, and share time) to highlight how the components unfold in daily classroom life.

Ms. Spencer was committed to providing authentic literacy experiences that help children to see how reading and writing can enhance their daily lives. While other teachers in her school felt pressured to "fit in all the curriculum," Ms. Spencer designed a classroom environment that was predictable and routinized. When children arrived, they tended to daily responsibilities that freed her up to provide individualized intervention support to a small subset of her students. As she worked uninterruptedly with these youngsters, other children in the classroom selected, rehearsed, and produced plays, co-authored texts in genres not currently being explored in their writing workshop, and played games to support their word knowledge. In spite of the fact that Spencer did not organize or lead these learning opportunities, children were hard at work exercising and respecting their right to choose how, in interaction with their peers, they began the day in the literacy rich environment. As this brief choice time came to an end, children responded to a recording of Rogers and Hammerstein's "Oh What a Beautiful Morning," and gathered to begin the day. This kind of structure was the

hallmark of their classroom life and enabled the children and teacher to both identify and fulfill the high expectations they set for themselves.

Children in Ms. Spencer's class had multiple opportunities to write each day. In addition to a daily Writing Workshop of about 40-60 minutes and writing in response to literature during the reading block, children also wrote in their "adventure journals" for 15 minutes after lunch each day. Ms. Spencer admitted that she began adventure journaling to squelch post-recess tattling; yet, over time it became an uninterrupted time in which children were building their writing stamina and trying out craft work they had noted in their reading. Although Ms. Spencer did not interrupt children or dictate topics or genres for writing during "adventure journal" writing, she admitted to encouraging them to try new things that related to what they were learning in the literacy block. For example, one day she suggested that students might try to create clear description in their writing, just like Eve Bunting did in the story they read earlier that day. In interviews, Ms. Spencer referenced this particular time of day as a time when children were increasing their ability to write for sustained periods of time without assistance or interruptions. She explained how children currently were expected to be writing for twelve minutes straight, and then complete a conventions check for the last three minutes of the block.

While there were many opportunities for children to engage with print as both writers and readers in Ms. Spencer's room, she saw Writing Workshop as one of the most important parts of the day for her second graders. She was committed to providing daily opportunities for children to write. On days when school activities conflicted with her daily schedule, she always made an effort to shift her schedule for the day to still allow for Writing Workshop.

Mini-Lessons

Writing Workshop in Ms. Spencer's class was comprised of three parts: the mini-lesson, independent writing with conferences, and a share time. Her mini-lessons began the workshop with students gathered on the rug for a lesson of about 8-25 minutes in length. In Spencer's daily mini-lessons in the writing

workshop, she drew children's attention to particular traits from the 6+1 Traits program, as well as her overall goals for children for the unit. For example, in the realistic fiction unit, she stressed the importance of staying true to the genre, creating and following a plan, and describing characters and settings throughout their stories. In the news articles unit, she focused on what she referred to as the four types of news articles (compare/contrast, descriptive, enumerative, and sequential), page layout, identifying a thesis, and using descriptive words. In mini-lessons, her core pedagogies were: (1) relating the focus of the lesson to children's prior experiences as readers and writers, (2) partial modeling how she would do the work as a writer, (3) asking students for input on her writing, and (4) reminding students what needed to be in their writing prior to dismissing them to begin writing independently. During these times, children were often interested in contributing to and learning more about their teacher's story. On multiple occasions, students left the reading rug to begin their independent writing and started writing pieces about topics that had an uncanny resemblance to what their teacher had written about.

While these lessons gave children an idea of the product their teacher wanted them to produce, they did not always unpack the work of writers in an accessible manner. For example, Ms. Spencer would often craft her own writing piece on chart paper in front of the class, reading aloud as she wrote. She would make comments such as, "Oh, this seems like a good place for me to share some information about my character," and then add description of her character without describing what prompted her to add such information or how, as a writer, she would go about adding that information. Further, this partial modeling often times contradicted what she had established as the purpose of the lesson. She called students' attention to other aspects of the writing she was considering as she wrote, likely distracting some children from the overall lesson. At other times, Ms. Spencer established expectations, provided hints or tips, and emphasized features of the genre that she identified as key; the features were not always in accordance with what the field would articulate about a particular genre. On days when she felt as if students were not ready for a new mini-

lesson, she would discuss production expectations. For example, she would say, "By the end of tomorrow, you need to have finished two realistic fiction stories – both the plans and print."

Independent Writing and Conferences

After the mini-lesson, children were dismissed to return to their seats and began writing independently. The energy of a collaborative classroom was evident; students chatted with seat partners when they needed help developing an idea or spelling a word. Independent writing typically lasted about 30-40 minutes, but on some days, especially as deadlines loomed, Ms. Spencer extended writing time or allowed children to stay in from recess and write. It was during the independent writing block that Spencer conducted conferences with children. Ms. Spencer described writing conferences as:

> *…one-on-one time where I sit down and talk with children one-on-one about the work that I am asking them to do and what they – where they are in their individual progress without that…basically it's about meeting their individual needs.* (Ms. Spencer, interview, March 24, 2011).

These individual writing conferences were a time in which Ms. Spencer aimed to differentiate instruction for individual writers. They occurred throughout the independent writing time on most days of the workshop. If an observer walked into Ms. Spencer's classroom during these times they would see children working on different phases of the writing process, as Spencer sat side by side with a child at his or her desk. Spencer and the child would be doing any number of things: looking at the child's writing, discussing their ideas and goals, studying a mentor text (i.e. model text) written in the same genre by another author, or listening as the child reads his or her work aloud. At first glance, these conferences appeared to be informal conversations between a teacher and a child. A naive bystander would not be able to detect the focused work in which both the teacher and child are engaged. Ms. Spencer's one-on-one conferences will be described in greater depth later in this chapter.

Share Time

Throughout the workshop, Ms. Spencer monitored time to ensure that her students had one more opportunity to gather together following independent writing. She used a number of structures to give children an opportunity to share their writing with classmates. On some days, she spotlighted examples of how children were incorporating the mini-lessons into their own writing. However, on most days, children met with partners to share their work. Ms. Spencer commented:

> *And they have a new partner of the day every single day so they are seeing different people around the room, other people are getting their--they're getting other people's opinion and feedback about the work that they've been doing.* (Ms. Spencer, interview, March 24, 2011).

Spencer saw what children could learn from one another as invaluable contributions that support their learning and development.

Findings

Recall that the purpose of this study was to investigate how teachers use writing conferences to support the growth and development of young writers. The following section presents findings pertaining to the both research questions:

(1) How does the teacher use writing conferences to facilitate children's growth as writers?

(2) How do children make sense of learning opportunities presented in writing conferences?

What is the frequency and duration of writing conferences?

Ms. Spencer conducted one-on-one conferences with an average of 5.27 children each day (sd=1.88) during the realistic fiction with a daily range of 2 to 8 conferences. Because the format Ms. Spencer used for conferring changed significantly after children selected the texts to be prepared for publication, the days following the day when children selected their piece for publication have been omitted from the analysis. As a result, the last four days of the realistic unit

have not been included because all of the conferences Ms. Spencer led were either in pairs or small groups.

In the news article unit, Ms. Spencer conferred with an average of 5.07 children each day (sd=2.76) with a daily range of 1 to 12. Again, any conferences following the day on which children selected their piece for publication were omitted from the analysis because the types of conferences led by the teacher did not fall under the data decision rule regarding what constitutes a conference (i.e. a conversation between the teacher and one student which had a duration of more than one minute in length).

During both writing units (realistic fiction and news articles), Ms. Spencer conferred individually with children more often during the start and middle of the unit. After students had selected texts to prepare for publication, the majority of conferences took the form of "partnered conferences" – where children met with one another to provide feedback about their drafts, and Spencer conferred with the partners about how to move forward in their quest to publish. Although "partnered conferences" are not addressed in this dissertation, it is important to highlight their use because they almost replaced independent conferences at certain points of each writing unit.

Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 display frequency counts for daily writing conferences, paired with the stage of the writing process Spencer targeted during daily mini-lessons for each unit. Both tables show how the majority of Ms. Spencer's mini-lessons focused on planning, and although a shift in the focus of the mini-lessons occurred as the teacher and children made their way through each unit, planning reappears toward the end of the unit. Patterns specific to the number of conferences Ms. Spencer facilitated over the course of the unit did not emerge, although there appeared to be clusters of time when she met with more students than usual. In the realistic fiction unit, she conferred with six or more children during the first three days of week 2, as well as the last two days of week 5 and first two days of week 6. This did not appear to be correlated with the stage of the writing process addressed in the mini-lesson. It is possible that the clusters served as days when the independent writing time was longer and

allowed more time for conferring. Alternatively, these could have been days when Ms. Spencer thought it was important to confer with more students in an effort to address possible misconceptions, or Ms. Spencer and the children were addressing aspects of their writing that did not require lengthy conferences, thus allowing her to meet with more children.

Table 4.1:

Number of daily conferences and mini-lesson focus – realistic fiction

	M	T	W	Th	F
Week 1			6	4	4
Week 2	6	6	7	5	6
Week 3			5	3	8
Week 4	2	4	7		
Week 5	3	3	5	6	8
Week 6	7	8	3	0	0
Week 7	0	0			

KEY Blue: Plan; Green: Draft; Yellow: Revise; Orange: Edit; Purple: Publish; White: No school or no mini-lesson and conferences; Pink: Workshop Routine

Ms. Spencer occasionally expressed concern that she was not conferring with enough children during independent writing. She typically aimed to see five to seven students per workshop and frequently commented about the need to confer with more children on days when she conferred with fewer than five children. The table above helps us see how, after a day or two of seeing fewer students, the number of conferences Ms. Spencer led increased significantly. This trend aligns with her concern to meet with more children - a concern voiced during interviews and multiple informal conversations during the study.

Table 4.2:

Number of daily conferences and mini-lesson focus – news articles

	M	T	W	Th	F
Week 1			**5**	**7**	**7**
Week 2	**5**	**5**	**6**	**2**	**12**
Week 3	**5**	**2**		**4**	**2**
Week 4	**6**	**7**	**1**	**0**	**0**

KEY Blue: Plan; Green: Draft; Yellow: Revise; Orange: Edit; Purple: Publish; White: No school or no mini-lesson and conferences; Pink: Workshop Routine

Ms. Spencer identified the students with whom she wanted to confer prior to the start of writing workshop each day. She listed these on her conference record sheet and carried it with her as she met with children to discuss their writing. These children were usually chosen based on three characteristics: (1) they had not recently had an individual conference; (2) they had demonstrated or expressed confusion in a conference held the day or two prior; or (3) they had expressed either explicitly or implicitly during an instructional transition that they were finding something challenging. Ms. Spencer always began with the first child on the list; subsequent children were attended to based on their proximity to the child with whom she had been working[11]. Although Spencer aspired to meet with each child she had identified, she also honored children's requests for assistance - often expressed through a written message the child delicately placed on the teacher's clipboard to avoid interrupting her work with another child, a routine she established early in the year. Further, she responded to her observations. When students exhibited signs that they were not working productively during independent writing (e.g. excessive talking with peers, staring off, frequent visits to the supply center or bathroom), she reserved the right to intervene with a conference or quick check-in as a technique for managing behavior. As a result, it was not unusual for her to disregard her conference list

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[11] This pattern could have been influenced by the videotaping, as Ms. Spencer was aware that moving across the room often required me to move the camera to capture the conference.

for the day. In this case, the students she had previously identified remained on her list for the following day. Although students who were not seen remained on her conference list, field notes indicate that sometimes these children never participated in a conference on the days that immediately followed; they remained on the list until a new list was created, and their names were not included on that subsequent list. In most cases, these were the children who had the fewest number of conferences with the teacher across units. The characteristics of these students will be discussed later in this chapter.

Staging and pacing conferences is no easy task. Teachers frequently express difficulty knowing how to handle decision making about who to confer with or how to conduct conferences in an efficient - yet still productive - manner that allows sufficient devotion of time and energy to supporting all children in the classroom. Time and pacing are factors contributing to teachers' abilities to meet such needs. In an interview, Ms. Spencer shared how individual writing conferences in second grade are more difficult to conduct as quickly as she did with the same students in the year prior. She attributed this to the content of the conferences. She said:

> *In first grade, I can move quickly because their stories are so much shorter. I can hit almost the whole class because I'm in and out, just like that. But in second grade, the writing work is much more sophisticated. I'm asking them to dip into character and setting and produce stories that are much longer and much deeper. I just can't pop in and pop out the way I could in first grade.* (Ms. Spencer, interview, February 16, 2011).

It is challenging for a teacher to find sufficient time to conduct individual conferences with 26 children and provide feedback tailored to the individual while still maintaining a pulse on the progress and productivity of other children in the classroom. Although Ms. Spencer recognized that her ability to confer with children on a consistent basis was influenced by the content of the conferences, she remained unclear regarding the "ideal" length of a conference. In an interview after viewing six conferences she conducted during the realistic fiction unit, Ms. Spencer expressed that she was "shocked" at the length of some of her

conferences. Yet, the transcript excerpt below represents her thinking about the affordances of longer conferences. She discusses the difference between a two-minute conference she conducted with Brendan, a child Ms. Spencer had identified in conversation as a struggling writer, and a twelve-minute conference she held with Tristan, a child she had described as a very capable but sometimes unmotivated writer.

Ms. Spencer: I was talking to kids for eight to twelve minutes?

Researcher: You have some conferences that are longer than others.

Ms. Spencer: I was shocked, but I also felt that in Brendan's conference, it was only two minutes, I felt like he probably walked away with nothing where those other ones I felt like they probably walked away with lots of good stuff. So maybe that in and out conference isn't necessarily--'cause I often pride myself in the fact I can get through half the class, but it felt like Tristan really walked away with meaningfulness when I sat there for eight minutes.

Researcher: And why do you think that is?

Ms. Spencer: Probably because as focused as I was I was focused on the content I wanted to teach--or that I was trying to talk to everyone about, but I absolutely a hundred percent took the time to sit down and ask the question, "Show me in your work where." And I did that with three, Brendan's I didn't. And that was an in and out and so maybe--I was thinking about that like I--okay. I was thinking, okay, I'm gonna try four minutes. I don't want a timer going, but I want to try to get--be more explicit so that I--four minutes in and out. But I also don't want to walk away from making sure that it is absolutely focused on them showing me where it worked in their writing. So being able to do that in a shorter amount of time will be harder.

Ms. Spencer's reflections surfaced another challenge teachers encounter while conferring: How does one conduct time-efficient, meaningful conferences that remain focused on content that will prove useful to individual writers? Perhaps, it is not prudent to think about such interactions in terms of time, but instead consider what occurs in the interaction and the extent to which the moves

teachers are making to move a conference forward are aligned with an instructional focus. Threading a clear, instructional focus through a conference would allow both the child and teacher to maintain focus. Glasswell's study of eight, exemplary writing teachers' conferences with children suggests that "to maximize opportunities for learning, it is helpful to consider the time given to the individual writer in terms of quality rather than quantity" (Glasswell, 2003, p.297). The findings discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter attempt to shed light on this very issue of quality.

What is the instructional focus of writing conferences?

Interview data and field notes revealed that Ms. Spencer attempted to link the instructional focus of the conferences to mini-lesson topics she taught on the day of the conference or days leading up to it. However, she was also responsive when students expressed immediate concerns not aligned with her larger goals for units or the previously taught lesson during their conferences. For example, when Lance told her he was struggling to identify a better word to replace one in the news article he was drafting, Ms. Spencer proceeded by teaching him how to use the thesaurus as a tool for improving his word choice. This was not something she had covered during the mini-lesson, but she saw it as a valuable contribution she could make to Lance's learning.

Ms. Spencer also viewed conferences as a time "to check and see if [students] applied what was taught" to help address misconceptions or misunderstanding before children fell far behind. For example, after mini-lessons focused on character development, she would begin conferences by asking students to show her where they had been working on developing their characters on the page. According to video coding, 15 out of 37 total conferences were categorized as "assessment" conferences where she gauged if students had applied content covered in previous mini-lessons and did not provide further instruction to support their development as writers. Given that Ms. Spencer's primary form of curricular support from her school district was training in the 6+1 Traits Writing Program, which emphasizes assessment, this is not altogether

surprising. Analyses also revealed that these "assessment conferences" unfolded in a predictable manner. Ms. Spencer either read or asked student to read their work to see where they had applied previous lessons. If the child had incorporated the learning into their work, she proceeded by reminding the child of other things he or she should attend as they continued writing. In cases where the child had not demonstrated application of content addressed in a mini-lesson, Ms. Spencer reminded the child that it was part of his or her "job as a writer," or she told students they "did not follow directions." This same structure was not apparent in conferences not categorized as assessment conferences; in fact, such conferences lacked a basic overall structure for both the teacher and learner.

Such observations where teacher-student interactions are categorized as assessment-focused as opposed to instruction-based are all too familiar in reading research. Durkin (1978/1979) and Taylor, Peterson, Clark, & Walpole (2000) found that teachers routinely engage in practices to assess whether students understand what they have read, but rarely engage in explicit instruction to support children in learning to comprehend text.

Student-Selected Focus

While the instructional focus of a conference typically aligned with Ms. Spencer's larger goals for the unit or what she had recently addressed during a mini-lesson, there were occasions when she attempted to have children identify what sort of assistance they needed from her.

After quickly reviewing the work the child had completed thus far or observing that the child appeared to be on track, Ms. Spencer often posed the question, "What do you need from me right now?" Students typically responded by shrugging or looking away to signal that they did not know what sort of assistance to request. Video data also indicate that the opportunity for a student to select the focus of a conference in response to Ms. Spencer's question only occurred in conferences with children she had labeled as strong writers or struggling writers.

Even in a conference where Ms. Spencer articulated how a writer might think about what assistance would be helpful, the child was unable to request targeted assistance. As a result, this child received no targeted instruction during the one-on-one conference. The transcript of a portion of this conference is included below. This segment began five minutes into Ms. Spencer's conference with Esmé. The following describes what occurred during the five minutes prior.

When Ms. Spencer began conferring with Esmé, there was confusion over how many stories Esmé had produced so far and what she was currently drafting. Esmé had explained that this was her first realistic fiction piece because, as Ms. Spencer figured out after looking back at her conference notes and probing, Esmé thought that only stories written using the new planning sheet that she was using for the first time were considered realistic fiction. After Ms. Spencer realized where Esmé's confusion was, she explained that everything they had done during the unit, regardless of which plan they used, was realistic fiction. Esmé then read her story aloud to Ms. Spencer, Ms. Spencer asked a few questions about the setting and told Esmé that she had adequately described her characters and setting.

Ms. Spencer: What kind of help do you need from me?

Esmé: Um.

Ms. Spencer: One of the things that writers do when they talk to someone about their story, is they think about the places where they wish they could do a little bit better or places where they are having a hard time with. Is there anything in your writing that you feel like you're having a hard time doing?

Esmé: No.

Ms. Spencer: No? Is there anything that if you could wish as a writer that you could get better at something, is there anything you would do?

Ms. Spencer: There's nothing you want to get better at? You feel like your writing is just where you want it to be?

Esmé: Mhmmmm. (Esmé nods.)

Ms. Spencer: So from [Ms. Spencer], what do you need? You need me to just give you some more time to write? You need me to teach you another lesson?

Ms. Spencer: More time? (Esmé nods.)

Ms. Spencer: More time? You want me to make writing workshop to go all day? Would that be a good thing?

(Esmé nods and smiles. Other children overhear Ms. Spencer's comment and affirm that it would be helpful to have more time so they can finish their stories.)

In the segment featured above, Spencer was the primary speaker and gave Esmé little opportunity to respond before speaking again. While Esmé's non-verbal indicators gave Ms. Spencer a window into her thinking, she did not verbally engage in the conference. Ms. Spencer had previously identified Esmé as a struggling writer and suggested that she had difficulty composing text because she was not a child who was "strong verbally." In a learning conversation following the conference, Esmé was asked what she talked about with Ms. Spencer. She responded by describing her characters and setting, and said, "Now I'm at the point where I'm writing about the problem." When asked what Ms. Spencer taught her or what she learned in the conference, Esmé responded, "Nothing. I didn't really learn anything." (Esmé, learning conversation, February 24, 2011). Could Esmé have profited more from this conference had she been able to articulate what she *needed*?

In informal conversation after that day's workshop, Ms. Spencer recognized that children might not be aware of what sort of help they might request in a conference. When asked what kinds of responses she anticipates from children when asking them "What do you need from me?," she replied:

> *I'd hope that they can think about what is difficult for them as writers, but the few times I've asked "What do you need right now?" kids have stared at me. To me, that indicates that they probably just need more time, but that's probably also the only thing they can think to ask for. It makes me think that I should probably do a lesson about conferences because ideally I'd like them to lead them more.* (Ms. Spencer, interview, February 25, 2011).

In subsequent instruction, Ms. Spencer did not conduct a mini-lesson to support children to identify what assistance would be helpful during a conference. During the realistic fiction unit, she continued to ask children, on occasion, what assistance they needed from her. However, in the news article unit, she did not pose this question during conferences she facilitated.

While literature points to the importance of letting children have a voice in conferences and assume the lead in their direction (McCarthey, 1989; McCarthey, 1994), it is possible that not all children are capable of such responsibility at this point in their writing development. Not one student whom Ms. Spencer asked what he or she needed responded in a way that helped her understand what the child found puzzling or challenging; the most consistent response besides a shrug was, "More time." By relying on a child to articulate his needs to drive instruction, many teachable moments are potentially lost.

In order to ask a question, in this case to express one's needs as a writer, one must know enough about a subject to consider what it is he does not yet know (Miyake & Norman, 1979), and also not know too much that the question appears to be a procedural display (Bloom, 1956). For a child to ask to be taught something, the teacher and he must have a shared understanding of what he is trying to accomplish as a writer and the tools and processes the teacher has exposed him to thus far. This raises the question: Could there be a relationship between explicit language use and teaching in mini-lessons and conferences and a child's ability to self-select areas where he needs assistance with his writing? While difficult to do, strong, explicit mini-lessons and conferences might be settings in which teachers can develop this shared understanding. Ms. Spencer's mini-lessons lacked attention to processes to support writers. Beyond the traits identified in 6+1 Traits, children were exposed to little common grammar to describe the invisible work of the writer.

Location in the Writing Process

Table 4.3 provides frequency counts for the stage of the writing process addressed in the total partnered writing conferences. Analyses conducted using

the Conference Analysis Tool (CAT) revealed that the majority of Ms. Spencer's conferences addressed the planning stage of the writing process. 23 of 35 overall conferences conducted were categorized as focusing on this stage.

Table 4.3:

Focus of writing conferences

Genre	Writing Process				
	Plan	Draft	Revise	Edit	Publish
Realistic Fiction n=22	13	0	7	2	0
News Articles n=15	10	2	3	0	0
COMBINED N=37	23	2	10	2	0

Interviews and field notes from daily mini-lessons also revealed that Ms. Spencer viewed this stage of the writing process as particularly important to her students. In informal conversations, Ms. Spencer emphasized the importance of teaching young writers to plan. In multiple mini-lessons, she reminded youngsters that they were "working on planning *on purpose*, so it would eventually become automatic." In interviews, she stressed that "research shows young writers need to learn to plan and plan well." While researchers emphasize the need to support young writers in learning to plan (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; McCutchen et al., 2008), we must consider that productive writers engage in many complex tasks, and it might not be productive to overemphasize planning to the extent to which it overshadows the other tasks writers must learn to accomplish.

While these analyses made Ms. Spencer's focus on planning salient, it is important to recall that this particular item on the CAT was identified as unreliable according to the calculation of Cohen's kappa (Cohen's kappa = 0.467 (p=.0250). This calculation prompted me to return to the CAT forms and see where the

stages did not align for both raters. All but one case lacking agreement involved drafting. In cases where it was difficult to obtain agreement, the conference had been coded in one of two ways: (1) One rater coded the stage addressed in the conference as "planning," while the second rater coded the stage as "drafting"; or (2) one rater coded the stage addressed in the conferences as "revising," while the other rater coded it as "drafting." When I reviewed the videos of the conferences for which the raters did not agree, it became evident that the teacher and children were working in different problem spaces. In all cases of disagreement, the child was drafting, and Ms. Spencer was focused on planning or revising. This revealed that the tool was unclear about if the rater should be attending to the stage of the writing process the child was working in or the stage of the writing process in which the teacher was focused while conferring. In many cases, as a child was drafting, Ms. Spencer was focused on planning or revising. The poor inter-rater reliability surfaced a mismatch between the problem spaces in which the child and teacher were working that required further investigation.

Problem Space. During the realistic fiction unit, 14 of 20 conferences categorized as occurring during the planning, drafting, or revising stages of the writing process were conducted as the child was drafting a first draft. In composing the first draft, children were charged with following their plans (i.e. graphic organizer) and "putting them into print." As children worked independently to compose their drafts, Ms. Spencer circulated the room and conferred with children as she consistently did during all writing workshops with the exception of those when children were publishing. Video data reveal that the teacher and child were working in different problem spaces (i.e. stages of the writing process) during conferences that Ms. Spencer initiated while the child was drafting new text. The same observation was not apparent in video analysis of conferences where the child was working in a different stage of the writing process (i.e. planning, revising, editing, or publishing).

Figure 4.1. Location of work during conferences
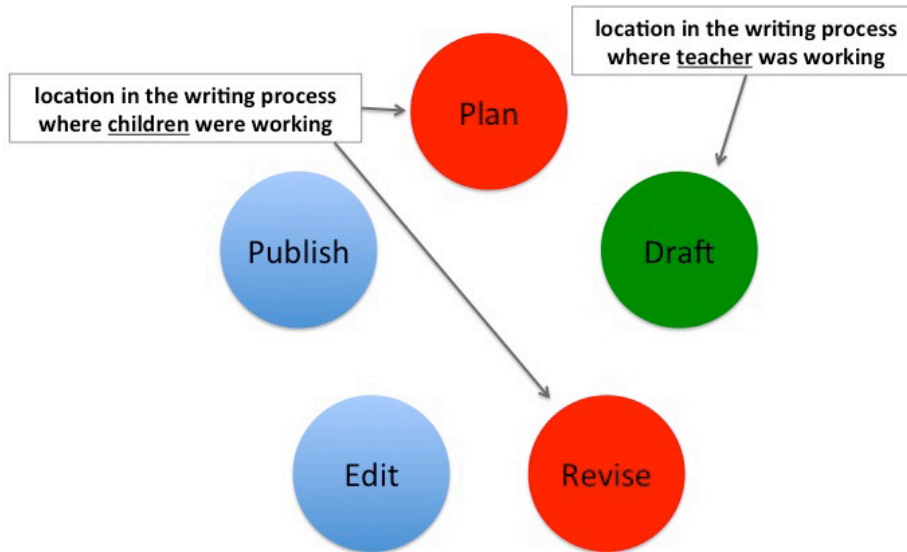
During conferences occurring as the child was drafting, the stage of the writing process that the teacher focused on did not align with the stage of the writing process in which the child is working. The instruction Ms. Spencer provided during conferences where children were drafting centered on planning or revision. Such conferences typically unfolded in one of two ways: (1) Ms. Spencer identified something the child had not attended to while drafting and then either reminded the child to revise his or her writing to include the missing element or posed questions to support the child in thinking about how he would return and revise his unfinished draft based on their conversation [revision], or (2) Ms. Spencer asked the child what he was planning to do next and then posed questions about specific details to include as the child talked about where he was going with the piece [planning].

The following transcript excerpt illustrates the mismatch between the space Ms. Spencer chose to work in, revision, and the space where Gus, the child, was currently situated. Throughout the entire study, Ms. Spencer made comments about Gus' struggle to draft independently. She stressed that while he was comfortable planning using a graphic organizer, he struggled to "put the plan to print." Gus was often supported by a resource room teacher who appeared to

spend the majority of their time together helping him compose a first draft by going through the plan, step by step.

Ms. Spencer initiates the conference by asking Gus about his story. He begins to tell the story aloud as Ms. Spencer scans his plan. She points to his drafting paper and asks him where he is starting his story. Gus begins to read his draft aloud with Ms. Spencer joining him at places where he begins to stumble. When he gets to the current stopping point of his draft, he continues to orally tell what he will write next:

Gus: So I was watching sports when I heard Barbara scream, "AHHHHH!"

Ms. Spencer: Is that what you're going to write next?

Gus: Uh-huh

Ms. Spencer: So this whole story, it looks like I have, so you're going to write AHHHHH here, and I see that you've got this plan where you're in the basement, Barbara is going to scream, Dad's going to go to the store and do what?

Gus: Um, upstairs and she's in the basement. (Correcting Ms. Spencer's statement that he was in the basement.)

Ms. Spencer: So here. Remember how we were talking about making sure you had your character in there? Here's Barbara screaming, so here's you talking about your character. Is there something else you could tell us that you know about character, Barbara? How old is Barbara?

Gus: Eleven.

Ms. Spencer: Do you think we could put that in there?

Gus: But the time that it happened, she was only 10.

Ms. Spencer: Okay, so maybe that could even go in here. It could give us a little more information. "I was watching sports in the basement when I heard my ten year old sister Barbara scream, AGHHHHH!" What do you think? Would that work?

Gus: Mhmmm.

During the first part of the conference, Gus' comments confirmed that he was working to produce a draft of his plan. When reading his text aloud to Ms. Spencer, Gus' continuation of the story in oral form indicated to her that there was further work to be done for Gus to complete his draft. Instead of meeting Gus in this problem space to support him in perhaps drafting more effectively or efficiently, she attempted to guide him in revising unwritten text – a problem space in which Gus' work was not currently situated. She led the conference to focus on revising by adding more details about a character, although the child was in the process of fulfilling his goal of completing the draft. Her conference notes in Figure 4.2 confirm that her understood focus of this conference was to help Gus "insert" more information about character. Inserting text is typically associated with revising.

Figure 4.2. Ms. Spencer's notes about Gus' conference
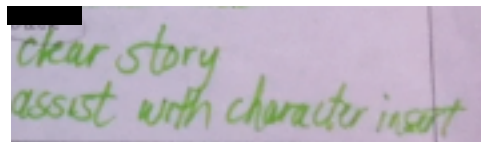
Ms. Spencer's work in the conference centered on helping Gus improve his writing before he even had it down on paper. It is questionable as to whether her interruption might have made a process that was already difficult for the child all the more complex by prematurely drawing attention to the details he was providing and the way in which he was communicating his thoughts. Such an interruption raises questions about a child's ability to respond and incorporate feedback does not seem appropriately matched with his needs as a writer or the current problem space in which he is functioning.

A Single Exception. Analyses identified one exception to this trend. In the following vignette, Ms. Spencer's instruction focused on the same stage of the writing process in which the child is currently working:

Ms. Spencer sits down next to Brandon, a child she has previously identifies as a struggling writer. She notices that Brandon has only drafted a few lines on his drafting paper, although she knows he has been ready to begin a first draft for many days. When she asks Brandon why he has very little written down, he shrugs. She continues to press until he responds, "I don't know how." Spencer then asks Brandon what she has been teaching during the mini-lessons for the past few days and says that the other children in the class know what they are doing, so she is confused as to why he doesn't. Brandon looks at the teacher with tears in his eyes. Spencer continues to ask Brandon questions about why his plan has check marks next to each part of the story when he has not written about each of those parts in his draft. She reminds him that he should only be placing a checkmark when he is done. Brandon responds by explaining that he was done and that's why he put the checkmark. At this point, Mrs. Spencer realizes that she needs to help Brandon understand how to use his plan to draft his story. She explains to him that he will look at the planning box that describes the beginning of the story and then write about that on his drafting paper. Together, they craft this beginning. She explains that he is now "done" with that part and can put a checkmark. Before closing the conference, Mrs. Spencer tells Brandon to do the same thing with the next planning box and asks if he understands. He nods.

During this conference with Brandon, Ms. Spencer recognized that he did not understand how to draft and providing instruction in that problem space. Instead of overwhelming Brandon with questions about the details in his plan, she focused on decomposing the process of drafting based on a plan. As a result, Brandon was receptive to the instruction Ms. Spencer provided. Because of the nature of the conference, I did not conduct a learning conversation with Brandon that day. However, field notes describing his work revealed that the conference did aid Brandon in learning how to draft using a plan. Brandon's writing showed

that he had drafted text based on the first square of the planning sheet, and had just started to draft text to describe the second planning square.

These examples make salient the need to consider when a child can be receptive to teaching that occurs in a conference and what the focus of teaching should be. It seems appropriate for teachers to confer with children as they draft in early primary grades (i.e. kindergarten and first) because of their ongoing need to develop encoding abilities and the teacher's role in leading this development. However, by second grade the majority of children should be writing in a sustained way, and thus capable of drafting over a few days time.

One of the complexities for the teacher is making the decision about when it is appropriate to interrupt a child who is drafting. While some children might benefit from conferences as they engage in the process of drafting a text, others who are more capable of writing for sustained periods of time might benefit from uninterrupted time to draft. Given what we know about the complexity of the writing process and the challenges young writers face as they attempt to simultaneously retrieve and apply many types of knowledge and skill as they write, the decision of when to interrupt a drafting writer is a challenging one for teachers. While researchers have concluded that expert writers frequently move between and among stages in the writing process as they compose, young novice writers may not be up to this challenge before they master what is necessary in discrete stages of the writing process. We want to be careful not to impede children's abilities to function as independent and self-regulated writers – the ultimate goal of writing instruction – while also recognizing individual children's needs for support for engaging in the challenging task of composing.

Content Focus

In the realistic fiction unit, Ms. Spencer identified her content foci for both mini-lessons and conferences as: "dipping into character" (i.e. character development), "dipping into setting" (i.e. setting description), and "planning *on purpose.*" In the news article genre, she identified "working on layout," "writing a thesis," and "organizing the text." Similar foci were identified in post-unit

interviews and stimulated recall sessions. For example, Ms. Spencer expressed her focus as follows:

> *During both of the videos we watched, I was really trying to teach Laura and Doug to develop their characters. They need to dip into character as they write.* (Ms. Spencer, interview, March 24, 2011).

Speaking to another video of her teaching that she watched, she commented:

> *I was trying to push her to add more details to her writing. Details about characters, details about setting. She's got to find a way to convey what she thinks is important to the reader.* (Ms. Spencer, interview, March 24, 2011).

In each of these cases, Ms. Spencer identified content resembling either the location in the writing process or a topic. The graphic below represents the extent to which Ms. Spencer unpacked or decomposed the content she planned to address in her teaching. The first level represents the location in the writing process. The second layer represents content that has been partially decomposed to assist in the naming and teaching of content. Ms. Spencer's explanation of the content she was teaching typically hovered around the first and second levels of decomposed content.

Figure 4.3. A possible representation of decomposed content for writing
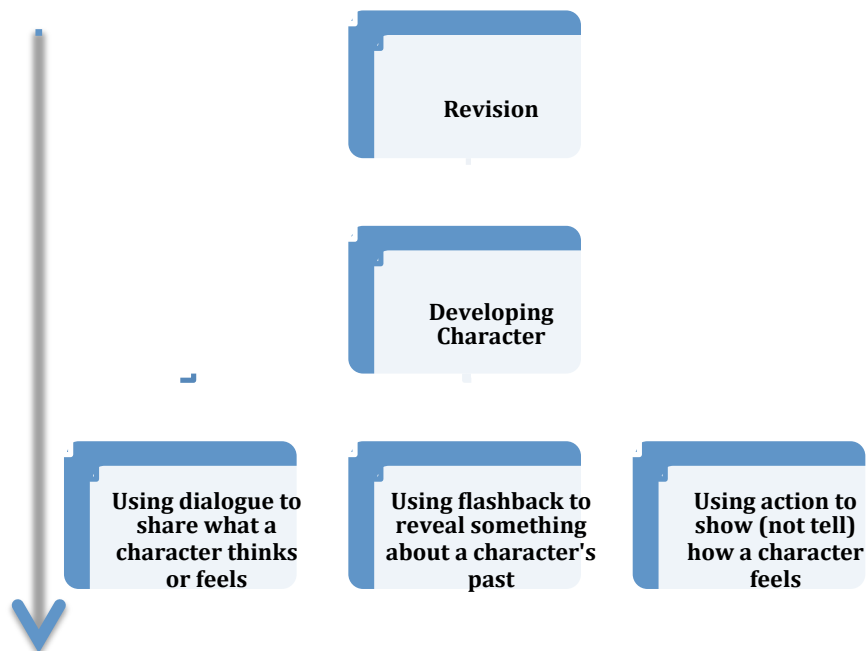
Ms. Spencer's explanation of the content she was teaching was never articulated at the third level in interviews or stimulated recall sessions.

While Spencer often drew attention to the fact that much of what she taught was "in her head" as she had "been teaching it for so long," this observation brings to question the importance of sufficiently naming and identifying a specific content focus for teaching. A teacher's ability to sufficiently decompose content to the extent to which it is usable in teaching might have implications on her ability to be explicit in conferences.

Writing conferences require teachers to make split-second decisions about writers' individual needs after a few minutes of researching the writer; the ability to identify a content focus in a specific, unpacked way is likely to impact a teacher's ability to identify the match between what a child needs to learn and the best method for facilitating this learning.

What instructional methods are used in writing conferences?

In materials to support teachers in conferring with children, Calkins emphasizes the naming of an explicit teaching point and the use of instructional methods to provide children with tools or mechanisms for engaging in specific work of writers. The section below describes Ms. Spencer's use of "teaching points" as defined by Calkins as well as the instructional methods she employed in writing conferences.

Teaching Points

Recall that the CAT was designed to represent Calkins' approach to leading conferences. The treatment of the data using the CAT examined the extent to which Ms. Spencer articulated what the child would learn in a conference in the form of a teaching point – something the child would learn to do, often in the form of a technique or strategy. The "teaching point" as defined by Calkins is specific in nature and appropriate for children's development as writers. Examples of "teaching points" articulated by Calkins to support children in providing more details about characters in their writing include:

- "Today, I want to teach you that writers create characters that feel real, just like in the books that we read. We make sure the people in our stories have big wants or needs. Writers think, "What does my character *really* want? Does she just want a doll or does she *really* want a friend to play with? Then we plan, draft, and/or revise our stories to show that in our stories." (Calkins, 2011, p. 48)
- "Today I want to teach you that writers show rather than tell how our characters are feeling. One way we can do this is by describing the characters actions or facial expressions. This helps our reader understand the character and make a clear picture in their mind as they read." (Calkins, 2011, p. 48)

Analyses indicated that Ms. Spencer rarely articulated a "teaching point" in conferences because of her lack of specificity and failure to name the strategy or mechanism a child would use as a writer to achieve a particular outcome. In many cases, these teaching points were implied in questions she posed, but children had to infer what they were to have learned from the conference based on the interaction. According to analyses, Ms. Spencer articulated the focus of the conference in the form of a teaching point in 4 of 22 conferences during the realistic fiction unit and 1 of 15 in the news article unit.

Further, conferences where a teaching point was not articulated typically had multiple foci. In a conference with Brianne that spanned nearly 9 minutes, Ms. Spencer alluded to four outcomes for the conference. She attempted to lead the child to the realization that she was off topic. She told the child her plan was not thorough enough. She discussed how the format of the text, a book, was not appropriate as it did not lend itself to teaching someone something, and finally, she told the child that she did not know enough to write about each topic. Each intended outcome was elaborated to varying degrees – some with examples where Ms. Spencer "flooded" Brianne with ways of changing her piece, others where Ms. Spencer simply heightened the child's awareness. Brianne's learning conversation following the conference suggested that she was as uncertain about what she learned in the conference as a viewer might be.

Brianne: We talked about, uh, I was going to write about how spring is all beautiful and stuff, but then I got stuck and started talking about people cutting down trees…I was going to do a flip-a-rama, but to me it sounded like it was too much work, but it would take too much time to match the picture up.

Researcher: What did Mrs. Jones teach you in your conference?

Brianne: Um, nothing really.

Researcher: There's nothing she helped you understand better?

Researcher: Maybe something you learned?

Brianne: Uh, no idea.

                              (Brianne, learning conversation, April 5, 2011).

Brianne's response to the initial question suggests that she might have understood Ms. Spencer's message that she did not remain true to her topic, one of the topics Ms. Spencer addressed in the conference; however, her subsequent responses indicate that although Brianne identified one of the issues raised in the conference, she did not have a plan of action for how to address it. In the conference, Ms. Spencer made multiple suggestions that had the potential to help Brianne improve her news article, but these were not communicated in a manner that drew attention to what Brianne could change as a writer and how she would do it.

In contrast, in a conference with Lance, Ms. Spencer stated the teaching point as:

It looks like you have a little bit of talking going on here. One thing you need to make sure that when there is talking going on that your readers know who is talking and when by opening and closing the talking with quotation marks. (Ms. Spencer, conference, January 19, 2011)

In this case, the teacher made is very clear to Lance what she was planning to teach him, how he would do it, and why it was important. In contrast with Brianne's case where Ms. Spencer had not identified a clear teaching point, Lance's learning conversation following the conference suggested that he knew

what Ms. Spencer intended for him to learn during the conference. He said, "I kind of had to put some quotation marks…so the reader knows that the person's talking." (Lance, learning conversation, January 19, 2011) While multiple factors undoubtedly influence a child's ability to identify what the teacher taught in a conference, these illustrative, contrasting, cases suggest that the presence of a clear teaching point that addresses what a child will learn and how he will apply this learning to his writing is a factor to consider when delivering instruction.

Instructional Methods

Calkins highlights three key instructional methods: guided practice, demonstration, and explaining and giving an example. Each of these instructional techniques aims to provide children access to the teaching point articulated earlier in the conference by the teacher. Analyses of conferences using the CAT showed that Ms. Spencer infrequently used these methods. In the realistic fiction unit, guided practice was used in 5 of 22 conferences, explaining and giving an example was used twice, and demonstration was not present in any conferences.

Table 4.4:

Instructional method by genre

Genre	Instructional Method			
	Guided Practice	Demonstration	Explanation & Example	Other*
Realistic Fiction (n=22)	5	0	2	15
News Article (n=15)	0	0	7	8

* "Other" includes no instruction provided and "flooding"

This finding is congruent with the instructional methods Ms. Spencer said she favored during interviews. When asked what instructional methods or moves she consistently utilized in conferences, Ms. Spencer identified a mixture of instructional moves, practices and principles: (1) establish trusting relationships with children; (2) limit empty praise, (3) refrain from "judging" student work and ideas; and (4) "flood" students with options. Of the moves, practices, and principles she described, the one that figured prominently in the case is that of "flooding." While describing her approach to assisting children through conferences, Ms. Spencer said:

> *Often times I'm providing them choices about how to proceed. I find myself saying, "Well could it be this or could it be that or could it be this?"…And that was me modeling different choices. And then I sit back and let the child make the choice. Sometimes they just need ideas for how things might look in their writing…I call it the flooding philosophy. I flood them with choices.* (Ms. Spencer, interview, January 13, 2011)

What Ms. Spencer refers to as modeling could be classified as brainstorming as she gave the child multiple ideas or options about how he could address a deficit she had noted in his writing or his explanation of his writing. However, her description of this approach to assisting students does not identify it as such. Spencer saw modeling and "flooding" as synonymous, however literacy researchers define modeling differently than Ms. Spencer. Instead of seeing modeling as the teacher's demonstration of the work of a writer with accompanying verbalization of his thinking while engaging in the work paired with the opportunity for the involvement of the learner, Ms. Spencer saw it as an opportunity to show children different options with the hope of sparking an idea of their own. Researchers emphasize the role of modeling in making practices transparent to learners. This conception of modeling stresses the cognitive processes that give children access to the often invisible work done by readers and writers, as opposed to overemphasizing the writing topic the child is addressing. For example, when teaching children to identify topics for realistic fiction writing, a teacher who is modeling might say the following:

One way writers come up with an idea for a realistic fiction is to think of problems they have had in their own lives and then put a spin on it by changing the characters, setting, or outcome.

Then, the teacher would model how she uses the strategy with her own work – narrating her thinking along the way for the children.

Watch as I try it. Hmmmmmm. What problems have I had? Well, there was the time that someone I thought was my friend stole my favorite book. Or the day when I went to school and realized I had forgotten to study for our spelling test. Or even last week when I woke up to find out we had no milk in the refrigerator and I had no clue what to eat for breakfast. Which one of those problems could I spin for my realistic fiction story? I could write about the stolen book, but that's not very fresh in my mind. Hmmmmmm. I think I'll write about the morning when I woke up and we didn't have milk. I could make the main character imagine all the different breakfast she could create, but ultimately settle on eating toast and peanut butter. Did you see how I did that? First, I thought about a few problems I've had. Then, I selected one. Finally, I thought about how I could spin the story to make it realistic fiction.

The teacher would then walk the child or children through using the technique through guided practice, narrating the steps in the process as the child used them in order to position the child or children to apply the technique independently in the future. This type of modeling is challenging. It requires expert learners, in this case teachers, to deautomatize what they do; they must not only know how to identify what they are trying to accomplish, but decompose the process in a manner that is accessible to children.

Multiple providers of professional development have often referred to this as "teaching the writer" as opposed to "teaching the writing" (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983; Murray, 1979). Such instructional interactions aim to help writers develop skills or techniques that are transferable to their ongoing development as writers, as opposed to enhancing only the quality of the writing piece the child is currently composing.

The following transcript excerpt illustrates how by "flooding" the writer with possibilities, Ms. Spencer helps Lance consider the different types of articles he

could write about gymnastics, but does not support him in learning to do this work on his own.

> Ms. Spencer: What kind of article could you write about with gymnastics? Do you think you would do, like a
>
> Lance: Write about the trampoline.
>
> Ms. Spencer: The trampoline. So that's what I was wondering…whether you were thinking about zooming in because I could see that going two different ways because you could do a compare/contrast where you could talk about like the trampoline versus something else like maybe your favorite thing versus your not favorite thing. Or you could write like an overview where you have four different paragraphs where one paragraph is about this thing, and the next is about the balance beam, and the next is about the bars.
>
> (Ms. Spencer and Lance begin to discuss the parallel bars. Ms. Spencer cannot remember what they are called and refers to them as the bars the boys walk on. Lance clarifies that boys do not walk on bars, and that they are the parallel bars.)
>
> Ms. Spencer: Perhaps since I can see a picture in my head and I don't know the name of it and I don't know the difficulty of actually doing it, that might be something you can think about too and actually move through explaining what each of the different things are that boys do in gymnastics. We might even have a girl in here who is writing about the things the girls do in gymnastics. That might be interesting…if you know enough, you could write a boy versus girls about gymnastics.

In this case, Ms. Spencer provided Lance with many ideas for how he could organize what he knows about gymnastics, yet did not teach him how to consider what he knows and identify an organizational structure that corresponds with this knowledge. This interaction supported the claim that Ms. Spencer's "flooding philosophy" focused on giving children ideas as opposed to teaching specific techniques or strategies for generating their own ideas.

Ms. Spencer's description of her instructional method as "flooding" alone is of interest. While data analyses help us to see that she likely uses the term

flooding to refer to the abundance of suggestions she is making to a child, flooding typically connotes overflowing or inundating. Data from learning conversations where children were asked to describe what happened in the conference, what they learned, and how the teacher helped them confirm that in many cases, the children felt overwhelmed by this approach.

In cases where Spencer used "flooding" to help children describe their characters and setting more clearly, the children noted either particular characteristics Ms. Spencer had suggested or inquired about, or they said that she told them they needed to describe the character or setting better. Children never discussed how as writers they could go about adding more detail or thinking about pertinent details.

> *I learned that she sort of told me the idea. Like who is going to go in the ambulance with her? So I said the teacher. So I think she sort of got me to see like how I could like who could well sort of just how people could just know she's not by herself in the ambulance.* (Ellen, learning conversation, January 17, 2011)

> *I learned that I should use some setting, like more setting into my writing because I just put garage, so she told me that maybe I should put like the messy garage.* (Joshua, learning conversation, January 24, 2011)

> *She was asking me how my setting was going to start out like, and I told her, and she liked something else…she told me to get some setting in my writing.* (Lucia, learning conversation, February, 7, 2011)

> *I needed to put more character, well, I need to put more setting.* (Tristan, learning conversation, February 11, 2011)

From the children's perspective, the conference heightened their awareness of what needed to be included in their writing – more detail about setting or character – but did not help them to think about how they would go about adding clear and pertinent details.

While the child ultimately makes the decision regarding which suggestion from the teacher he will use, if any, this approach does not provide the child with a way of approaching the work without the teacher's assistance. Creating children who depend on the teacher, as opposed to those who are working

toward being self-regulated learners is a common conferring pitfall that works against teachers (Glasswell, 1993). One way to avoid this is to instead teach strategies or techniques for accomplishing what the teacher believes the child needs to address.

In each of these conferences, Ms. Spencer gave the child many ideas for how she might enhance his writing, and the focus of the conversation centered on the content or topic of the writing. Analyses of the conference category using Calkins' categories confirmed this. Of the 22 realistic fiction conferences analyzed, nearly 75% focused on the content of the child's writing as opposed to expectations, spelling and conventions, or process and the qualities of good writing. While Ms. Spencer's preferred instructional method was collaborative in nature and provided for give-and-take between her and the child to grow the child's ideas, it did not reinforce the explicit naming and teaching of techniques or strategies to support the writer in the long term.

Table 4.5:

Conference categorization by genre

Genre	Conference Category			
	Content	Expectations	Spelling & Conventions	Process & Qualities of Writing
Realistic Fiction	15	1	1	5
News Article	8	0	0	7

Contrary to findings from other research studies that have noted teachers' overemphasis on spelling and conventions in writing instruction, Ms. Spencer did not attend to issues of spelling and conventions during writing conferences. While she occasionally drew attention to a child's misspelling of a word-wall word while reading through the draft, spelling and conventions were not emphasized in

conferences. Spencer stressed that conferences are not the time in which she addresses spelling. She said, "Even if their spelling is atrocious, I'm still focused on growing them as a writer versus beating them down about them not being a speller." (Ms. Spencer, interview, January 23, 2011) According to Ms. Spencer, she addressed such issues during other times during the day like the adventure writing block and word study. Writing researchers have noted how difficult it is for young writers to juggle the multiple demands placed on them as they first learn to compose (Schneider, 1997), yet creating structures where children believe writing is solely about stamina and conventions, as they do in adventure writing, and content and craft, as they do in writing workshop raises some issues. While spelling and conventions should not be overemphasized at the expense of other important elements of writing, they contribute to the clear communication of thoughts. As a result, teachers must help writers see how attention to such features enhance the overall production of a writing product. The segmentation Ms. Spencer describes, and the emphasis of content and process/qualities of good writing illuminated by the analyses do not align with Spencer's focus on helping children learn to write for readers. In order to effectively write for readers, presentation must be a consideration; mechanics influence the extent to which writer's ideas and messages are accurately presented or communicated to an audience.

With the exception of "expectation conferences" and "spelling and conventions conferences," these trends were not consistent across genres. In the news article unit, the types of conferences were split between content (8/15 conferences) and process and the qualities of good writing (7/15). During the news article unit, Ms. Spencer seemed to focus equally on the content of the children's writing (i.e. what they were "reporting") as she did on qualities of news articles (e.g. organization and layout of news articles). One might hypothesize that because Spencer did not see herself as an expert in all of the topics her children selected for their informational writing, she was unable to conduct conferences where she could assist them in elaborating the content of their texts as she had done in moments where she helped children to think about better

ways of describing characters and setting during the realistic fiction unit. As a reader, we often have questions about characters, settings, and experiences that novice writers do not always make clear to us in their writing. In Ms. Spencer's case, she was easily sidetracked during the conferences and focused on minute details (e.g. hair color, if a garage was dirty or clean, if the character's mother was wearing her pajamas) during conferences and, as a result, focused on the content of the writing as opposed to ways of helping the children improve as a writer; whereas, in conferences and mini-lessons during the news article unit, she emphasized text features and layout, and steered conferences away from the topic of the writing and more toward features of the genre.

Recall that on multiple occasions Ms. Spencer voiced having limited understanding about the news article genre. In interviews and informal conversations, she stressed how she was using examples of news articles, most notably magazine articles from *Ranger Rick*, *National Geographic for Kids,* and *Scholastic News* to help her develop a clearer understanding of the genre and what her teaching should emphasize. These magazines contained an array of informational texts including but not limited to procedural texts (e.g. how-to, persuasive essays, feature articles, and all-about texts). As a result, many of the texts Ms. Spencer shared with children would not have been classified as true news articles. However, they did serve as models for text features (e.g. headings, captions, labels, photographs, glossaries etc.) Ms. Spencer suggested including in the news articles, and followed typical newspaper layouts. Because Ms. Spencer was searching to develop her own understanding of the news article genre during the unit of study, it is not surprising that she focused on nameable features of non-fiction that were easily located in the texts she had as opposed to how to organize and communicate ideas in news articles. Instructional researchers and teacher educators have acknowledged the overemphasis of features as opposed to organization, ideas, and purpose in non-fiction writing.

The Use of Mentor Texts

Ms. Spencer's emphasis on nameable and visible features of news articles also possibly influenced her teaching methods during conferences. Analyses show that Ms. Spencer used a different instructional method in news article conferences than realistic fiction conferences. Table 4.4 shows that Ms. Spencer used the method of explaining and providing examples in 7 of 15 conferences. In each of these cases, Ms. Spencer utilized mentor texts (e.g. model texts) to show children how other authors approached particular issues in news article writing, most often layout and text features, and explained why and how they might want to do this in their own writing. While Ms. Spencer did refer to texts children had read during guided reading and read-aloud during mini-lessons in the realistic fiction unit, she did not refer to or use these texts during conferences in that unit.

The transcript below provides a window into a conference in which Ms. Spencer used the mentor text, *Shelby's Egg-cellent Day*, to support Jenna in learning how to label photos to aid the reader in understanding how to proceed. Prior to the excerpt shown below, Jenna had revealed to Ms. Spencer that she wanted to write a news article about her room and give readers a sequential tour of special places, culminating with a fort she had built with her sheets and clothing. She asked Jenna what kind of photo she was thinking of including, and Jenna explained how she had made a "little book" with each page representing a part of the room. Figure 4.4 represents the mentor text; the transcript of the remaining part of the conference follows.

Figure 4.4. Mentor text, *Shelby's Egg-cellent Day*
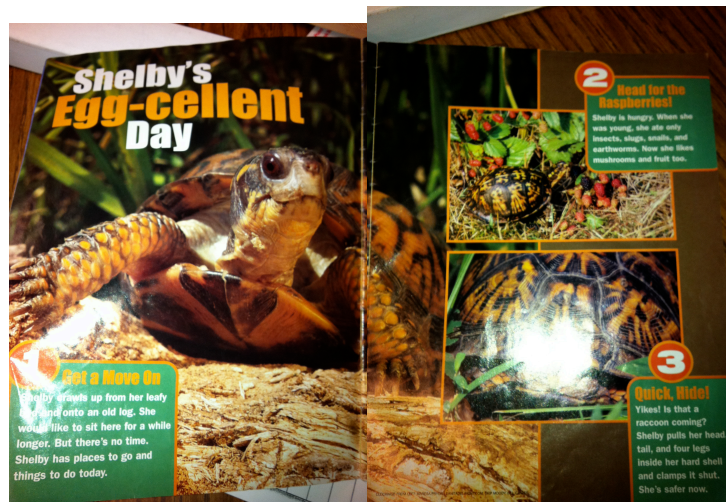
Ms. Spencer: Okay, and then how are your readers going to know which picture is connected to what text?

Jenna: Um, I'm thinking probably well they'll have the idea, they have the idea of the book, they can flip through the pages to find

Ms. Spencer: So in the text you're going to say, look at picture number 1? I have a mentor text that I just saw that might be helpful to you. (Ms. Spencer goes to get text.)

Ms. Spencer: I don't know for sure that this is necessarily [what you should do], but when I was talking to James and we were looking at this mentor text, and look at what they did. (Shows Jenna *Shelby's Egg-cellent Day.*) Do you see how they put a number with each? Like the number with the title and then they told the information about it?

Ms. Spencer: I wonder if you had, like if your pictures were going to be there, like if you put the number and a heading in the different parts of the text kind of spread all around, and then each one of these had a number on it, if that would help them to know which one to go to?

Jenna: Yes, so like maybe after I write that sentence about that picture, I'd say now go to, now go to page, now go to the drawing, now go to the little flip-over book and look at page number five.

Ms. Spencer: Well, let's see what they did here. Number 2: Head for the raspberries. Which picture are they talking about?

Jenna: Right there.

Ms. Spencer: How do you know?

Jenna: Because there is a turtle heading to the raspberries.

Ms. Spencer: So the heading, you might not even have to say the words, go to page two. You might be able to put a heading on it that in some way lets them know which picture it connects to. That's a possibility. So I'm going to go ahead and let you get to work and think that through. But I want to make sure that you're thinking it through, um, think of more than one possible way to do it, so when it comes down to it, you're sure your readers are going to know how to connect what thing, what picture to what text in a way that is both clever and interesting. Okay? So you might have to draft that in a couple of different styles.

In this conference, Ms. Spencer used the mentor text to help Jenna consider how she would support the reader in using the pictures featured in her news article. She asked questions to guide Jenna in seeing how the author of the text used the numbers and made suggestions about how Jenna might do something similar or, at the very least, use the mentor text to help think about other ways of supporting the reader. In the learning conversation following the conference, Jenna shared how the conference had helped her think about this very issue and what she was planning to do next as a writer. She said:

> *We talked about how, like how I was going to do my pictures, and like I should have like little paragraphs that say, "Go to picture one. Go to picture two… When I write about it, we need to have paragraphs, so I thought I'd have a little tiny book of the pictures, and then I'd put little numbers, so that they'd look at the page and then look for the number, and then the number that they find will help them connect to the sentence… at first I just thought writing the sentence and letting them look at the pictures, but when [Ms. Spencer] showed me a news article that had the steps and everything, I thought maybe I could like put the numbers and tell them where to go.* (Jenna, learning conversation, March 29, 2011)

It is clear that the use of the mentor text played a pivotal role in Jenna's learning. Her statement indicated that she understood the role of the mentor text – to show her what another author had done in attempt to spur her thinking about how she might handle the same issue as a writer. Figure 4.5, Jenna's writing from the end of class that day, represents how she had taken what she learned from the conference and applied it to her own work.

Figure 4.5. Jenna's writing

numbered pictures
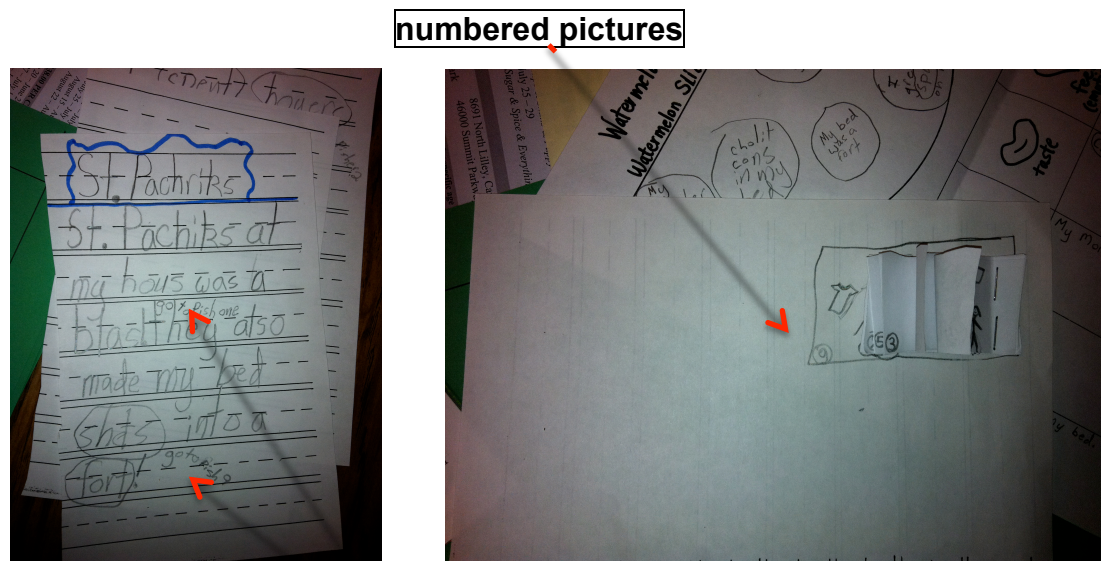
instructions to guide readers to pictures

The children in Ms. Spencer's class were familiar with the idea of using a mentor text to help them as writers. In fact, during the news article unit, the majority of the children had a news magazine at their desks to reference during the writing workshop. They knew that these texts could provide insight about the organization and layout of their texts, two elements Ms. Spencer had stressed in her daily instruction. While most students used these texts in appropriate ways, the transcript below represents a child's uncertainty about how one would use a mentor text.

As Ms. Spencer approaches Nikki, Nikki is looking closely at the article *Monkeys in the Snow* from the children's magazine *Your Big Backyard.* Nikki tells Ms. Spencer, " I was looking at my mentor text, and I'm finding things in common

with things I'm doing." Ms. Spencer begins to ask Nikki questions about what her topic and thesis. Nikki explains that she is writing a "compare/contrast news article about different kinds of animals" Ms. Spencer attempts to get Nikki to articulate what she knows and plans to teach about the four animals she has chosen. As the conversation continues and Nikki continues to convey to Ms. Spencer that she is not confident about what she knows about the animals she is hoping to write about and that she is planning to look to her mentor text to help her find out more.

> Ms. Spencer: Oh, your mentor text is going to help you with, I'm not sure your mentor text is where you should be getting your research from. Is this your research text?
>
> Nikki: Yah.
>
> Ms. Spencer: Here. *Monkeys in the Snow*, so it's not really your mentor text, it's your research text. This is where you're getting information about the animals from.

In this case, the term mentor text had become such a part of the classroom discourse that Nikki assumed that any time a writer used a book to help her, it was considered a mentor text. While Ms. Spencer did not describe the different between a mentor text and research text, she clarified for Nikki that when a text is used to gather more information about the writing topic, it's a research text, and not a mentor text.

Explicit Teaching

When discussing her struggle to identify the ideal duration for conferences, Ms. Spencer talked about how being more explicit would allow her to get "in and out" of conferences in less time. This section provides a deeper look at two contrasting, illustrative cases to represent the relationship between the explicitness of the instruction occurring in the conference and the child's perceptions of what he had been taught. Discourse was analyzed to explore two

factors of explicitness: what the teacher said about the content and the method she used to convey the information and scaffold the child's understanding.

The first conference featured below represents an interaction where Ms. Spencer's conference focus and teaching are not completely explicit to the child. While she identifies and attends to two foci – making dialogue clear by including which character is talking and using setting to provide important details about a character or characters – she leads the child through these revisions without naming or providing an instructional explanation to support the work. The learning conference with the child following the conference suggested that the way in which he was taught about the two foci insufficiently supported his understanding.

As Ms. Spencer initiates a conference with Tristan, he shares that he is writing a story about basketball. She poses questions and ascertains that Tristan is starting to work on the end of the story. Ms. Spencer identifies the multiple colors on Tristan's paper which suggest that he has been "working with both character and setting and trying to dip those back and forth." Upon noticing this, she poses questions to investigate why Tristan made the decision to return to his text and add more details about setting and character, and he explains that it was missing. Ms. Spencer then asks Tristan to tell her about his plan, so she can "see it coming to life on [his] paper." Tristan follows the plans and tells his story about being at Lifetime Fitness Day Care and playing basketball, and how a "mystery person" teaches him about how to shoot a basketball." Ms. Spencer asks Tristan to select a part that he would like her to review – "a spot where [he's] needing a little bit of help." Tristan says that he does not have any such spots, and Ms. Spencer tells him to pick a spot so she can "hear it and see what [they] can do with it." The transcript excerpt below begins as Tristan is reading his story aloud with Ms. Spencer looking over his shoulder.

Tristan: "Here, let me teach you something," said the mystery person. "Something, what, why?" "So you." (Stops reading.) Wait, I think that

Ms. Spencer: You're right. You just misread. (Reading child's text.) Said,"here let me tell you something," said the mystery person. (Stops reading.) And then you are responding, (reading child's text) "What? Why?" (Stops reading.) And then he's saying

Tristan: (Reading his text.) "So you have to use the right distance for shooting." "Thank you."

Ms. Spencer: Okay, and you said, (reading child's text) "Thank you, you're welcome." The mystery person

Tristan: (Continuing to read his text.) Has brown hair, blue eyes. (Stops reading.) I accidentally put it on the wrong line.

Ms. Spencer: I see that. I think I'm okay here. I'm trying to figure out how this is going to fit though. So, (reading child's text) the mystery person has brown hair, blue eyes, and tan skin like

Tristan: (orally completing teacher's sentence) You.

Ms. Spencer: Like You. Is it like you or like me?

Tristan: Like me.

Ms. Spencer: Hmmmm…let's go see what perspective you're writing from. Are you being me in the story or are you writing it from the author's point of view?

Tristan: Probably like the author

Ms. Spencer: Look at here. (Pointing to child's text and reading.) What should I do said seven year old blond haired Tristan with black white greenish, and yellow glasses.

Tristan: (Interrupting teacher) I think I

Ms. Spencer: (Continuing to read child's text.) Oh I know what I should do. I'll play basketball. And great, there's another player to play with me. "Do you want to play basketball with me," the mystery guy says?

Tristan: Uhuh

Ms. Spencer: (Continuing to read child's text.) Okay, so we

Tristan: Wait, Tristan. (Correcting Ms. Spencer's statement that the mystery guy was the speaker.)

Ms. Spencer: Sure. So Tristan's saying that?

Tristan: Uhuh

Ms. Spencer: Do you want to play basketball with me? So we need to caret that in. What's it going to say?

Tristan: Said Tristan.

Ms. Spencer: Said Tristan or asked Tristan.

Tristan: Mhm.

Ms. Spencer: Sure, then what? Who says sure?

Tristan: Uh, the mystery person.

Ms. Spencer: Are you going to say *said*?

Tristan: Said the mystery person.

Ms. Spencer: Or do you want to use a different word besides said.

Tristan: Says, or uh.

Ms. Spencer: Well.

Tristan: Yell. Uh.

Ms. Spencer: He answered, he responded, he replied, he?

Tristan: Replied

Ms. Spencer: Replied

Tristan: Yeah.

Ms. Spencer: The mystery person, like that? (Pointing to where she has written *replied the mystery person* on Tristan's paper.)

Tristan: Yeah?

Ms. Spencer: See how I'm actually going in there and putting in there that information, so we know who is talking? I think it's going to make it easier for you to read, and I think that you're ready to do that.

Tristan: Yeah.

Ms. Spencer: (Reading text.) Do you want to play basketball with me, said Ryan? Sure replied the mystery person.

Tristan: Mhm.

In this segment, Tristan's disjointed reading of his writing indicated to him that something was not written clearly. As he continued reading, Ms. Spencer posed questions to help him identify the perspective from which the story was being told, include who was speaking, and identify words to convey how the speaker relayed the dialogue. As Tristan provided answers to these questions, Ms. Spencer edited his paper. At the end of the segment, Ms. Spencer articulates what she was teaching – "putting in there that information so we know who is talking." Not only does her description not thoroughly address what she was teaching the child in the interaction, but it also neglects identifying when this would be important or particular features to attend to. It was only toward the end of the interaction after Ms. Spencer had posed questions to aid in the editing of Tristan's piece that she drew attention to what she thought he should have taken away from the interaction. The question that this excerpt raises is to what extent does it support Tristan to function independently as a writer when the teacher is not available for assistance. Explicitness is one dimension on which we can characterize conferences. In this exchange, we see that there is little explicitness in Ms. Spencer's discourse specific to the content or in her approach to conveying the content to the learner.

Ms. Spencer's conference with Tristan continued to address another focus – using setting to provide important details about a character or characters – yet continued to lack explicitness specific to the content and instructional methods. The transcript below represents the second segment of the conference.

Ms. Spencer: Now you told me here that you're at Lifetime in the Day Care area, so this mystery person is also a kid?

Tristan: Yeah.

Ms. Spencer: Okay, so I'm not sure if I know that yet that this mystery person is another kid.

Tristan: So do you think I should put that in there?

Ms. Spencer: Well, I'm not sure. Does it matter that it's another kid?

Tristan: Well, I think we could change the person to a kid.

Ms. Spencer: Well the other thing would be the fact that you're telling us that you're at Daycare at Lifetime, so that if you set that up and there's a bunch of kids around and there's a bunch of stuff to do, but you're not sure what to do?

Tristan: Mhm

Ms. Spencer: It might even be adding to your beginning because you told you're at Lifetime Day Care on your plan. I don't see that coming across

Tristan: It's not in my story yet

Ms. Spencer: It's not in your story yet. So that's probably a place that if you let us, if you set the setting for us that you're in Day Care at Lifetime with a bunch of other kids and you're looking for someone to play with even though you don't know anybody

Tristan: Yeah

Ms. Spencer: Then, you probably never have to explain that this mystery person is another kid, I think we'll be able to infer that.

Tristan: Okay.

Ms. Spencer: Without you setting the setting, I'm not sure that I know that if it's a kid or an adult. I actually assumed that it was an adult.

Tristan: Oh.

Ms. Spencer: Except that I knew here that you were in day care.

Tristan: Ah.

Ms. Spencer: So, do you think we need to put a front page on that?

Tristan: Well, yeah.

In the segment above, Ms. Spencer talked about a point of confusion she encountered when reading Tristan's story and concluded that by establishing the setting, it should make it clear to the reader that the characters in the story, specifically the "mystery person," is a child. Although Ms. Spencer asked Tristan if he thought it "matter[s] that it's another kid?," he is not able to address this question in the conversation because of the emphasis she places on the importance of providing this information – either explicitly or implicitly in the text.

In this interaction, Ms. Spencer did not teach or support Tristan in learning to establish setting in a way that reveals information about characters. She did not identify when writers would do so, what is important to attend to, or provide examples of it being done. She closed the interaction by asking Tristan a question that provided Tristan with a way of moving forward to address what he had been told and not necessarily taught. Much like the first segment of the conference, this segment lacks explicitness in many of the same ways.

The learning conversation with Tristan following his conference suggested that while he understood that Ms. Spencer was confused about if the "mystery person" was a child and that he needed to include something about his setting at the beginning of his story, he was clear about why or how these related. While Tristan identifies individual ideas that he gathered from the conference - the importance of setting, the beginning of his story, and pertinent information about the "mystery person" - his talk suggests that he does not understand how these ideas can be integrated. He said:

> *We talked about, like that I needed a new beginning and I already had a beginning, and like the beginning that I did, so I started a new beginning and I finished that beginning, and [Ms. Spencer] said I needed to start a new beginning so it would sound better, and my setting is Lifetime and I didn't put anything about it. And the other kid is a mystery person, and you don't know if he's a kid or an adult. [Ms. Spencer] thought he was an adult and he's actually a kid, and so I have to do the setting at the beginning so you know it's beginning.* (Tristan, learning conversation, February 11, 2011)

Tristan's learning conversation indicated that he did not understand how the setting, mystery person and beginning of his story were related. It is possible that because Ms. Spencer did not articulate this relationship clearly or teach him how to accomplish what she had identified by through explicit instructional methods, it was left to Tristan to infer what he had been taught in the conference, and he was unable to do this.

Conversely, the conference featured below represents an interaction where Ms. Spencer voices what she intends to teach Ravi and uses an explicit teaching method to guide Ravi through the process of using the tool she

introduces to him. Further, Ms. Spencer addresses divergences from the instructional focus to thread a consistent purpose throughout the conference. Sections of the conference have been summarized to provide an understanding of what occurred prior to and after transcribed conference excerpts. Figure 4.6 represents the "bulls-eye," Ms. Spencer and Ravi co-constructed during the conference.

> Ms. Spencer approaches Ravi and asks him to tell her about the story he is writing. He describes the main character, Limmaker, and begins to describe the problem. Ms. Spencer interrupts Ravi to ask where the story takes place and poses questions to get Ravi to more clearly describe the setting. The transcript that follows begin as Ms. Spencer explains the purpose of the conference to Ravi and continues as she draws a bulls-eye to represent how Ravi can zoom in on the setting in his writing.

Figure 4.6. Ravi's setting bulls-eye
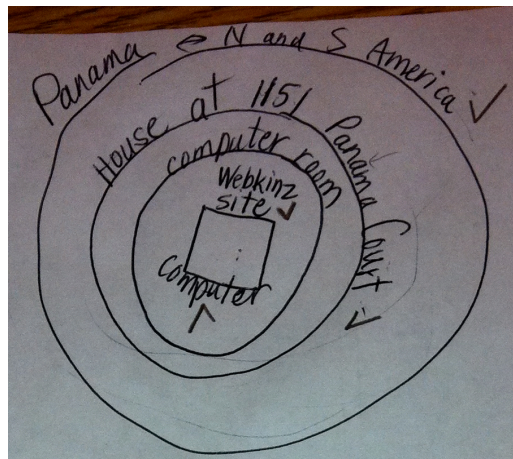
Ms. Spencer: The reason I asked you all that is because I think your setting can be more specific than the house that it's at. Right? It needs to be on the computer in the computer room at this house. So, sometimes kids have done this when they are describing the setting. (Ms. Spencer draws a blank bulls-eye.) So this is the house at?

Ravi: Pamana (mispronunciation of Panama) Street

Ms. Spencer: 151 Panama Street Court

Ravi: Can I tell you something?

Ms. Spencer: Yes.

Ravi: They actually live in Pamana.

Ms. Spencer: Panama.

Ravi: They actually live in Pana pama.

Ms. Spencer: Pan, look (Ms. Spencer writes Panama.) Pan-a-ma.
                Panama.

Ravi: They actually live there.

Ms. Spencer: Sure, and that may be something that you might want to tell
                us. But then what the kids do is they zoom in, so they might
                start off, maybe you even say to your readers, something
                like, "In the area where North America and South America
                connect is a little country called Panama.

Ravi: And the capital of Panama is actually Panama City.

Ms. Spencer: Do you want it to be in Panama City?

Ravi: Ah, no.

Ms. Spencer: Okay, then I don't need to know that. What I need to know is
                that then I can zoom in a little closer. "In Panama at the
                house on 1195 Panama Court lives."

Ravi: Limmaker and his mom.

Ms. Spencer: Li, Limmaker and his mom.

Ravi: Limmaker is one of my realistic fiction characters.

Ms. Spencer: Yes, I'm aware of that.

Ravi: He's a boy.

Ms. Spencer: So then, so actually this would be even bigger than that, first
                you tell us about Panama being the area between north and
                south America, and then you could zoom us into

Ravi:	It's a little country
Ms. Spencer:	Where, yep a little country, then you zoom us into Panama Court, and then the house at Panama Court, and then inside the house, where is Limmaker going to be?
Ravi:	The computer place when he takes out his passport and user name
Ms. Spencer:	Computer room

In the excerpt from Ms. Spencer's conference with Ravi, she began by naming what she planned to teach him – how to make his setting more specific using a tool that other children in the classroom have used to help them describe the setting of their stories. She then used guided practice to and questions to support him in using the bulls-eye to zoom in and provide more information about setting. Together, Ms. Spencer and Ravi co-constructed the bulls-eye to show how he could zoom in on the large-scale setting, Panama, to ultimately reach the smaller scale setting – the computer room. While Ms. Spencer served as the scribe in the process, she led Ravi through the steps involved in zooming in on a setting to make it more specific while creating a representation of their collaborative efforts that he could refer to as he write independently, but also replicate in his future attempts to describe a setting more clearly. The conference continued as follows:

Following the creation of the bulls-eye, Ms. Spencer continues the conference by linking the way in which she helped Ravi provide a clearer description of the setting through the use of the bulls-eye to how Ravi will now transfer this thinking onto his paper.

Ms. Spencer:	Now, in order for us to zoom into the character though, you're going to have to tell your readers more than just one sentence about each step. So, here's how you can zoom into setting. It's not really a choice. It's what second graders do at writing. So, this is a choice where you could tell us more about the setting by zooming into the setting. You could tell us about Panama. Most people don't probably know about Panama, most of your readers in here. So you could tell them about this area between North and South America, then you zoom into the house, then into the

computer, and then into the computer and tell us that he typed in his username and password and this is the message that came up. That is how you take setting. That's how you take the beginning of your setting and you grow it out into something that is longer than one sentence that really doesn't tell us a lot of information. That's gonna zoom us into a lot of information and make setting very clear for us.

Ravi:	So basically, you're asking me to make this one something, this one something, and this one something.

Ms. Spencer: Well possibly.

Ravi:	So all of the zoom stuff is one sentence and the Pamana one sentence?

Ms. Spencer:	Possibly. A few sentences about that because it depends on how you're going to say it. So how do you think you might start if you choose to zoom in your target like this?

Ravi:	I'd start with. Limmaker lives in Panama which is a little country which connects north and south America.

Ms. Spencer: That's two sentences. You just got two there.

Ravi:	Which one? What?

Ms. Spencer:	Cuz the first one you said was a question. Do you know who lives in Panama? Which is a, right? And then, so you're going to tell us Limmaker does, right?

Ravi:	Yah.

Ms. Spencer: And then you're going to tell us that he happens to live at a house

Ravi:	On Panama court

Ms. Spencer: Yep. 115 Panama Court. Mhm. And then, down in, where's his computer room at?

Ravi:	Ah, the computer room's name is really the computer room.

Ms. Spencer: Right, but where is it in his house. Is it upstairs, downstairs, on the main floor?

Ravi:	It's on the downstairs of his house. Here's the kitchen. Here's the hallway, and here's the computer room. It's sort of like a
Ms. Spencer:	So it's on the main floor
Ravi:	It's sort of like my study. My study has a computer a desktop but, yah.
Ms. Spencer:	So it's on the main floor of his house. So you're going to tell us a sentence about that and where it is in his house.
Ravi:	The zoom zoom part is a square.
Ms. Spencer:	Well, I zoomed that down like that so it looked like a computer because then you're going to zoom all the way down to what that when you said he was going to type in his username and password and on the screen that website was going to tell him the error message. So all that writing is going to get us that far just getting just started, and that's what you're supposed to do in second grade is stretch out your details…

In this section of the conference, Ms. Spencer began by telling Ravi the next step in the process. She then referred back to the bulls-eye as she related the next step to the setting of his story. At this point, Ravi posed a question to clarify his own understanding, a behavior that was not noted as typical in other conferences during the study. Next, Ms. Spencer named how he was going to accomplish that by addressing each part of the bulls-eye and writing a sentence or two, and then guided him through an oral rehearsal of this process.

In this conference, we saw how Ms. Spencer unpacked the process of providing a clearer description about setting and supported Ravi in learning to apply this process to his writing. The extent to which Ms. Spencer explicitly addressed the content she attempted to focus on in the conferences, as well as the means she used to facilitate Ravi's application of the technique likely influenced Ravi's understanding of what occurred during the conference. The learning conversation with Ravi following the conference suggested that he not

only understand what Ms. Spencer taught him, but also how he might apply it to writing in the future.

> Researcher: What did Ms. Spencer teach you in your conference today?
>
> Ravi: Well, she showed me how to zoom zoom zoom in on setting. She drew this (points to bulls-eye) and we kept zooming in from the big Pamana to the computer.
>
> Researcher: How might you do this in your writing in the future?
>
> Ravi: Well, you see, if I need to talk about my setting and need to say more about it, I'd draw this circle thing (points to bulls-eye) and just zoom zoom in the way Ms. Spencer did. Then I move in and write a few sentences about each part.
>
> Researcher: Why might you do this?
>
> Ravi: So my readers can see my setting better.

Although Ravi's initial description of the technique he learned to support setting -ˆdraw this circle thing and just zoom zoom in…" – is vague, he appropriated the language Ms. Spencer used in the conference. Further, the utterance that followed provided more clarity. When Ravi said, "I move in," he made reference to the way in which Ms. Spencer had taught him to start with a more global setting and "move in" to provide more particular details of the more specific "parts" contained in the bulls-eye.

These cases suggest a relationship between the explicitness of teaching and the child's perceptions of what occurred ruing the conference. Duffy and colleagues identify explicitness as a distinguishing characteristic of teachers whose students demonstrate strong metacognitive awareness. In their study, when teachers were explicit, children were able to identify what they had been taught in follow up interviews (Duffy et al., 1986).

Scholars have argued that explicit teaching is the responsibility of any teacher as it provides children with access to academic content. Non-explicit teaching requires learners to interpret what is being taught based on their culture and experiences in school and the world writ large. When cross-cultural

communication occurs, participants' understandings are not always parallel; in order for participants to achieve a common understanding, explicit communication, where little is left to be inferred, is necessary. This poses a challenge for teachers as they attempt to strike a balance between supporting a child to clearly communicate his ideas in writing while still developing the habits, skills, and techniques necessary for writing.

How does the teacher differentiate instruction as a function of the children's profiles as writers?

Although writing conferences are meant to be a time when instruction is differentiated to meet the needs of individual writers, analyses across data sources indicate that there was little differentiation in terms of nature of support, explicitness, and redundancy based on Ms. Spencer's indication of the children's writing profiles. However, frequency counts of conferences with individual children appeared to be somewhat influenced by the children's writing profiles. Further, two of Ms. Spencer's students received or had recently received outside support aligned with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The way in which she supported these writers during conferences typically differed from how she supported other children.

Field notes revealed that of the 26 children in the classroom, there were some children who participated in individual conferences just twice over the course of the realistic fiction unit, while others conferred with the teacher a total of 10 out of the 22 days. Frequency counts from the news article unit were similar. During the 17 days, some children had conferences on a total of 9 days, while others had conferences only twice during the unit. The wordle labeled Figure 4.7 illustrates the frequency of overall conferences in which each child participated. Names in a larger font size indicate that the child had many conferences, while names with the smaller fonts identify the children who had fewer conferences. Children identified by Ms. Spencer as struggling writers are represented in red, while children she identified as strong writers are represented in yellow.

Figure 4.7. Conference wordle
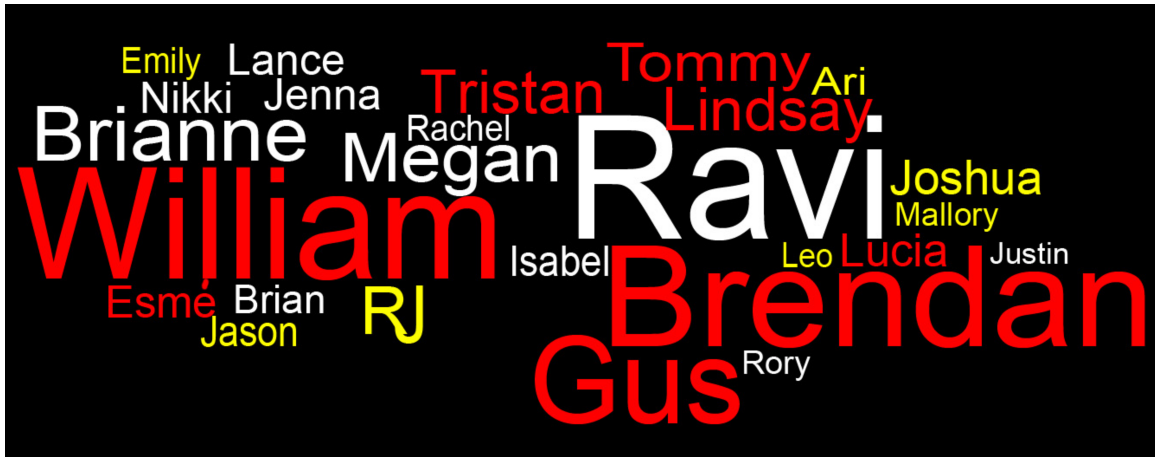
The frequency of conferences with individual children seemed to be influenced by children's ability to (1) engage or appear to be engaged in their work; (2) follow directions; (3) function without teacher assistance; and in some cases (4) the teacher's beliefs about the child's competence as a writer. The students receiving the most conferences during the unit were consistent across genre: Ravi, Brendan, William, and Gus.

While Ms. Spencer did not identify Ravi as a struggling writer, she explained how he was the youngest child in the class and often times demanded more attention from her because he could not function as independently as the other children in the class. She stressed that although he had "come a long way" since the beginning year, he still needed to be frequently reminded of expectations she had for him as a member of the learning community and learner

Similarly, Ms. Spencer identified Brendan as a child who is a "hard ball kid and a rule breaker." In an interview after Ms. Spencer facilitated the conference featured earlier in this chapter where Brendan was confused about how to use a plan to help him draft, she said, "He is young…and he absolutely has to be told, 'Absolutely *not* acceptable.' And he has in every subject area. She stressed how there are times when he simply chooses not to do what is asked of him as a learner. When asked following the "drafting" conference, "What triggered the feeling of this is Brandon choosing not to do this as opposed to this is Brandon not getting what he's supposed to do?," she responded, "I do still think that part

of him didn't get it." She continued to explain her thinking about needing "to play hardball" although she did recognize that "part of [Brendan] didn't get it." She said:

> *The history with him on this is…he writes more words on his plan than needs to be. So when I actually went back and looked at his plan, he had sentences in each box. Now why he didn't take this back in three days was, you know, "I was mad." But when I look at his plan, and I see that he has a sentence per box, I do think he though he was done. Now why he didn't go, "Well, but nobody else is," and that's where that, that's when I decide it's a choice because on the second day that everybody else still seems to have so much to do and you don't have anything to do? That should, I've taught you to be smarter than that…I really want kids who think about what they should be doing, how they should be doing it.* (Ms. Spencer, interview, January 20, 2011)

While Ms. Spencer had previously identified Brendan, but not Ravi, as a struggling writer, the interview data discussed above indicated a possible link between Ms. Spencer's view Ravi and Brendan had a tendency not to do what they were told and the frequent conferences she conducted with them.

The two other children who participated in the most conferences during the study were William and Gus. Ms. Spencer had identified these boys as children with more extreme needs than others. William had recently been released from speech and language support he had been receiving, but his teacher and parents remained concerned about his processing abilities. Gus received extra support from the resource room teacher in all subject areas. These children and their progress were consistent focal points of Ms. Spencer's daily work. Even on days when she did not confer with the two boys, she would either quickly check in with them to make a plan for their work that day or peer over their shoulders as they wrote to ensure they were "on the right track." In both cases, Spencer also implemented a different approach to supporting them than she did with other students. Their conferences were focused on the sequential aspects of their work as she walked them through what they needed to do, step by step by step, to write in the genre of study and ultimately produce the expected end product. She frequently acknowledged the need to make sure they were keeping up with the class and not getting off-track.

As evident in the wordle, there were other children Ms. Spencer had identified as struggling writers who did not participate in as many conferences. While the frequency alone tells us little about the strength of the support children received, it should be noted that three of the children identified as the teacher as needing extra support, Esmé and Lucia had far fewer conferences than their peers who the teacher identified as more capable writers. In an interview, Ms. Spencer voiced her concern about Lucia's progress. She said: "I look at her writing every night and generally worry about her." Based on this comment, one would assume that a teacher would devote more time to meeting with the child in question, yet frequency counts did not indicate that Ms. Spencer did. It is possible that because Lucia was the type of student who appeared to be engaged in her work the majority of the time (i.e. working quietly and not disturbing others), her behavior did not bid for Ms. Spencer's attention the same way as other students' did. Similar to Lucia, Esmé was a quiet, rule-following student who always appeared to be on task. Although she was the only student in the class classified as an English language learner, she did not receive any differentiated instruction inside of conferences to attend to her language needs.

Conclusion

The findings above demonstrate Ms. Spencer's commitment to daily writing conferences and surface many of the challenges teachers encounter while conducting one-on-one writing conferences. Clearly, learning to conduct effective conferences that use time wisely is difficult. In thinking about her own challenge with the duration of conferences, Ms. Spencer suggested that a possible key to conducting more time-efficient conferences would be to focus on being more explicit. The importance of being explicit – with regard to purpose, instructional methods, and language use – surfaced time and time again when exploring the relationship between certain aspects of instruction occurring during conferences and children's articulated understanding of what they had been taught. In cases where Ms. Spencer provided either an explicit teaching point or

sufficiently unpacked the process of using a strategy or technique during a conference, children demonstrated a better overall understanding of what had been targeted in the conference. In cases where conferences contained multiple foci and lacked a clear instructional thread, children's perceptions of what they had learned in conferences were not as clear.

Beyond highlighting the importance of intentional, explicit instruction, the findings also draw attention to three additional trends noted across cases: (1) the content focus of a conference was typically minimally decomposed; (2) the content of children's writing was emphasized over the processes to support writers to develop transferable skill and techniques; and (3) instructional methods that demonstrate and unpack the writing process rarely occurred. These trends likely influenced what children took away from conferences. Overall, children needed to infer what they were learning (e.g. teaching point and processes) in conferences. While these trends will be further discussed in Chapter 6 of this dissertation, the teaching featured in Chapter 5, *Conferring in Ms. Hanson's Classroom*, contrasts many of these trends and illustrates how their presence influences children's perceptions of teaching and learning occurring in conferences.

CHAPTER 5

CONFERRING IN MS. HANSON'S CLASSROOM

I organize Chapter 5, *Conferring in Ms. Hanson's Classroom*, to closely mirror the organization of Chapter 4 in which I described how conferences unfolded in Ms. Spencer's writing workshop. In this chapter, I begin by describing the teacher, writing curriculum and classroom context in which they study occurred. Then, I detour to outline factors influencing data collection at this site. In the sections that follow, I report findings organized by research sub-questions. At a glance, the findings are particularly unique in regard to Ms. Hanson's awareness of the role of intention, precision, and structure and their relationship to children's understanding, and her commitment and approach to supporting language development in relation to writing instruction.

Research Context

Ms. Hanson

As described in Chapter 3, Ms. Hanson was a second grade teacher in a self-contained classroom at a suburban school in southeast Michigan. The study occurred during Ms. Hanson's ninth year teaching second grade and her 22nd year as a teacher. Prior to teaching second grade, she served the special education population in a number of roles; these included a self-contained special education teacher, a resource room teacher, and a teacher consultant.

Ms. Hanson was respected and revered by colleagues and district administrators. She was frequently approached by the district Language Arts Coordinator to serve on committees, develop curriculum, and lead professional development sessions specific to literacy instruction. When the district adopted

the Fountas and Pinnell literacy instruction framework, Ms. Hanson's classroom was featured as a district lab classroom.

Ms. Hanson also exhibited an on-going commitment to working with the teacher education program at a local university. Through this partnership, she mentored both student teachers and practicum students involved in the university's Master's and Bachelor's with certification programs. It was in my capacity as a teacher educator for the university that Ms. Hanson and I were introduced. While our interactions prior to recruiting her as a study participant were limited, I was aware of her reputation as a high quality teacher and mentor, but I had never spent prolonged periods of time in her classroom.

As described in Chapter 3, Ms. Hanson's school was the district magnet school for English language learners (ELLs). Two of her students, both native Spanish speakers, were classified as ELLs and received supplemental support from the school's ELL teacher. The ELL teacher provided approximately thirty minutes of language support to a small group of ELLs in a separate classroom. While this instruction typically occurred during blocks of time where the children did not miss classroom instruction (e.g. morning work, literacy centers silent sustained reading), there were times that it overlapped with the start of writing workshop.

Ms. Hanson's twenty-two years of classroom experience supported her rich understanding of her student's academic and social-emotional needs. In conversation, her deep understanding of her students as both learners and individuals was evident. An extreme level of care and deliberate thought about the whole child surfaced in her daily interactions with children – whether she was encouraging her students to peek at the butterfly solarium as a new butterfly began to slowly emerge from its chrysalis; reminding children that although it felt like summer, school was still in session, and there was work to be done; comforting a child who was terrified by the sudden onset of dark skies and a booming thunderstorm; or launching a mini-lesson about identifying the heart of a story. Ms. Hanson maintained high expectations for her students and knew how to capitalize on her knowledge about all aspects of each child to support and

spur learning. She worked to meet children where they were and recognized that if they did not understand something, it was her responsibility to either reteach the content or find a new way to teach it until the child understood. She viewed their success as learners as highly dependent on her skill as a teacher.

Ms. Hanson had a reputation for offering orderly, respectful classrooms where any child could thrive as a learner. Her classroom was always calm and orderly, and her interactions with children exuded respect. Children had a sense of what was expected of them at all times, and Ms. Hanson held them accountable for their learning. She consistently articulated and reinforced expectations for behavior, both academic and social in nature. In times when individual children or the class as a whole did not honor classroom norms, Ms. Hanson addressed the issue with the children and restated the expectation in a firm but caring manner. Her classroom was one where children could trust and be trusted and one where their teacher's high expectations conveyed that they were capable learners.

Writing Curriculum and Materials

Ms. Hanson's school district invested multiple resources to train and support teachers to provide explicit and leveled literacy instruction using the Fountas and Pinnell literacy framework. The district required teachers to use running records as diagnostic and summative assessments, and teachers were trained to link the assessment to guided reading instruction. Teachers received hours of training and coaching to implement the model and to become more explicit teachers of the reading process.

In writing, the district had not been as committed to providing sustained, research-based professional development for teachers. When Ms. Hanson began teaching second grade nearly ten years ago, she remembers feeling "overwhelmed and scared" about teaching writing. She said, "I came from a special education background, and we didn't really have a writing curriculum." (Ms. Hanson, interview, March 28, 2011) It was just as she began teaching second grade that the district transitioned from an unstructured approach to

writing where children were given journals by teachers and *told* to write to a more formal workshop approach. Teachers received general support to implement a workshop approach to teaching writing during this time. Hanson recalls stumbling upon Ralph Fletcher's *Craft Lessons* and credits his work with helping her "realize that [she] could teach kids things that they can use in *any* writing which is much better teaching than just giving kids a topic and having them write." (Ms. Hanson, interview, March 28, 2011)

In 2005, Ms. Hanson's school district formally adopted *The Units of Study for Primary Writers* (Calkins & Colleagues from the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, 2003), herein referred to as *The Units of Study*. Professional development efforts to support teachers' use of the materials were led by teachers with little formal training in their use. Broadly*, The Units of Study* consist of nine books (seven discrete units and two additional texts that address workshop essentials) and a CD-ROM containing print and video materials to support teachers to prepare for instruction. Each of the seven units contains multiple sessions (i.e. lessons) that provide scripts for the mini-lesson, suggestions for writing conference topics, and scripts for the after-the-workshop share for day-by-day implementation. Also included in the margins of each lesson are samples of student writing with comments from the authors, instructional suggestions from the authors, and suggestions for connected readings from the supplemental texts included in the package. The scripts provided in the mini-lessons and after-the-workshop share are not intended to be delivered verbatim by teachers, but rather a source for explicit language that can potentially transform their teaching (Personal Communication, TCRWP Staff Developer).

The school district mandated a workshop approach to writing instruction and the use of *The Units of Study* in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade classrooms*.* Second grade teachers were required to use six of the units each year: *Small Moments* (Calkins & Oxenhorn, 2003), *Writing for Readers: Teaching Skills and Strategies* (Calkins & Louis, 2003), *The Craft of Revision* (Calkins & Bleichman, 2003), *Authors as Mentors* (Calkins & Hartman, 2003), *Nonfiction*

Writing: Procedures and Reports (Calkins & Pessah, 2003) and *Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages* (Calkins & Parsons, 2003). The district supplemented these materials in other genres in the second grade including: content-area integrated non-fiction units, writing for standardized tests, autobiography, and personal narrative. Committees of teachers authored the supplemental units. On occasion, Ms. Hanson contributed to the committee work.

While the district issued a grade-level writing calendar outlining the ideal sequence of units, Ms. Hanson typically adjusted the order to address the needs of the children in her class. However, she held herself accountable for covering all genres and topics identified by the calendar and curriculum. Ms. Hanson closely followed *The Units of Study,* session by session, but made adjustments based on her students' needs, the GLCEs and report cards. She also stressed that because the lessons spiral and are used in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade, it was often necessary to modify lessons for her students. She said:

> *I need to make it more challenging and in the zone for second graders. It can't be the same thing they do in kindergarten. It's kind of erroneous when you talk about second graders because they can just produce so much more. There are still things to learn in the units; it's not just the same thing you've done in first grade and kindergarten…* (Ms. Hanson, interview, April 20, 2011)

Hanson emphasized the need to adapt *The Units of Study* to make them more appropriate for the more sophisticated writing her second graders were doing. She also admitted to looking beyond the materials to develop lessons that better suit the needs of her students. She said, "I'm always looking for a way to extend it or making something I've seen another author do or something that's in the zone for second graders."

The study occurred during two writing units from *The Units of Study* (Calkins, et al., 2003): *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and* Reports (Calkins & Pessah, 2003) and *Authors as Mentors* (Calkins & Hartman, 2003). *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports* (Calkins & Pessah, 2003) aims to teach children to write two types of non-fiction texts: how-to books (i.e. procedural

writing) and all-about books (i.e. information texts focused on one topic). During the study, Ms. Hanson only taught the how-to books component of the unit. While the unit is intended to be covered in approximately six classroom sessions, Ms. Hanson expanded the unit by teaching children multiple ways to revise their texts and incorporate text features into their writing. *Authors as Mentors* (Calkins & Hartman, 2003) is a unit designed to help children learn to study the work of published authors to discover and learn to use techniques and approaches occurring in model or mentor texts. The unit is structured in four parts: (1) *Crafting as in Angela Johnson's Books*; (2) *Working with a New Text Structure*; (3) *Finding Writing Mentors in All Authors*; and (4) *Preparing for Publication.* Ms. Hanson modified the unit to account for the children's past experiences with the materials and number of instructional days remaining on the school calendar. Because they children had already explored Angela Johnson's stories as mentor texts, Ms. Hanson supplemented the texts with those from other authors; as a result, the mini-lessons focused on writing features and craft that supplemented the authored unit. Ms. Hanson did teach the text structure, many moments stories (collections of small vignettes focused on a common theme or topic), as outlined in the unit, but included mentor texts written in this structure that had not been utilized in the unit during kindergarten and first grade.

Ms. Hanson also recognized how children's experience learning from teachers who used the same materials in kindergarten and first grade could both benefit and challenge some students. For example, one student in her class, Oliver, was new to the school district during the year of the study and had previously been at a school that did not use *The Units of Study.* Ms. Hanson spoke of his struggles to understand the norms and routines of writing workshop and engage in the discourse specific to writing that the other children had been exposed to since the start of kindergarten. Even toward the latter part of the year, Ms. Hanson remained very aware that Oliver might need supplemental explanations to have full access to the instruction she provided.

Classroom Context

Ms. Hanson's calm, caring manner set the tone for classroom interactions. There was never a feeling of chaos or disorder, and children almost always appeared to be on task. They, too, exuded a certain sense of calm atypical in most elementary classrooms. Even after a rowdy game of tag on the playground at recess, children entered the classroom peacefully as they transitioned from playing to learning. Ms. Hanson had established that the classroom was a place in which work was the main focus, and children honored this. As children wrote or chatted quietly with neighbors about what they were reading, it seemed as if they felt at home in many ways. It was as if they were completing tasks and interacting that way because that's just what you do in second grade, as opposed to doing it *for* their teacher. Children cared about their work and took care of one another.

A Look Inside Ms. Hanson's Classroom

The following section describes activities and structures to support literacy learning in Ms. Hanson's classroom. Moreover, it overviews each component of the writing workshop to provide a clear vision of how Ms. Hanson capitalized on this instructional time each day.

Ms. Hanson's classroom was one where children were given choices and freedom to select texts to match their interests. Further, Ms. Hanson strived to meet individual needs and provide children with learning opportunities and instruction needed to support their individualized, on-going development as readers and writers. The daily literacy block took two forms during the year. From September through April, children worked independently at literacy centers as Ms. Ramsey met with leveled guided reading groups and provided targeted instruction to small groups of children. Shortly before the study began, Ms. Hanson started to transition the literacy block to the form that children would experience as third graders in the coming academic year. This move shifted the literacy block from a centers-based approach to a more traditional reading workshop. Ms. Hanson began each reading workshop with a short mini-lesson to

provide children access to the invisible work of readers. These mini-lessons addressed topics such as investigating book genres, noticing characters' feelings, identifying character traits, and understanding the problem or conflict in a story. She also addressed topics specific to non-fiction texts such as noticing text features and understanding information. Following the mini-lesson, children read independently or wrote a letter to Ms. Hanson in their response notebooks. They submitted these letters once a week, and Ms. Hanson responded. As children worked independently, Ms. Hanson continued to meet with daily guided reading groups. Word study instruction was still provided every Monday, and formal writing instruction occurred outside of the literacy block.

Ms. Hanson was committed to teaching writing, but in the year of the study, it was difficult for her to design a weekly schedule that allowed for daily writing instruction because of multiple factors including, but not limited to, district curricular requirements and the "specials" (e.g. art, media, music, physical education) schedule her students had been assigned. While she identified a block each day as writing workshop, this block did not include any instruction on Mondays. Instead, children continued to work on their writing as they would during independent writing time, and Ms. Hanson met with targeted word-work groups, a district requirement. Ms. Hanson did not provide a mini-lesson or confer with children. Writing workshop proceeded as normal Tuesday through Friday. Other opportunities to write were plentiful in Ms. Hanson's classroom; however, targeted instruction in writing did not accompany these opportunities. Children completed reading responses during the literacy block, wrote extended responses in mathematics, and engaged in writing activities across the content areas. Although children were provided other opportunities to write throughout the day during these times, they did not offer the same learning opportunities for children as where present during writing workshop.

Mini-Lessons

Writing Workshop in Ms. Hanson's class consisted of two parts: the mini-lesson and independent writing with conferences. She began each mini-lesson

by requesting children to bring their writing folder with them to the rug to begin Writing Workshop. Children quickly and quietly located their writing folders in their desks as Ms. Hanson called table groups (i.e. four to five desks that had been clumped to form small teams of children) to the rug. Children sat next to their writing partners for the unit and patiently waited for the entire class to join them on the rug. Once all children were present and their eyes were on Ms. Hanson, she began the mini-lesson. These mini-lessons varied in length from 10-18 minutes.

Each mini-lesson followed a predictable format. Ms. Hanson linked what the children would learn in that day's lesson to previous lessons or experiences and then articulated a clear, instructional goal for the mini-lesson. Ms. Hanson had also written the goal on chart paper and referred the children to the visual as she began teaching. Figure 5.1 is the chart Ms. Hanson used when teaching a lesson on how to revise their work by having a partner act on the directions they had written.

Figure 5.1.   Chart from mini-lesson on revising for clarity by reading and acting out your directions
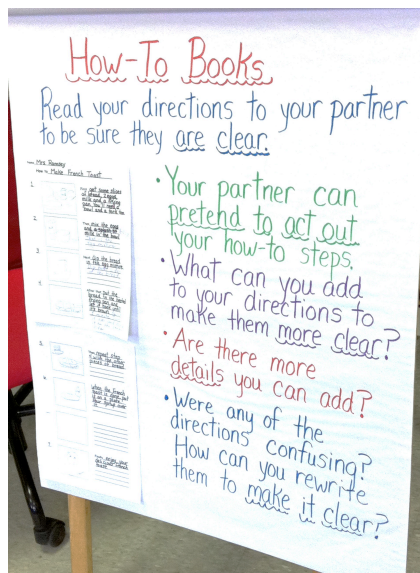
After stating the goal of the lesson, Ms. Hanson explained how writers accomplish the goal she identified. In many cases, this included step-by-step narration of the process children would use. After narrating the process, she

typically applied it to her own writing while thinking aloud about the process and specific technique or strategy she used as she planned, drafted, revised, or edited her own writing. On other occasions, she shared mentor texts and unpacked the work the author had done or provided counter-examples of what they were trying to do. With regards to the session documented in Figure 5.1, Ms. Hanson explained to the students what they would learn to do and how it would impact their writing. She then explained the steps that they would use when sharing their writing with others – how the writer would read his text, what the listener would act out, and what questions would guide their conversation after the reading. In this case, one child acted out Ms. Hanson's directions as she read it aloud, and they discussed each question as a class culminating with Ms. Hanson sharing her thinking about the changes she would make based on the conversation.

Without exception, Ms. Hanson always provided the opportunity for children to practice what they had been taught in the mini-lesson before they returned to the seats. Children frequently paired with their writing partners to engage in applying a strategy or method Ms. Hanson had taught them or identify a place in their current draft where they might "try it out." Ms. Hanson assigned children writing partners each unit and deliberately matched children who could provide the support to one another. In describing one partnership, she said:

> *At first I was nervous because she can be really judgmental, but they worked together in science, and she was very positive, encouraging, and nurturing. She did all the right things. As a result of that interaction, I knew pairing them for this unit would work.* (Ms. Hanson, interview, May 27, 2011)

She would listen in as the children worked with partners to determine if re-teaching was necessary or identify conversations where children were appropriately using techniques and strategies to highlight for the group. She would then reassemble the group for necessary re-teaching and highlighting, as well as to restate the goal and purpose of what the children had learned. The charts that represented the goal for the day and particular strategies or

techniques to support the children as writers were then made available to children as needed throughout the current and subsequent workshops.

Ms. Hanson did not expect all children to return to their seats and apply what they had learned that day to their writing. She said:

> *As a teacher, I'm making sure that my mini-lessons are in the zone, so kids get it and are able to apply it. Does it work for every kid, every time? No, but I keep trying, and eventually I hope they get it. It's like a spiral. They get mini-lessons that are pretty similar throughout the years…so when the kid is ready to apply what's in the mini-lesson, it'll happen on their terms.* (Ms. Hanson, interview, April 20, 2011)

She saw the mini-lesson as an opportunity to bolster children's knowledge, techniques and strategies for writing, so they could access such information and skills as needed in the future.

In each of these mini-lessons, Ms. Hanson strived to deautomatize the work that writers do in order to help children understand how to engage in processes or apply strategies to enhance their own writing. The language she used to describe the strategies and processes, as well as her own thinking as she attempted to make the invisible work of writers visible for her second graders, was consistent and deliberate. It was apparent that she recognized the importance of providing children with a language and grammar for talking about the work of writers. Language used in mini-lessons surfaced in conferences as well. Further, her instruction decomposed the work of writers in a way that allowed children to see how they too could engage in the process.

Independent Writing and Conferences

Following each mini-lesson, Ms. Hanson dismissed children from the rug. She allowed a few minutes to settle in as she conversed with children who approached her, organized her materials, and announced the children with whom she was aiming to confer. She then signaled to children that their transition time had ended, and it was time to begin working. Chatter quickly died down, folders opened, and children began to write. Earlier in the academic year, children

listened to classical music as they wrote, but because it interfered with the audio quality of the video, she suspended the use of the music during the study.

Ms. Hanson frequently stressed to her students that conferences were not to be interrupted unless there was an emergency. Children had been taught where and how to access materials and resources they might find useful during independent writing time in an effort to build independence and allow Ms. Hanson to confer without interruptions. However, she frequently interrupted her own conferences to redirect off-task behavior.

When engaged in conferences, Ms. Hanson sat perpendicular to the child at his or her desk. She respected children's personal space, only leaning in toward the child when both she and the child needed access to the text they were discussing. Because children were seated in small groups of 4 or 5 desks clumped together, it was common to see other children leaning in, "eavesdropping" as she facilitated conferences. Conferences are further described in the findings section of this chapter.

Share time did not follow independent writing time in Ms. Hanson's classroom. Instead, independent writing time often concluded with the realization of the segment of time allotted for writing coming to an end and instructions to line up for recess or electives. As children stored their work in folders, Ms. Hanson typically walked throughout the room glancing at the writing children produced that day.

Factors Influencing this Study

As discussed in Chapter 3, data from this research site were limited and consisted mainly of video records of conferences and learning conversations with children. There were multiple factors that influenced the quantity and quality of the data collected in Ms. Hanson's class. While Ms. Hanson and I intended to begin the study earlier in the year, scheduling of lead-teaching for her student teacher disrupted our plan. As a result, we pushed back data collection until after the student teacher finished her placement. When data collection began on April 13, 2011, Ms. Hanson had two units to cover by the time the school year ended

in early June. Those familiar with the school calendar are aware that multiple assessments and school activities typically disrupt instructional time during the last month of school. While Ms. Hanson strived to minimize the amount of instructional time lost, there were a number of disruptions that required her to cancel writing workshop almost weekly. The last unit, *Authors as Mentors/Many Moments*, seemed particularly rushed occurring over just nine days and not culminating with a published product. Further, during the course of the study, Ms. Hanson's sister was fighting stage 4 cancer and passed away. While Ms. Hanson exhibited extreme professionalism in attending to her responsibilities as a classroom teacher, the data collected as she grieved her sister are not fully representative of her robust work as a teacher.

Findings

Recall that the purpose of this study was to investigate how teachers use writing conferences to support the growth and development of young writers. The following section presents findings pertaining to the both research questions:

(1) How does the teacher use writing conferences to facilitate children's growth as writers?

(2) How do children make sense of learning opportunities presented in writing conferences?

As suggested in the chapter overview, the findings section will also explore the role of the mini-lesson in relation to conferences and children's understanding.

What is the frequency and duration of writing conferences?

Ms. Hanson conducted individual writing conferences with an average of 3.36 children each day (sd=1.48) during the how-to unit with a daily range of 1 to 6 conferences. Since the individual interactions Ms. Hanson had with children on

the last day of the unit differed from typical conferences, this day was not included in the analysis.

During both writing units (how-to books and many moments), Ms. Hanson held regular conferences with children until the last day of the unit. On this final day, children organized and assembled their published work, and she assisted them with final preparations for publication. Children lined up at the table where Ms. Hanson was seated, and she quickly reviewed children's work to ensure that all pages were in order and helped with the final assembly. These interactions typically took under one minute as she quickly ushered children through – sending them back to their seats if there were missing pages or incomplete sections. These brief interactions differed from typical conferences as they served as check point for children, and no new teaching occurred. Further, they occurred at Ms. Hanson's table, as opposed to the children's desks.

In the many moments unit, Ms. Hanson facilitated an average of 4.38 conferences each day (sd=1.57) with a daily range of 2 to 6 conferences. As in the case of the how-to unit, the last day of the unit was not included in the analysis because the interactions did not qualify as conferences according to the data decision rule. The mean number of conferences differed by 1.02 across units. While the time allotted for independent writing and thus conferring each day remained consistent in both the how-to unit and many moments unit, informal conversations with Ms. Hanson during the second unit suggested that she was concerned how she would confer with all students in the class at least once during the unit because of end-of-year disruptions and absences. This likely influenced the increase in the number of conferences she facilitated each day.

Table 5.1 and Table 5.2 present frequency counts for each day's writing conferences, as well as the stage of the writing process Ms. Hanson addressed during corresponding mini-lessons. Both tables indicate that the majority of Ms. Hanson's mini-lessons targeted revision, and little attention was paid to editing. During the how-to unit, the revision mini-lessons were clustered over a span of seven days. In the many moments unit, revision mini-lesson were scattered

across a three week span. However, if the instructional days had been sequential and not interrupted by days when the children did not have writing workshop, the revision lessons would have been clustered in a five day span, with one day in the middle returning to a focus of drafting. Throughout both units, Ms. Hanson emphasized the importance of children "getting their ideas down," enabling them to return to drafts and revise their work to attend to elements of craft she was teaching.

Table 5.1:

Number of daily conferences and mini-lesson focus – How-to

	M	T	W	Th	F
Week 1			3	5	
Week 2	2	4	2		
Week 3		6	4	4	
Week 4		2	3	4	2
Week 5	1	5		0	

KEY Blue: Plan; Green: Draft; Yellow: Revise; Orange: Edit; Purple: Publish; White: No school or no mini-lesson and conferences; Pink: Workshop Routine

Table 5.2:

Number of daily conferences and mini-lesson focus – Many moments

	M	T	W	Th	F
Week 1					3
Week 2		5	5		5
Week 3		6	6	3	
Week 4		2	0		

KEY Blue: Plan; Green: Draft; Yellow: Revise; Orange: Edit; Purple: Publish; White: No school or no mini-lesson and conferences; Pink: Workshop Routine

Identifying Children

During interviews, Ms. Hanson shared how her thinking about organizational systems to support her in conducting consistent conferences with children had changed over time. Initially, Ms. Hanson tried assigning groups of children to participate in conferences on specific days of the week. However, she

found that she rarely conferred with all the children assigned to each day; as a result, she would never end up having conferences with them because she needed to attend to the children who were assigned to the following day. Further, she felt that when "kids were expecting to have a conference, it altered how they worked" during the workshop. She has since altered her approach.

Her decisions about which children to confer with each day were informed by multiple sources of information including observations of children's daily productivity and close review of children's writing each weekend. When asked about this process in an interview, she explained:

> *Over the weekend, I always take writing home and take notes. I have notes on whose writing I need to see every day, and I find a moment to check in. It's usually kids who need more support; it helps me to have an idea of what I might target in a conference before I go into it... I look over their shoulder to see who need a little more support or a push. I usually start with that kid the next day.* (Ms. Hanson, interview, April 20, 2011)

While the interview emphasized Ms. Hanson's focus on children who needed extra support, she consistently conducted conferences with children of all abilities in the classroom.

She also saw record keeping as an important aspect of her work as a teacher of writing. On multiple occasions, she stressed how her conference records helped her not only know who she needed to see in a conference, but also document what children's strengths, challenges, and writing topics were during each writing unit. Figure 5.2 represents Ms. Hanson's conference records over a two-week span during the how-to unit. These conference records served as a valuable resource for Ms. Hanson. While discussing how they informed the selection of children for each day's conferences, she said:

> *I put things like stars and numbers on my conference records to indicate that I want to meet with kids the next day. No one else would understand these records, but they serve a purpose for me as a teacher.* (Ms. Hanson, interview, April 20, 2011)

Moreover, Ms. Hanson explained that while she typically identified about five children with whom she aimed to conduct conferences each day, she only announced a few children at the start of each independent writing session, in

case she was unable to meet with everyone on her list. Field notes suggested that this approach also enabled Ms. Hanson to be responsive to the needs of individual children who might not have been identified as needing conferences that day.

Figure 5.2. Ms. Hanson's conference records [12]

Sometimes these responsive interactions took the form of table conferences, where Ms. Hanson engaged the entire group of children whose desks were arranged in groups of four or five in talk about particular strategies or techniques for writing. Ms. Hanson utilized multiple participation structures and formats in her attempts to engage in targeted teaching that focused on students' needs. These formats included one-on-one conferences, table conferences, quick check-ins, and interactions as children practiced what they had learned during a mini-lesson with partners before beginning independent writing.

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[12] Children's names have been covered. Yellow coverage indicates that the teacher had highlighted this child's name on the conference records.

Duration

The average duration of conference during the how-to unit was 3.65 minutes (sd=1.9), while the average duration for conferences during the many moments unit was 3.92 minutes (sd=2.2). Observations indicated that Ms. Hanson consistently watched the clock in the classroom to monitor time and help her appropriately pace conferences. Conferences of 12-14 minutes in length did occur, but infrequently. Typically, these longer conferences targeted children having difficulty understanding the writing genre or those in need of heavy scaffolding in order to produce in the genre. Further, when Ms. Hanson needed to reteach a mini-lesson for the two English language learners who had missed the mini-lesson due to the scheduling of ESL support outside the classroom, these interactions occurred over longer stretches of time. Multiple factors discussed in the section below likely influenced Ms. Hanson's ability to conduct focused, time-sensitive conferences with the children in her classroom.

What is the relationship between the organization of the conference and children's understanding of what the conference targeted?

One key feature of Ms. Hanson's instructional practice was conducting research to obtain information about children's needs as writers. This was demonstrated above in the examples of her thinking about how to identify children who needed conferences and featured prominently in her selection of instructional foci for individual conferences. Ms. Hanson structured each conference to allow time for her to gather information about the child's writing process and product.

Video data and CAT analysis revealed that such structure was consistent across conferences. Upon approaching a child for a conference, she would attempt to understand what the child was working on, as well as his or her current challenges or areas where she could further support him or her. She did this in many ways including asking the child what he or she was working on, observing the child as he or she continued writing, or requesting the child to read his or her work. Following this initial research, Ms. Hanson frequently paused to

process the information she had gathered and make decisions about what the child needed to learn and how she would teach it. After sharing this focus with the child, she usually engaged in guiding the child through using the particular strategy or technique that her teaching point addressed. Before exiting the conference, Ms. Hanson positioned the child to continue working and made a record of what they had done in the conference on her record form.

When asked what Ms. Hanson thought was important to convey to student teachers about conferring, she said:

> *There's a basic structure, but there's a lot of room for your own interpretation as a teacher… It starts with encouragement aspect – the positive, then you want to research and identify the little lift you can give each individual kid as you're having his conference, then name a direct teaching point and give the kid a chance to apply it. Then, I like to say follow up and see. It might be the next day, it might be a week later, but I want to see that they've done it, and praise them because it's hard letting someone else read your writing. I recognize that.* (Ms. Hanson, interview, April 20, 2011)

With the exception of consistently naming "a direct teaching point" for the child, Ms. Hanson's description of the conference structure aligned with the structure identified in observations and through the use of the CAT.

While Ms. Hanson identified other aspects of conferring that she found fundamental for novice teachers, she emphasized the structure on multiple occasions and consistently demonstrated its use in her teaching. Ms. Hanson's structure, albeit slightly different from the structure outlined in the CAT because of the lack of her attention to teaching methods such as modeling and explaining and providing an example as forms of teaching, still resembled the overall structure and honored the corresponding purpose for each part of the conference.

It is possible that this structure served as a way of organizing both teaching and learning. It might account for the teacher's ability to maintain focus and sequence important aspects of the conferences that support student learning. Additionally, the structure might help children to understand their role in the conference and anticipate how it will unfold, the same way in which a

reader's knowledge of genre helps him or her to anticipate how a particular type of text will unfold.

What is the instructional focus of writing conferences?

Ms. Hanson believed mini-lessons and conferences were strongly related and saw conferences as a way to "expedite" children's application of what the instructional focus of a mini-lesson. She said:

> [Conferences] *allow teachers to help see how kids can apply mini-lessons, even those we've covered a month ago. As a teacher, I think you have to have a fund of craft ideas…writing techniques or elements you can apply to your writing…in your head and encourage kids to do that in a moment, when it fits, and get excited about it.* (Ms. Hanson, interview, March 28, 2011)

While she valued the connection between a topic addressed in a mini-lesson and a conference, she recognized that as a teacher, it was her role to resurface relevant mini-lesson topics that the writer had been taught, but was not currently using, during the individualized instruction of a conference. Furthermore, she recognized the tension between facilitating conferences to support writers to develop transferable skill and knowledge to support their on-going writing development and facilitating conferences that improve the quality of the text children are currently crafting. She said:

> *One of the things I struggle with is that conferences should be generative. That's really really hard. Sometimes it's about fixing a piece of writing, just to make some improvement. Sometimes they are generative where you get a kid who is thinking about his writing differently based on something you said… That's really hard, and it's not possible in every single conference.* (Ms. Hanson, interview, April 20, 2011)

Recall that as Ms. Hanson described her experiences learning to teach using a workshop approach, she called attention to the work of professional text author Ralph Fletcher, and how his work helped her realize that it was feasible to teach children in ways that changed their writing as a whole. This thought still resonates in her reflections about her current day teaching. Field notes showed that Ms. Hanson unfailingly presented mini-lesson topics that were generative to the extent that her students could apply them to multiple texts, not just those they

were currently crafting; some, but not all, mini-lessons were even transferable across genre.

Limited Instructional Focus

Ms. Hanson strived to identify only one or two points of focus for each conference. She recognized that although there were a multitude of lessons to be taught in conferences, children benefited more from learning about one or two targeted foci. She said, "There are some kids who would need me address many many things in a conference, but that's not helpful. I can choose one or two things." While it is difficult to see inside the mind of the teacher to determine the moment in which she is identifying the direction she will lead the child in a conference, video analyses indicated that Ms. Hanson often paused in between the parts of the conference where she was researching and teaching. In conversation, she shared that this was the time in which she was making decisions about what the child needed to be taught to be "lifted as a writer." Further, Ms. Hanson's belief that conferences often served as an opportunity to help a child learn to apply a technique or strategy taught in mini-lessons throughout the year as they fit the child's development, likely allowed her to limit the focus of the conference to techniques and strategies she had identified and taught previously, thus increasing the ease of identifying just one focus.

While Ms. Hanson admitted that she could not categorize every conference as "generative" to the extent that she helped the child to learn to do something he would transfer to other writing as opposed to solely targeting the text to improve its quality, the conferences she led still maintained focus. As opposed to conducting them as an editor, going line by line and suggesting corrections that did not emphasize on one or two central foci, she consistently identified a limited number of topics for focus and maintained devoted to only addressing these topic during the conference. In video analyses, these foci were identifiable, and in learning conversations, children were able to articulate what had been discussed in the conference. Not one child expressed confusion about

what had been targeted in his or her one-one-one conference with Ms. Hanson. Instead, they made comments such as:

> *We talked about like, well first, well we were talking about taking it step by step, and it ended up working out good because now I'm just about done doing the illustrations.* (Max, learning conversation, April 14, 2011)

> *She helped me like decide where to put my comeback lines and where not to because on my first paper, my lead, I really liked the end, and so I didn't put a comeback line in there, and so I just put it on my other two, and I thought that was really helpful because I didn't know if I was going to put a comeback line in there.* (Lilah, learning conversation, May 27, 2011)

> *She taught me that, um, she taught me that I should have, I should not say, I was really excited, and I should express what I was feeling, but not say.* (Julia, learning conversation, June 1, 2011)

Ms. Hanson's commitment to maintaining a focus during the conference likely enabled children to capture the essence of the interaction in a way that benefited them as writers. The learning conversations shared above suggest that children left conferences with an idea of what had been discussed. Because of Ms. Hanson's ability to thread the focus through the conference, children were not sidetracked by multiple foci.

Student-Selected Focus

Ms. Hanson also provided children with opportunities to self-select the focus of the conference; however, she did not do this by asking them what assistance they needed from her. Instead, she saw the self-selection as more subtle. The interview excerpt that follows represents Ms. Hanson's thinking about the importance of allowing children to self-select conference foci:

Researcher: Often times you slow down and stop and observe. Or you'll stop and just watch.

Ms. Hanson: Depends on the kid. Sometimes I like to listen while they read it. Sometimes they'll notice it first. Other times it's easier for me to just listen, it's that research part of conferring, it's so important. By having the kid read, it gives him a role from the beginning of the conference.

Researcher: I did notice that they often stop while reading.

Ms. Hanson: And at that point, they identify what they need to work on.
They basically tell me what my teaching point needs to be.
It's a nice way to meet the writer's needs.

This approach allowed Ms. Hanson to capitalize on the teachable moments children presented as they read their work aloud. Additionally, it helped children become accustomed to the constant work writers do as they read and revise their own work, yet with the support of their teacher.

Location in the Writing Process

Table 5.3 displays frequency counts for the stage of the writing process address in the total paired writing conferences, writing conferences with corresponding learning conversations with children. Analyses conducted using the CAT indicated that the majority of Ms. Hanson's conferences occurred as children were revising texts. This finding is in line with the emphasized focus of her mini-lessons - revision.

Table 5.3:

Focus of writing conferences

Genre	Writing Process				
	Planning	Drafting	Revising	Editing	Publishing
How-to n=13	3	3	6	0	1
Many Moments n=6	3	1	2	0	0
COMBINED N=19	6	4	8	0	1

While this finding emphasizes the link between Ms. Hanson's mini-lessons and conferences, we must recall that this particular item on the CAT did not have strong reliability among coders. However, the sample used for calculating Cohen's Kappa included conferences led by Ms. Hanson and Ms. Spencer.

Subsequent video analyses using the CAT indicated that Ms. Hanson's conferences did not indicate that the teacher and children were working in different problem spaces, as they did in the case of Ms. Spencer.

Content Focus

While Ms. Hanson followed the teaching sessions outlined in *The Units of Study* (Calkins et al., 2003), she recognized that the materials were written for kindergarten through second grade classrooms. Thus, she enhanced content and added new content to increase the level of challenge for the second grade writers in her classroom. For example, *The Units of Study* outline six teaching sessions during the how-to unit; Ms. Hanson identified additional content to raise the quality of writing of her students and presented 9 additional mini-lessons.

She described one major focus of second grade writing as, "A big thing in second grade is details. I teach them to write talking details, dialogue details, thinking and feeling details, and describing details." Figure 5.3 represents the decomposition of this particular content focus. The first level represents the location in the writing process, revision. The subsequent layer represents partially decomposed content – adding details. It is quite common for teachers to attempt to teach children how to add details without unpacking the content. However, Ms. Hanson went one step further and identified the multiple ways in which details can be added in this third level of her explanation of content in interviews, as well as in her teaching. While expert writers would likely identify many other ways to add details to writing, Ms. Hanson's selections demonstrate a fit with the development of second grade writers. It is possible that the curricular materials (i.e. *The Units of Study*) available to Ms. Spencer played a role in not only her ability to decompose content, but also identify content that fit the needs of the second grade writers in her class.

Figure 5.3. A possible representation of decomposed content for teaching revision
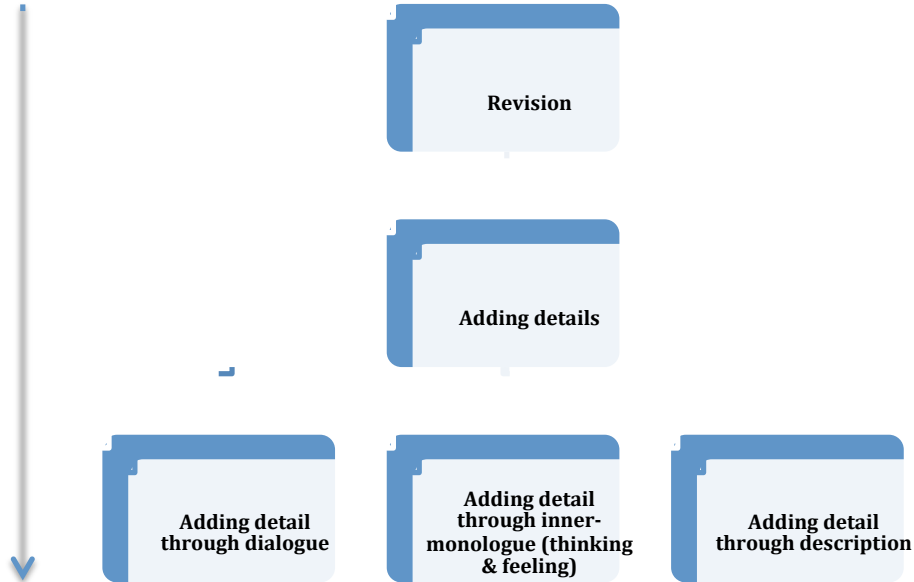
While this study did not closely examine how the teacher utilized *The Units of Study* to support planning for and enacting instruction in mini-lessons and conferences, it is likely that the way in which the authors of *The Units of Study* unpacked content to help teachers better understand particular topics and acquire the language and pedagogies necessary for teaching children influenced Ms. Hanson's awareness and ability to decompose content to the level at which it becomes more accessible.

A teacher's ability to decompose content has many possible implications for teaching and learning. First, a teacher's specificity about content (e.g. talking about "adding detail through inner-dialogue as opposed to simply adding details), she is also likely to be able to transfer this specificity to her teaching – both in mini-lessons and conferences. Second, the more specific the content is, the more deliberate and precise the teacher's language must be. Deliberate and precise language is likely to influence the class' discourse related to the subject matter; thus, the children and teacher develop and use a common grammar for describing the work of writers. This common language has multiple implications as well. Not only will it allow teachers and students to communicate more

effectively with one another, but it also enables peers to more efficiently converse about writing as they provide feedback to one another.

What instructional methods are used during writing conferences?

The subsequent section describes Ms. Hanson's use of teaching points and instructional methods in conferences and explores their relationship to her enactment of mini-lessons. Although the focus of this study was to explore the use of conferences to support young writers' development, field notes suggest that Ms. Hanson's approach to and use of mini-lessons likely influenced how conferences unfolded and what children were able to articulate as having learned.

Teaching Points

Recall that the CAT analysis identified the presence of a teaching point, a teacher's articulation what the child would learn to do as a writer. While field notes from Ms. Hanson's mini-lesson indicated consistent naming of teaching points, video analyses of conferences revealed that Ms. Hanson rarely stated a teaching point during one-on-one interactions with children. In fact, Ms. Hanson articulated a teaching point in only 3 of 19 paired conferences.

The transcript below represents one of the three conferences where Ms. Hanson stated a teaching point. However, in contrast to the ideal conference structure she had outlined, she did not articulate the teaching point until after she had started to lead the child through guided practice.

The conference begins as Ms. Hanson sits down next to Oliver and peeks at his web of sub-topics (Figure 5.4) for his many moments story about his annoying sister. Oliver then shares his lead with her and expresses that he does not know what to do next. The excerpt begins as Ms. Hanson leads Oliver back to his web.

      Ms. Hanson: Okay, well let's look at your list. Tell me about a time, a specific, one specific time when (points at his idea) she was slamming doors.

      Oliver: Ooooh. Well, she was doing it recently.

Ms. Hanson: Okay, tell me about what happened.

Oliver: Well, me and her were in a timeout, and I got out of my room without permission, and I went out into the upstairs hallway and over to my sister's room. She opened the door and slammed it shut, and of course, it got my mom's attention.

Ms. Hanson: Of course. Well, that's a moment! What you just told me, that story, is a moment. And since you're writing a many moments story, you can just take those ideas that you were sharing with me, put them down on your paper, and then you've got your next moment, your number two moment is done.

Oliver: Mhm. All right.

Ms. Hanson: Okay, does that make sense?

(Oliver nods.)

Ms. Hanson: Okay, then the next thing you want to do, because you want to try to have several moments in your story. Then all you have to do is look at your list and say, I have to think of a story, think of a time when this happened.

In this conference excerpt, Ms. Hanson walked Oliver through the process of thinking about what he needed to do next: identify a new sub-topic and think about a one time when that happened. She then explained to him what he would do after identifying and telling the story. She closed the conference by explicitly naming her teaching point: "Look at your list and say, 'I have to think of a story, think of a time when this happened.'" The learning conversation with Oliver (May 25, 2011) that followed the conference indicated that Oliver understood one technique he could use to begin writing a new moment in his many moment story.

Researcher: What did you learn?

Oliver: I was stuck, and Ms. Hanson was saying, "Think back to a moment when me and my sister. Think of the moment when my sister slammed the door shut." Well, should I tell you what I wrote about?

Researcher: If you want, or you can tell me what about that helped you.

Oliver: Well, I'll tell you what the moment was about.
(Child retells the moment)

Researcher: So it seems like Mrs. Hanson helped you to get unstuck. Next time you get stuck, what might you do?

Oliver: Think back to when a moment happened that I put on here. (Refers to web.)

Figure 5.4. Oliver's many moments web
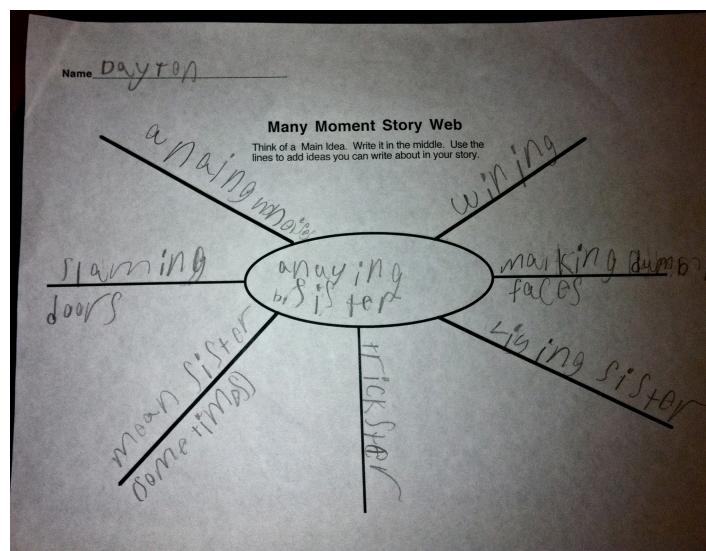
This excerpt was also representative of Ms. Hanson's consistent use of language – both in the guiding of Oliver and the articulation of the teaching point. Oliver's learning conversation served as an illustrative example of how children acquire language through repeated use.

Strikingly, even when a teaching point was not explicitly named as something a child would learn to do in a conference, learning conversations suggested children had inferred the mechanism or strategy aimed to teach during the conference. In contrast to the example provided above, the conference that follows shows how although Ms. Hanson does not actually name a teaching point in the conference, the precise and explicit nature of her teaching and talk

contribute to the child's understanding of what he was taught. This is the type of conference that more typically unfolded in her daily instruction.

In Ms. Hanson's conference with Foster, she discovered that he was having difficulty generating multiple topics for his how-to writing. She guided him through brainstorming by continually asking the question, "What else are you good at?" This approach supplemented Ms. Hanson's mini-lesson for that day in which she taught children how writers think about topics they know a lot about to identify possible topics for how-to texts. Further, she had stressed that trying to teach someone how to do something the children had never experienced or did not know how to do would be difficult. In the conference with Foster, Ms. Hanson supported him to identify topics by posing the same question multiple times as he practiced thinking about something he was good at, identifying it, and writing it down. At the end of the conference, Foster had not only developed his topic list (Figure 5. 5), but also understood one targeted method for generating ideas for how-to texts.

Figure 5.5.   Foster's how-to list
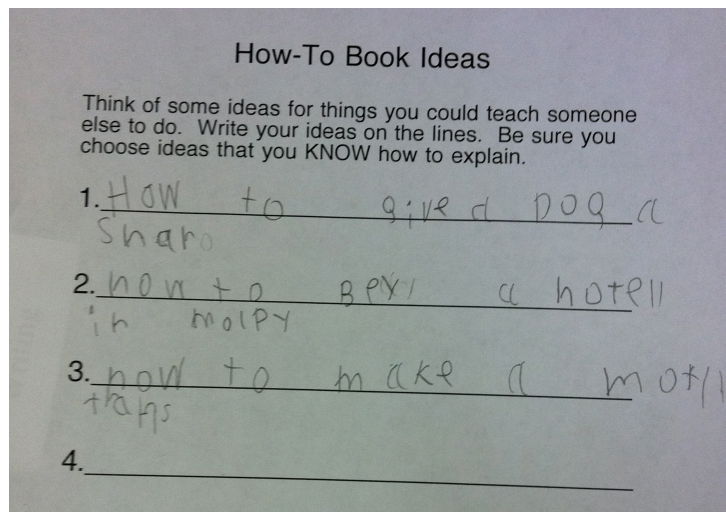
The following excerpt from a follow-up learning conversation (Foster, April 13, 2011) represents his thinking about what occurred during the conference:

> Foster: Well, we talked about how we, about stuff I was good at, so I could write my how-to ideas.

Researcher: Did she teach you anything?

Foster: …she helped me figure out what I could write about.

Researcher: What did she do to help you out?

Foster: She asked me some questions like "what am I good at?"

Researcher: So next time you sit down and feel stuck, what might you do to help yourself?

Foster: I'll just think of stuff that I'm really really good at.

Although Ms. Hanson did not directly identify that thinking about something the child was good at as one way of generating ideas for how-to books, but rather repeatedly asked him to name what he was good at, Foster inferred that he was to have learned that based on their interaction. Based on the earlier discussion about how Ms. Hanson limited the foci of conferences to only one or two and addressed only these foci in her teaching, it is likely that she identified teaching points, yet did not consistently articulate them to students during conferences.

Instructional Methods

Analyses using the CAT revealed that Ms. Hanson's preferred method of supporting children was through guided practice. She utilized this method in 17 of 19 total conferences. Analyses also revealed that it was common for Ms. Hanson to omit features of guided practice that Calkins highlighted. These included: the naming of an explicit teaching point and narrating the child's actions or process as he applies a technique or strategy. In spite of eliminating what Calkins identified as key aspects of the instructional method of guided practice, learning conversations with children indicated a strong understanding of what had been addressed in the conference. Recall the conferences with Oliver and Foster featured in the previous section. In each case, Ms. Hanson posed questions using clear and consistent language to support each youngster in acquiring the ability to do what she was teaching him. In Oliver's case, her language and guidance helped him to see the invisible work of a writer – locating a sub-topic

and thinking about one particular moment in which it occurred. Without her prompting and guidance, Oliver could have watched an expert writer do exactly that without seeing the process at play. In Foster's case, Ms. Hanson guided him to generate more ideas for his how-to topic list. She repeated a question that Foster too could ask himself when attempting to identify a topic, instead of giving Foster ideas (e.g. *You know a lot about baseball and playing the harmonica. Those would be good topics.),* providing generic prompts such as, "What else could you write about?" or asking questions that directly relate to what she knows about Foster (e.g. *Do you play any sports? You could write about one of those.).* By asking a question that Foster could also ask himself, she is supporting his development as a self-regulated, independent writer who does not rely upon his teacher to generate ideas for his writing.

Given the explicit nature of the talk and teaching in mini-lessons, one cannot help but wonder about the potential for event preceding independent writing and conferences (i.e. the mini-lesson) to influence children's interpretations of the teaching that occur during conferences.

Role of the Mini-Lesson

The strength of Ms. Hanson's mini-lessons is one possible hypothesis to explain children's accurate explanations of what they had learned in their conferences in spite of the lack of an articulated teaching point or explicit teaching. Ms. Hanson's mini-lessons maintained a consistent structure during which she not only provided an instructional explanation for what children were learning to do and why it was important, but also modeled the process of using particular strategies or techniques germane to their development as writers. These mini-lessons positioned children to approximate the use of techniques and strategies for writing when they returned to their seats. Further, the explicitness of her instruction demonstrated through her attention to deliberate language and use of pedagogical approaches that unpacked processes for children while allowing them to engage in the work, coupled with the artifacts she created to document topics addressed in mini-lessons made mini-lessons a rich context for

supporting developing writers. The mini-lessons not only served the purpose of providing children with techniques and strategies to enhance their writing, but also a fertile ground for helping children acquire a common language for describing and talking about writing.

As described above, the focus of Ms. Hanson's conferences were often times linked to what had been covered in mini-lessons, either that day or at some point in the school year. She believed that one useful way of thinking about the relationship between a mini-lesson and conferences was "*give kids a model during mini-lessons and then talk about it in conferences.*" This gave her an opportunity to guide the individual children's use of mini-lesson topics in their own writing when appropriate. Children also seemed to recognize this link. When her student, Erica, described why she was excited to have a conference with Ms. Hanson, she said:

> *I like it because it's not in a mini-lesson usually because you can't be having all those questions all those times, and she gets to read your writing, and usually it's always in a conference.* (Erica, learning conversation, June 1, 2011)

Erica appreciated the individual guidance and feedback she received from her teacher during one-on-one conferences, yet saw how the participation structure differed from that of a mini-lesson. Thorough mini-lessons enable children to function independently. In the case of Ms. Hanson's teaching, they also provided a foundation from which conference topics were developed.

How does the teacher differentiate instruction as a function of the children's profiles as writers?

In exploring the relationship between the number of conferences children of different writing profiles received, the frequency counts of conference per child per unit revealed very little. This can be attributed to the small sample size for each unit. Overall, children participated in one or two conferences each unit. However, Ms. Hanson did conduct more conferences with the two ELLs in her class, Martin and Pablo. Recall that Ms. Hanson also used other structures such

as table conferences and conversations under one minute to support children's learning.

Ms. Hanson differentiated instruction based on writing profiles in other ways, most notably her approach to working with children who were in need of supplemental language support – both ELLs and native English speakers. Early in the study, she emphasized the strong link between language development and writing. She said, "Writing is thinking on paper.[13]" Ms. Hanson recognized that in order to write, children must be able to develop and access clear internal thoughts. The lack of well-developed syntactical structures and vocabulary can impede one's ability to transfer thinking to print. The following section describes how Ms. Hanson supported children's language development and illustrates her commitment and approaches to enhancing the learning of the two ELLs in her class, Martin and Pablo.

Supporting Language Development

Ms. Hanson consistently assisted children in identifying the best way to convey what they were thinking to others. In many cases, this occurred as she supported them in acquiring more targeted vocabulary for their topics while emphasizing how this would impact the clarity of their writing. For example, in a conference with Josie about how to put your hair in pigtails, Josie wrote about wrapping the ponytail around the hair. Ms. Hanson asked her to explain her thinking, and then explained to her that a more accurate word to describe what she was referring to was "pony tail holder" or "rubber band." Josie's learning conversation (May 5, 2011) revealed that she understood the role that using words with precision played in conveying her thinking to an audience.

Researcher: What did the two of you talk about?

Josie: Um we talked about how we can um how I can make my story a lot better by talking about tiny eetsy weetsy details,

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[13] Although I did not discuss this with Ms. Hanson during the interview, this quote is from William Zinsser, author of *On Writing Well* (1976).

like pony tails, like that was a no-name for it, so Ms. Hanson was like pony tail holders, so I wrote that down.

Researcher: So why is that important?

Josie: To make the reader understand it better a lot more.

While this example speaks to the more deliberate use of vocabulary in relation to meaning, Ms. Hanson also supported children who needed assistance in accessing the language to help them write their how-to texts and stories. The following excerpt represents a conference Ms. Hanson facilitated with Beatrice, a child Ms. Hanson had identified as a struggling writer who has difficulty accessing vocabulary and language structures to facilitate writing. This conference demonstrates how Ms. Hanson integrated her knowledge about Beatrice's strengths of learning through movement to help her develop the vocabulary and language structures necessary to draft her how-to book.

Prior to the conference, Beatrice mentioned to Ms. Hanson that she was going to write a how-to book about dancing. The conference begins as Ms. Hanson sits down and begins to discuss how Beatrice will start her text. They discuss how the things one would need to learn how to dance differ from the items children have listed in other how-to books. Ms. Hanson and Beatrice co-construct a list of things you'll need to learn to dance. These include: space and music. The excerpt below begins as Ms. Hanson helps Beatrice think about how she will explain what to do when you dance.

Ms. Hanson: Show me, and then we'll talk about the words you might use. (Ms. Hanson and Beatrice walk to the reading rug.)

Beatrice: (Begins to moonwalk backwards.) Like, when sometimes you go back and forth

Ms. Hanson: You back up, okay? What else do you do?

Beatrice: (Slides to the side.) Sliding.

Ms. Hanson: Sliding is a good word.

Ms. Hanson: What else?

Beatrice: And (Does the "grapevine.")

Ms. Hanson: Okay, how could we, what could we say that is when you do this?

Beatrice: Cross-step

Ms. Hanson: Cross-step, okay, all right.

Ms. Hanson: Do you ever do anything like this when you dance? (Kicks her legs.) What do you call that?

Beatrice: Um, kick.

Ms. Hanson: Yeah, so now you have a lot of words you can use in your writing. Let's go back and we'll write them. (Beatrice and Ms. Hanson transition back to Beatrice's desk.)

Ms. Hanson: (Writing down each word as she says it.) Okay, so I heard you say, slide, kick, back and forth, and cross-step was the other thing you said, right?

Beatrice: Mhm.

Ms. Hanson: So there's a list of words you could use to get started on your next step.

By allowing Beatrice to physically act out various dance moves and posing questions about what each move was called, Ms. Hanson supported her in accessing the vocabulary necessary for writing a text about how to dance. In a learning conversation following the conference, Beatrice confirmed this in her explanation of what she had learned. She said, "Ms. Hanson helped me think about the steps – what footwork I should do." (Beatrice, learning conversation, April 26, 2011) Without this interaction, it is unlikely that Beatrice would have had the language to adequately describe the footwork. In an interview following that day's writing workshop, Ms. Hanson reflected on the use of movement and her approach to supporting Beatrice.

Researcher: There were two students you had physically act something out. What was your thinking about that?

Ms. Hanson: I was trying to have them show what they were trying to

write first as a pre-writing or during writing strategy because for some kids, that kinesthetic element, like [Beatrice] really needs to move, she goes back and forth to the water fountain. She's dancing in her seat. She needs to move. But for some kids, that's a way to get to where they need to go, to get into what they're thinking, and help them get some language around that. Also, it helps them to be more clear. For some, it'll spark them to think they should be including something or add something.

Ms. Hanson's conference with Beatrice did not end after she helped her identify a list of words to help her describe the dance moves. Instead, Ms. Hanson continued by supporting Beatrice in thinking about how to use that vocabulary to develop text. Ms. Hanson and Beatrice's conference continued:

Ms. Hanson: (Pointing to the list of dance words.) Now, do these make sense the way they are?

Beatrice: Mhm (Nods).

Ms. Hanson: Do they? When I say slide, kick, back and forth, and cross step? Does that sound like a direction?

Beatrice: Mhm.

Ms. Hanson: Well, really it's just a list of words, so you're going to have to take that word and use it in a sentence that somebody could read and understand.

Beatrice: Can I like say, um, slide and kick and (Interrupted by other student, Elle.)

Ms. Hanson: What's that, [Elle]?

Elle: I think she should like, first you slide, and then you go back and forth or cross step.

Ms. Hanson: Okay, so [Elle], do you think you could talk to her quietly if she gets stuck and help her come up with some sentences?

Elle: Uhuh. (Returns to writing.)

Ms. Hanson: All right, so you're going to use one of these words in your first sentence to tell about how you get started with dancing. What do you think you might say in your next step?

Ms. Hanson: What do you want that first sentence to say, Beatrice?

Beatrice: Slide.

Ms. Hanson: Okay. So, you would say. Next, slide?

Beatrice: And (pauses)

Ms. Hanson: So slide what? What are you sliding?

Beatrice: Slide your legs back and forth

Ms. Hanson: Slide your legs back and forth, okay you could say that. And think about, what's the next thing you want to do.
(Teacher answers telephone. Beatrice continues writing.)

Ms. Hanson: (Returns to Beatrice.) All right [Beatrice], when I come back to you I'm going to check to see if you have more details about how the person slides.

In this part of the conference, Ms. Hanson taught Beatrice about the sentence structure required when giving directions and then facilitated Beatrice's formation of a sentence to describe the second step of her instructions to support others in learning to dance. She helped Beatrice build upon the vocabulary they had previously identified to form complete, descriptive thoughts. Ms. Hanson's understanding of the relationship between language and writing were evident in her plight to assist Beatrice in developing the syntactical structure to transfer her thinking to writing.

Support for ELLs

This case would not be complete without a description of how Ms. Hanson supported the two ELLs in her classroom, Pablo and Martin. In formal teaching and interactions, she consistently remained in tune with each of the learners' challenges and strengths both relating to and not relating to their developing capacities as users of the English language. Video data[14], interviews, and field

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[14] Audio from video of conferences with Pablo and Martin was for the most part muffled and difficult to understand. Field notes from the mini-lessons and conferences were referred to in

notes highlighted Ms. Hanson's commitment to supporting English language learners and suggested that the nature of the conferences differed slightly from that of those she facilitated with native English speakers. She said:

> *I feel like the mini-lesson goes by them at the speed of sound. They're really not getting much out of it, so I really try to check in with them pretty quickly after the writing time starts, even if it's to glance at their work and see if they're on the right track.* (Ms. Hanson, interview, May 25, 2011)

Ms. Hanson recognized that pace of the mini-lesson could potentially overwhelm Pablo and Martin. She saw it as her responsibility to informally assess their comprehension of mini-lesson content and further facilitate their understanding by re-teaching with appropriate modifications if they did not grasp what had been covered. Often times, this occurred during individual conferences. The way in which she did this differed between children and built upon their strengths and comforts as learners.

Field notes from mini-lessons revealed that Pablo frequently initiated sharing his thinking with the class. When Ms. Hanson posed questions, he attempted to answer them. As the class discussed the use of particular strategies and techniques or provided feedback about their peers' writing or Ms. Hanson's writing during mini-lessons, he was always eager to share his thinking. Ms. Hanson was accurate in her assessment that the mini-lessons were sometimes inaccessible to Pablo. His contributions were sometimes completely unrelated to the discussion or question at hand. Still, she recognized the power of Pablo's contributions and used them as an opportunity to gauge his understanding in order to inform subsequent teaching. In cases where it was evident that Pablo did not understand what had been taught, Ms. Hanson typically either asked him to stay on the rug or return to the rug for a re-teaching conference, during which she would quickly reteach the mini-lesson, focusing on using accessible language, imbedding definitions and explanations for words she suspected Pablo did not comprehend, and referring to the chart paper documenting the content of

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viewing and analyzing the video, but because of the inadequate audio, transcripts are not available.

the mini-lesson. She would then guide Pablo to apply the lesson to his own text. Observations indicated that Pablo was the only student Ms. Hanson conferred with at the easel. When asked about this during an interview, she commented, "Pablo, he's more of a visual learner, so if I can take him back over to the chart to reteach, that seems to really work for him." (Ms. Hanson, interview, May 25, 2011)

Ms. Hanson recognized that this approach to re-teaching was not the appropriate method for both Pablo and Martin. While they both were children who needed supplemental support to enhance their understanding and learning, she honored who they were as learners in her decisions about how to support each boy. Field notes indicated the Ms. Hanson often listened in as Martin and his partner attempted to practice what they had been taught during the mini-lesson. In this interaction, she provided further explanations to give Martin access to the content and redirected his thinking when necessary. When explaining why her approach to working with the two boys differed, she said:

> *Martin is a little bit more reluctant when it comes to that. He sort of hmmmmms and haaaas and looks at me because he feels like it makes him different. I try to do it with him on the spot with relevance to the work.* (Ms. Hanson, interview, May 25, 2011)

On occasion, Ms. Hanson would immediately confer with Martin following the mini-lesson although he was not on her list of conferences for the day. In informal conversation, she explained that this was because she overheard an indication of misunderstanding or poor comprehension as he practiced with his partner on the rug.

Ms. Hanson also recognized that while necessary to maintain high expectations for the boys, she had to adjust those to account for their language development. She said:

> *I'm not looking to them to do much of the craft from the mini-lessons, I'm looking to help them do the basics. Do they have the basic concepts, can they produce something that approximates what kids are producing in the genre?* (Ms. Hanson, interview, May 25, 2011)

To accomplish this, Ms. Hanson had to listen and watch Pablo and Martin closely in order to understand what they were finding difficult. For example, she noticed that both boys had difficulty understanding the idea and purpose of a how-to text. In a conference with Pablo, Ms. Hanson asked him to read the text he had drafted. As Pablo started to read, it became apparent that he had written a story about the time he fed the birds as opposed to instructions to teach someone else how to feed birds. Accordingly, the conference became focused on the difference between a stories the children had been writing all year (e.g. realistic fiction and personal narrative) and how-to texts. Ms. Hanson honored and identified what Pablo had attempted to do, and then proceeded by explaining the main features of the two genres that differed.

In Ms. Hanson's conference about the same issue of genre with Martin, she shared how-to mentor texts they had read as a class and reviewed them with him. She stressed how each text taught someone how to do something and included directions that did the teaching. The following excerpt from a learning conversation with Martin (April 18, 2011) that occurred at the end of writing workshop that day demonstrates his developing understanding of the how-to genre:

Researcher: What did she teach you?

Martin: He (*sic*) teach me how to make things like it. So he (*sic)* showed me the directions, and I know how to make it now.

Researcher: How does that help you as a writer?

Martin: Make it my own.

When coupled with the observation that Martin produced a how-to text that gave sequential instructions for Martin's text, *How to Make a Chicken Sandwich*, this learning conversation can be interpreted that he understood the purpose and organization of a how-to text from his conference with Ms. Hanson. Figure 5.6 represents the first page of Martin's how-to text, *How to Make a Chicken Sandwich.*

Figure 5.6. Page 1 of Martin's how-to text: *How to Make a Chicken Sandwich*
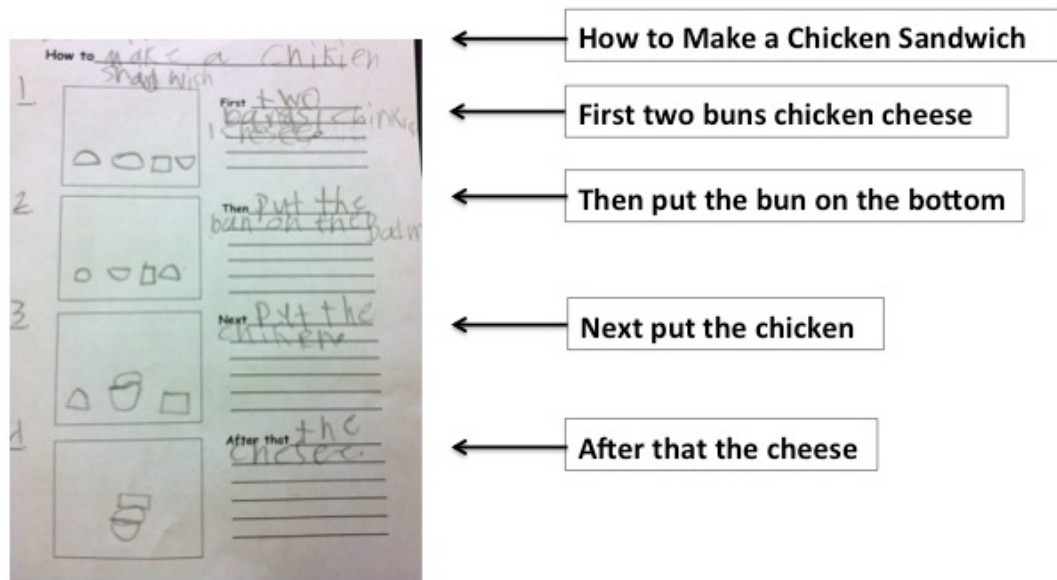
Both the pictures and text indicate that Martin understands that the purpose of a how-to text is to teach someone the procedure for accomplishing a particular task in sequence. The pictures and text demonstrate the transition from separate ingredients of a sandwich represented in step one (i.e. the top and bottom of a bun, a piece of cheese, and a chicken breast) to a stacked sandwich represented in step four.

Further analyses of video and field notes also suggest that Ms. Hanson supported their language development using techniques similar to those she enacted in her conference with Beatrice in the previous section of this chapter. She frequently helped Martin and Pablo access or learn the vocabulary necessary for their topics and also guided them in thinking about how to convey what they want to say as writers. She would ask questions such as, "So how would you say that?" or "How would you start that sentence?" Additionally, she provided the boys language frames to begin their sentences. For example, when starting their how-to texts, she suggested begin with the phrase, "First, you need…" After saying the phrase aloud, she would have the child repeat it and continue talking. This often supported Martin and Pablo in orally rehearsing their thinking before writing it down. The techniques illustrated by the above

interactions raise questions about the extent to which Ms. Hanson's training as a special educator might have influenced not only the way in which she supported children, but the topics on which she chose to focus.

Ms. Hanson's commitment to supplementing and modifying instruction for English language learners not only gave boys access to the actual content of second grade, but it also supported their development and confidence as users of English. In a tangential conversation after a day's learning conversation, Pablo said:

> *I'm not going to give up never. I'm never going to give up. I'm going to write a lot of stories. I finish one. I do another and another and another and another. I never never give up. I published a story and I writed [sic] eight poems. I'm never going to give up. Never.* (Pablo, learning conversation, May 11, 2011)

In spite of the extra effort required of him to produce coherent texts, Ms. Hanson had inspired Pablo and given him the confidence to think of himself as a capable writer.

Conclusion

The findings from the case described above illuminate the role of deliberate, precise use of language and the identification and implementation of clear instructional foci when teaching. They demonstrate the need for explicit instruction attending to the processes, techniques, and strategies writers employ. Most importantly, the findings bring to light the influence of events that preceded individual conferences. The mini-lessons Ms. Hanson conducted maintained a consistent structure, provided explicit instructional explanations, and utilized instructional methods that enabled children to not only see and hear how writers engaged in specific practices to improve the quality of their texts, but also practice these approaches before attempting to draw upon them in their independent work. The mini-lessons seemed to provide a foundational understanding for children that influenced conference interactions. While mini-lessons were not the focus of the study, the relationship between the explicit, targeted teaching that occurred during that segment of the writing workshop and

conferences was evident in children's appropriation of language from mini-lessons to describe Ms. Hanson's teaching focus for individual conferences.

As suggested in Chapter 4, the case of Ms. Hanson provided a contrasting view of trends noted in Ms. Spencer's corpus of conferences. Notably, the instruction Ms. Hanson enacted during conferences illustrated three trends: (1) the content focus of conferences and description of essential content for second grade writers to learn were typically decomposed and described in a thorough, specific manner; (2) processes to support writers to develop transferable skill and techniques were linked with a focus on improving the quality of individual texts; and (3) instructional methods that unpacked the writing process and provided children with a clear, consistent language for describing the processes of writers were utilized during both mini-lessons and conferences. These trends influence the children's perceptions of what was taught and learned during their conferences. A more thorough cross-case analysis will be presented in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6
CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

In Chapter 6, I present the cross-case analysis of Ms. Hanson's and Ms. Spencer's teaching. While case-study research provides the opportunity to engage in deep analysis at a fine-grained level, what ideally culminates from such fine-grained analytical work are important themes that rise above individual cases. In this spirit, this chapter attempts to utilize the intimate knowledge of each teacher's instruction to highlight a bigger set of issues that can be gleaned from the overall study. I organize the chapter according to four larger themes that have been extracted from the case-study analysis. These include: the influence of curriculum and materials, influences of participation structures, challenges of establishing a shared problem space, and enactment of instruction. The chapter concludes with a discussion regarding how these themes are interrelated.

Influence of Curriculum and Materials

In any classroom context, teachers are given access to resources and materials such as curricula, curriculum materials, benchmarks and standards. These resources and materials can vary greatly in their alignment with one another and in the amount of support they provide teachers. While teachers exercise professional judgment in their enactment of curriculum and use of curricular materials, they serve as factors that influence classroom teaching and learning. This section explores the influence of curriculum and materials on writing conferences across cases. I begin by revisiting the curriculum and materials that informed each teacher's instruction. Then, I explore the ways in which two commercially available writing materials that teachers drew from during the study (i.e., *6+1 Traits* and Calkins' *Units of Study*) support and interfere with conferences. Next, I discuss the influence of the Grade Level

Contents Expectations (GLCEs) on conferences, and finally I describe a unique support that Ms. Spencer used to enhance her own understanding of genre, the use of mentor texts.

Throughout the investigation, Ms. Hanson and Ms. Spencer identified very different curricular supports. In interviews, Ms. Hanson indicated that she heavily relied upon *The Units of Study* to guide her teaching. Although her school district provided a pacing calendar, there was no formal writing curriculum issued at the district level. The pacing calendar included supplemental units designed by teachers in the district and did not follow the scope and sequence outlined by the books in *The Units of Study*. Still, when questioned, administrators and teachers made comments such as "Our curriculum is Calkins," not recognizing that *The Units of Study* are curricular materials and not curriculum. In this era of accountability, Ms. Hanson also attempted to align writing instruction with district benchmark and the state GLCEs.

Although she taught in a school district twenty miles away from Ms. Hanson's district, Ms. Spencer had a different experience with curriculum and curricular materials in her district. In interviews, she identified *6+1 Traits* as the district writing curriculum and shared sparse district-authored curricular guides that outlined outcomes for children by grade level. Much like Ms. Hanson, Ms. Spencer was also concerned with attending to the state GLCEs in her writing instruction. Ms. Spencer recognized that the limited instructional support provided to her through district resources (e.g. curriculum, GLCEs) and claimed to rely heavily on professional texts to support her teaching. She identified the work of Ralph Fletcher, Regie Routman and an article published by the Michigan Reading Association as particularly influential on her teaching. She referred to these professional texts to help her identify a scope and sequence for teaching and to understand targeted genres in an attempt to address the absence of a thorough district writing curriculum and supportive instructional materials. In an effort to enhance her own understanding of the news article genre, Ms. Spencer also relied upon mentor texts to support her genre knowledge and interactions with children in conferences.

Ms. Spencer's Use of *6+1 Traits*

Analyses revealed that the *6+1 Traits* materials both supported and interfered with writing conferences conducted by Ms. Spencer. Again, although teachers and administrators often refer to *6+1 Traits* as curriculum or instructional materials[15], the program is intended to support teachers to assess children's writing based on the seven traits identified in the program; further, it provides ways of talking about these specific traits with students. While suggestive of a curriculum, it does not provide one.

Field notes from mini-lessons and conferences suggested that Ms. Spencer consistently used the seven traits to describe writing. In her mini-lessons and conferences, she frequently referred to a cabinet in the back of her room that listed each of the traits and made comments such as, "That's great word choice" or "This is part of the organization of the text. In conferences, Ms. Spencer also used the language of the traits to highlight what children were doing well in their writing. More than any other trait, she consistently drew children's attention to "strong word choice." The *6+1 Traits* materials likely supported Ms. Spencer in acquiring and utilizing a common language to describe writing at a global level. This common "trait" language was appropriated by the children and gave children access to a language for discussing their writing and the writing of others. However, the use of *6+1 Traits* did not appear to foster a more nuanced way of describing writing on the part of Ms. Spencer. While her language use was consistent, it was often colored by expressions, such as "dip into character" or spoke in generalities: "your writing has such voice," the meaning of which may elude children.

Analyses also suggested that *6+1 Traits* provided Ms. Spencer with a foundational understanding and propensity for *assessing* children's writing, but stopped short of supporting instruction. Recall from Chapter 4 that her conferences often served as an opportunity for her to evaluate children's writing

and provided little in the way of giving children mechanisms or tools for improving their writing.

Another possible way in which the use of 6+1 Traits and Ms. Spencer's commitment to using them to support her instruction was through the use of a grade-level rubric designed to evaluate children's writing according to the traits. While Ms. Spencer did not use this rubric in the course of the units investigated in the study, she did refer to the ways in which she and her teammates used it to score benchmark writing samples. Although the rubric was designed to assess children's writing of personal narrative stories, Ms. Spencer frequently adopted explanations from the rubric of each of the traits as she taught children during the news article unit. This influenced the ways in which she supported children in conferences. One telling example of this issue arose during the news article unit. Committed to "teaching the traits" during this unit, Ms. Spencer had children fill in a graphic organizer to identify sensory details to be used in their news articles. Many children struggled to accomplish this task, and she focused a number of conferences around helping children see how the incorporation of all five senses would make their news articles more descriptive, regardless of the topics they had selected.

Ms. Hanson's Use of *The Units of Study*

Analyses of Ms. Hanson's teaching highlighted her precise use of language, ability to identify a single focus in conferences, and deliberate intent to teach children strategies or techniques to support them to independently function as writers. While these features of her instruction can also be attributed to other factors, such as her background as a special education teacher, her use of *The Units of Study* likely influenced the way in which conferences unfolded in her classroom.

There are a number of ways in which *The Units of Study* supported conferences. First, unlike the *6+1 Traits* materials, *The Units of Study* are designed to be used in the writing workshop context. The workshop context that Ms. Hanson created was quite similar to the context espoused by the materials.

As a result, it was less challenging to incorporate supporting features of *The Units of Study* into her daily instruction. Second, *The Units of Study* provided a scope and sequence for how daily writing instruction unfolds. Although Ms. Hanson did not implement each session (i.e. lesson) from each unit as outlined by the instructional materials, she did have a vision for what her students should be able to accomplish over the course of the unit and how the stages of the writing process should be addressed over time. Third, *The Units of Study* provide teachers with very clear, concise language for describing the work of writers, including, but not limited to, the techniques, strategies and processes writers use to accomplish specific goals. As described in Chapter 5, this was a dominant feature of Ms. Hanson's instruction. In addition to providing actual language for teaching that shows - as opposed to describes - how lessons unfold, *The Units of Study* also include examples of children's writing, as well as mentor texts, to help teachers understand the genre they are teaching. Ms. Hanson felt confident about her level of understanding of each of the genres she taught during the investigation. This was evident in the explanations she provided that overviewed each genre, as well as the chosen points of focus during conferences. Finally, Ms. Hanson was supported by *The Units of Stu*dy in their mere structure. (See Appendix F for a copy of a daily session from *The Units of Study* unit Ms. Hanson used to guide her teaching of how-to texts.) They contain an abundance of information including lesson overviews of each part of the writing workshop, sample instructional charts, marginal "words of wisdom," samples of children's writing, suggestions for providing children additional support, and advice specific to assessing writing to address the multiple instructional supports that teachers, who are using a workshop approach to writing instruction, might need. There are even suggestions for possible conference topics and links to separate text within *The Units of Study* materials that outlines specific ideas for conferences. These suggestions are intended to work in concert with the mini-lesson provided in the session and the work the teacher has been doing with children up until that point in time. For example, in the session represented in Appendix F – *Checking for Clarity* – makes suggestions for conferences to support children to generate

ideas for how-to texts, envision steps as partners read texts aloud in order to provide feedback, and apply strategies to address issues in their texts that surfaced while sharing them with partners.

While *The Units of Study* likely provided a helpful amount of support to Ms. Hanson, we must also consider the ways in which these curricular materials might have interfered with conferences. As previously mentioned, *The Units of Study* present one particular approach to writing workshop. Ms. Hanson had been conducting writing workshop in her classroom long before the district adopted *The Units of Study*. As a result, the explicit nature and targeted foci outlined in *The* Units of Study might have forced her to abandon effective instructional methods or approaches she used in conferences before the materials were adopted. Further, each session in *The Units of Study* is packed with information. For instruction to truly be affected by them, the teacher must devote a great deal of time and energy to identifying what information in each of the sessions is relevant to her individual growth as a teacher and the growth and development of her students. Regardless of these possible challenges, when asked about using *The Units of Study*, Ms. Hanson responded positively saying, "Love them!"

There are many factors contributing to the ways in which Ms. Hanson and Ms. Spencer enacted writing conferences, but the materials described above likely influenced the features of conferences investigated in this study. Although this study did not directly investigate the role of materials in conferences, the specificity of the materials and curriculum provided to Ms. Hanson likely enabled her to feel more free to make instructional decisions based on her knowledge of the scope and sequence of each writing unit. On the other hand, the dominant features of Ms. Spencer's conferences were likely influenced by the fact that she essentially had no writing curriculum or targeted instructional materials to support her in planning and enacting writing instruction. As a resourceful and committed teacher, she searched for materials to support her and attempted to adopt lessons and language from various sources, but these did not always appear to cohere in her instruction.

The GLCEs

Analyses indicated that both teachers' conferences and writing instruction writ large were influenced by the GLCEs. Ms. Hanson and Ms. Spencer both strived to figure out how the GLCEs fit within their respective district writing curricula and aligned with curricular materials provided by their districts. They each referenced how they considered the GLCEs as they exercised professional judgment about what to address in the teaching of writing. In many ways, the incorporation of the GLCEs appeared to be one additional piece of the puzzle that the teachers attempted to align with children's individual needs.

Both teachers felt pressured to address the GLCEs in their writing instruction. Ms. Spencer stressed that it was her responsibility as a professional – "what [she] was hired to cover regardless of if [she] agree[d] with them." Yet the teachers used the GLCES in distinct ways. Ms. Hanson referred to the GLCEs, in addition to district report card standards, to modify and enhance the topics addressed in *The Units of Study* in order to make the materials more grade level appropriate. In contrast, Ms. Spencer used the GLCES to supplement her understanding of the underdeveloped district curriculum. As described in Chapter 4, Ms. Spencer expressed frustration about her limited understanding and the limited support provided by the district in describing the news article genre. During the study, she presented four "types" of news articles to children. These included *compare/contrast*, *descriptive*, *enumerative*, and *sequential* news articles. When asked in an interview where she learned about these types, she explained that they were from the GLCEs. In fact, these are the categories of informational texts - not news articles – that are identified in the GLCEs. Still, Ms. Spencer adopted these types in her instruction throughout the news article unit. She attempted to use them to make sense of the unfamiliar genre and provide structure to her teaching.

Analyses also illuminated a tension between honoring what children brought to conferences and teachers' feeling the need to teach "to" something or cover topics from the GLCEs and benchmarks. Teachers make split second

decisions in the course of a conference to decide the direction it should go. While early pioneers of the workshop approach emphasized the importance of letting the writer guide the conference (Lensmire, 1993), the mere fact that teachers are accountable for addressing the GLCEs likely influenced the extent to which teachers could "follow the child" (Graves, 1983). Although the highly personal nature of writing – especially when addressing creative writing and story writing – makes this tension particularly important to call attention to, it is not a new conversation in the world of educators. Over one hundred years ago, Dewey (1902) challenged us to consider the same tension:

> "Abandon the notion of subject-matter as something fixed and ready-made in itself, outside the child's experience; cease thinking of the child's experience as also something hard and fast; see it as something fluent, embryonic, vital; and we realize that the child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a single process" (p. 16)

Ms. Spencer's Use of Mentor Texts

One unique feature of Ms. Spencer's conferences during the news article unit was the use of mentor texts as a tool for teaching. As described above, interviews revealed that Ms. Spencer felt that the curriculum and resources provided by her school district did not sufficiently support her understanding or teaching of this sub-genre.[16] While Ms. Hanson only used mentor texts on rare instances during conferences, Ms. Spencer frequently turned to such texts while in conversation with children during conferences. She used these texts to discuss what both she and the child were noticing and to suggest that the child might apply similar techniques or structures to his or her own writing. Although the mentor texts Ms. Spencer referred to often fell within the genre of informational text - but outside of the news article genre - these proved to be a helpful way of identifying features of the sub-genre (e.g. captions, headlines, photographs). Ms.

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[16] In many cases, it seemed as if Ms. Spencer was asking me as the researcher to provide some insight as to what qualified as a news article. In each of these instances, I responded with questions that asked about resources she was using to supplement her understanding or inquired about how other teachers were defining the genre.

Spencer appeared to turn to mentor texts as models to supplement her own understanding in the same way that she had encouraged children to use them to build their own understanding of particular writing genres.

Influences of Participation Structures

The design of the writing workshop requires teachers to organize their instruction using multiple participation structures in the course of a single workshop (e.g. whole group, partners, one-on-one teacher/student interactions, individuals). While this design feature can be considered a feature of the curriculum, it is so prominent that it needs to be treated separately from the earlier discussion of curriculum and resources. This section addresses the influences of the structure of the writing workshop (e.g. mini-lesson, independent writing with conferences, sharing time) as a whole and then proceeds to explore the ways in which individual parts of the workshop structure influenced writing instruction.

The Structure of Writing Workshop

Although writing workshop unfolded differently in each of the cases, both teachers referenced the widely recognized structure of the workshop. In interviews, Ms. Hanson and Ms. Spencer referred to the role of each of the parts. They shared the understanding that each writing workshop began with a whole group mini-lesson where children gathered on the rug to learn about a particular topic, technique, or strategy for writing. After the mini-lesson, children transitioned to their desks for independent writing and one-on-one teacher/student conferences aimed at providing differentiated instruction for children. The workshop concluded with a share time intended to regroup the children to reflect on or foreshadow important topics from the day's work or future work. Even though Ms. Hanson recognized all three parts of the structure, she did not close her workshop with a share time; she instead signaled the end of the workshop while children were still at their seats. Beyond telling children that writing time was over, she did not use this transitional moment to construct

meaning around what children had accomplished during the workshop. In contrast, Ms. Spencer used share time as an opportunity to highlight successes children had as writers or to provide children with focused opportunities to provide feedback to partners about specific elements (e.g. how adequately they described their characters) of their writing or the seven traits.

The overall structure of writing workshop and the participation structures involved in the workshop benefit teachers and children in a number of ways. This predictable structure enables children to know what to expect and what is expected of them as learners and community members during this daily instructional block. In each of the cases, children understood explicit and implicit norms about teacher-student interactions during each of the parts. For example, children understood that they needed to raise their hands to share ideas or ask questions during mini-lessons, and that during this part of the lesson the teacher was the main speaker. Children in both cases also understood that conferences were a time in which teaching occurred during a transactional conversation between the child and teacher. Analyses of video and interviews suggest that children recognized that conferences were their opportunity to get feedback or advice specific to their piece of writing or writing process. Further, children who were not engaged in conferences during independent writing knew that they were not to interrupt the teacher during these intimate interactions. In both classrooms, teachers frequently revisited ways of requesting assistance without interrupting the conference in progress. These structures and shared understanding of norms allowed for independent, self-paced work and exploration.

The teachers also benefitted from the workshop structure. Along with the structure came a built-in model of a release of responsibility between the teacher and learner. In the mini-lesson, the teachers maintained the majority of the responsibility as they modeled, explained, and represented the processes, strategies and techniques of writers. In the case of Ms. Hanson, she shared this responsibility with students toward the end of each mini-lesson when she provided children with an opportunity to practice applying what had been addressed during the mini-lesson with partners as she listened in and guided

students as needed. Conferences provided an opportunity for teachers to share responsibility with children, albeit to different extents for each teacher. Nevertheless, both teachers' understanding that conferences were a requirement of writing workshop allowed for built-in opportunities to differentiate instruction based on the needs of the writer or the specific text he or she was composing. The structure of conferring appeared to make differentiation an instructional norm in both classrooms. Finally, children took full responsibility for applying what they had been taught in mini-lessons to their own writing during independent writing. However, teachers' expectations regarding what children applied to their writing differed across cases. Interviews and field notes indicated that Ms. Spencer expected children to apply what was taught during daily mini-lessons in the work that followed during independent writing. In many cases, she concluded mini-lessons by reminding children what their "job" for the day was based on what she had covered during the mini-lesson. In contrast, Ms. Hanson believed that children would apply mini-lessons as they fit their needs as writers.

Mini-Lessons

As referenced above, Ms. Hanson and Ms. Spencer both established a connection between the mini-lesson and individual conferences. Cross-case analysis revealed that, although both teachers strived to connect mini-lessons and conferences, their approaches varied. Video analyses indicated that Ms. Spencer often used conferences as a time in which she could evaluate student work to see if they had applied what was taught during the mini-lesson. She frequently began conferences by saying, "Show me where you've [insert mini-lesson topic] in your writing" and then evaluated the extent to which the child did so in his or her draft. This action aligns with Ms. Spencer's belief about the mini-lesson setting the stage for the work or task that her students needed to accomplish during independent writing.

While Ms. Hanson believed that conferences and mini-lessons were linked, evidence from interviews and video demonstrated how she saw this relationship differently from Ms. Spencer. Ms. Hanson saw conferences as a time

to help children apply mini-lessons from across the year when the child seemed ready and the mini-lesson topic seemed to appropriately fit his or her goals as a writer and the text at hand. She also used conferences to further clarify children's understanding or misunderstanding about the current mini-lesson.

This raises the question about the role of the mini-lesson. Recall that one of the reasons I first engaged in this study was because of the overwhelming requests from teachers and administrators to support teachers in facilitating conferences that could play a more prominent role in improving children's writing. Yet, this study demonstrates how teachers' attempts to link mini-lessons and conferences in their daily instruction suggest that mini-lessons might perhaps be a form of instruction that is just as powerful, if not more powerful, than conferences. Calkins (1986) suggests that "conferences are at the heart of our teaching," (p. 189), but it is quite possible there is a more appropriate metaphor for describing the work of conferences and their relationship to mini-lessons. Could it be that *mini-lessons* are the actual heart of the writing workshop – creating a steady stream of techniques, strategies and processes to support the work of budding writers? In this metaphor, conferences assume the role of arteries and veins– transporting the stream of techniques, strategies, and processes into children's developing writing practice and function. Conferences become the conduit through which the sensemaking a teacher has done about children's individual needs during the conference flows back to inform subsequent mini-lessons.

Independent Writing with Conferences

Both teachers defined their role during independent writing as conducting individual conferences with children. Moreover, field notes revealed that both Ms. Hanson and Ms. Spencer took liberties in adjusting the individual participation structure of the traditional teacher-student. In addition to individual writing conferences as defined in this study, Ms. Hanson utilized quick check-ins with students and table conferences focusing mainly on getting started or checking progress. Ms. Spencer also use quick check-ins with students, in addition to

"partner conferences" where she conferred with children who were working together to evaluate and provide suggestions for revisions to one another's drafts. In both cases, these alternative structures still resembled conferences in many ways.

Data also suggested that both teachers faced many challenges as they used conferences to meet the individual needs of children. In both cases, teachers communicated concern addressing the following issues: (1) How do I meet the needs of all children?; (2) How do I make decisions about with whom to confer?; (3) How do I see "enough" children each day? Each week? Each unit?; and (4) How do I decide what topics I'm going to address? While Ms. Hanson and Ms. Spencer attempted to address these challenges in unique ways, the overlap of challenges and ways in which they support and impede instruction speak to the complexity of using conferences as a main structure for differentiating instruction during the independent writing block.

Findings from video analysis and field notes also revealed that Ms. Hanson and Ms. Spencer frequently conducted conferences with the same instructional focus with multiple students on the same day. For example, during the realistic fiction unit, five out of six conferences Ms. Spencer conducted during one independent writing block were focused on helping children use the writing technique of "show don't tell" to adequately describe their characters. The same trend of conducting conferences that addressed common instructional foci held true in Ms. Hanson's instruction across units as well. The teachers' talk during the conferences reflected the specifics of individual children's writing; however, the instructional foci and instructional methods of these conferences were often more similar than different across children. This observation makes one wonder if bringing children together in small groups to focus on specific aspects of writing might be a more efficient and powerful way to support individual needs of writers. Yet, there is an expectation that teachers must conduct individual conferences during independent writing. These data raise an important question as to whether writing conferences really are the most powerful and productive context to teach children to write. It is possible that the mere expectation of the use of

conferences during independent writing limits teachers' ability to create alternative structures that accomplish the same goals as conferences. Both teachers stressed the importance of using conferences to give personal feedback to children and connect with them about their writing process and current writing product. There might be other alternatives to providing targeted instruction that is personal in nature that teachers could conceive if they felt more freedom to deviate from the traditional one-on-one conference structure; these alternative structures might help rectify some of the challenges the teachers expressed as they navigated the complex practice of conferring with children. For example, teachers could conduct flexible, small-group writing instruction to address common needs of writers. Such a structure would still allow for direct application and conversation tailored to individual pieces of writing, but would allow for targeted teaching. Further, small-group writing instruction would free up time for teachers to connect with more children during the course of an independent writing block.

Challenge of Establishing a Shared Problem Space

One of the challenges of facilitating an ideal conference is the challenge of attaining a shared understanding between the teacher and child. For intersubjectivity to evolve from the interaction, the teacher and child need to be working in a shared problem space. This study provided many examples of the challenges of establishing this common problem space. There were times when the child was at a different point in producing the draft from where the teacher wanted to focus or lead him. This was especially prevalent in the case of Ms. Spencer when she conferred with children about planning or revision while they were still focused on drafting. There were also moments in which a child had a particular idea about how his writing would unfold (e.g. what information to include or omit while describing a character), and the teacher planted ideas that were not germane to what the child had done or was planning to do. Finally, multiple conferences facilitated by both teachers served as examples of the previously discussed tension of honoring what children bring to their writing and

their own pathways while maintaining focus on teaching "to" something. Findings revealed that Ms. Hanson, more often than not, had success in establishing a shared problem space during conferences with children. This section examines the differences in the features of the conferences led by Ms. Hanson and Ms. Spencer in an attempt to hypothesize about possible explanations for this finding.

We have already established that conducting one-on-one conferences with children requires a lot on the part of teachers. Beyond split-second diagnosing and decision-making, teachers are required to integrate what they know about children, curriculum, and pedagogy – all within a particular context - to make an educated guess about the instruction that will best support the writer at that moment in time. An additional demand on the part of the teacher is the need to give children the opportunity to talk while listening closely to what children are saying. Scholars have recognized the importance of a teacher's ability to be a good listener (Ball, 1997; Duckworth, 2001; Schultz, 2003) yet this remains a challenging endeavor for most teachers.

One of the features that distinguishes Ms. Hanson's conferences from those facilitated by Ms. Spencer is the amount of teacher talk in the interactions. In Ms. Hanson's conferences, there were many more opportunities for children to talk and for her to listen to their thinking. This created different opportunities for Ms. Hanson to learn about what the children were thinking and finding challenging. Ms. Spencer's talk typically dominated the conferences she led. An analysis of three randomly chosen transcripts from each teachers' conferences revealed that the turn-length for the teacher and student in Ms. Hanson's conferences was more balanced with an average of 9.9 words per teacher turn (sd=10.4) and 8.0 words per student turn (sd=8.1); in contrast, Ms. Spencer's average turn length of 29.5 words (sd=37.1) was much longer than those of the children (mean = 7.8 words per student turn ; sd= 9.1). In Ms. Spencer's conferences, it was common for children to contribute one-or-two-word utterances. In addition, the transcripts showed how Ms. Spencer often interrupted children as they attempted to explain their thinking or respond to questions she posed. In an interview, Ms. Spencer identified her propensity to "overtalk" during

conferences as a challenge. She said, "I know they're supposed to do more talking than I do, and I struggle with that because I like to talk. And I'm pretty sure that I'm right about what I want to say." (Teacher interview, March 31, 2011)

Another feature of Ms. Hanson's conferences that likely enabled her to co-construct a shared understanding with children was the patience she exuded with children and herself as she attempted to move a conference forward. Field notes identified moments in which Ms. Hanson began to confer with a child, engaging in research to identify the needs of the writer and identifying what the child was doing well as writer, but quickly abandoned the conference telling the child that she would return the following day when she had time to think about how to best support him. These instances were not included in the video data corpus or analyzed because they did not fall under the data-decision rule that a conference must last for more than one minute to be considered a conference, but they are powerful representations of Ms. Hanson's patience and commitment to intentional, deliberate teaching. In informal conversation, Ms. Hanson also explained that, if she sits down with a child and does not know what to discuss, she grants herself the liberty to simply name what the child is doing well and exit the conference to give herself time to consider how she can more appropriately support the child the next day. On occasions when she did this during the study, she consistently returned to confer with those children the following day.

A final feature of Ms. Hanson's teaching that likely contributed to the construction of a shared problem space was her systematic decision making about conferences. She consistently used the first part of conferences to gather information about the writer and his or her writing in a slow and methodical manner. She would sit down, observe the child, and listen closely. The children understood that it was common for their teacher to pull up a chair and sit quietly next to them before the conference talk began. In many cases, they were unfazed by Ms. Hanson's proximity and would continue writing when she arrived. Moreover, Ms. Hanson gathered information about children's immediate and long-term needs as writers as she reviewed children's work each weekend noting what she needed to attend to in the coming week. This propensity to conduct

research in an attempt to inform her plans for teaching likely contributed to her ability to create a space where she and the children could develop shared understanding.

Enactment of Instruction

Although establishing a shared problem space contributes to the teacher and child's communication during the conference, it is important to also consider the enactment of instruction within the conference. While conferences require give-and-take on the part of both the teacher and student, the cross-case analysis suggested a relationship between the teacher's use of precise language and explicit teaching methods and the child's clarity of understanding regarding the focus of the conference.

Sufficient Decomposition of Content

Analyses indicated a difference in the level of decomposition of content across cases. Ms. Hanson's conferences and interviews suggested that she understood the importance of unpacking subject-matter content in order to understand the qualities of well-developed writing as well as the processes and techniques writers employ to construct such texts. For example, when discussing details, Ms. Hanson identified three types of details used in writing: talking details, thinking details, and action details. In contrast, when Ms. Spencer discussed details to support character development, she stressed the importance of "growing characters" and "dipping into character" (i.e. including details about characters throughout a text). While Ms. Spencer alluded to actions writers could take to "grow their characters" during conferences (e.g. asking how a character felt, what he looked like, what might motivate him to act a certain way), neither video data of instruction or interviews revealed that she decomposed the content at the level of Ms. Hanson. While this difference might be related to the knowledge, beliefs, and/or orientation of each teacher, it is also possible that the materials and curriculum informing writing instruction influenced teachers' practices decomposing content. As described in Chapter 4 and revisited above,

Ms. Spencer's knowledge and beliefs about writing were influenced by her training in the *6+1 Traits* program, which emphasizes assessing writing for the extent to which particular traits are present. The *6+1 Traits* materials do not provide the same level of specificity regarding content to be covered that *The Units of Study* informing Ms. Hanson's teaching provide. In fact, Ms. Hanson's understanding that there are different "types" of details likely came directly from her use of lessons from *The Units of Study*.

The extent to which the teachers decomposed subject-matter content and writing processes seemed related to their abilities to identify and articulate clear, precise teaching points. While Ms. Hanson did not consistently name a teaching point during conferences, without fail, she identified them during daily mini-lessons. Learning conversations with children from her class suggested that they often appropriated the language from mini-lessons teaching points to describe what they had discussed during conferences. While some of these teaching points were evident in *The Units of Study* sessions that Ms. Hanson enacted during mini-lessons, Ms. Hanson enhanced, modified, and created new lessons to meet the needs of her second graders. In each of these mini-lessons, she still presented a teaching point for the lesson. On the contrary, in interviews, Ms. Spencer identified teaching points similar to the fashion in which she described content. During the realistic fiction unit, she discussed how she was working to support children in "growing their characters" and "describing setting." She used similar language during conferences as she described how children could improve their texts. Learning conversations indicated that children's understanding of what they had learned in conferences hovered at that level. While they were able to identify that they were working on "growing their characters" or "describing setting," they were unable to articulate clear ways of developing characters or setting. In fact, when asked to say more about how to accomplish the task, they frequently responded by posing questions such as, "Well, what color hair does he have? How old is he?"

Deliberate and Explicit Focus and Language

Cross-case analysis also illuminated differences between teacher's enactment of deliberate and intentional conferences. Observations and video revealed that Ms. Hanson facilitated conferences with a deliberate instructional thread woven throughout the interaction. She focused the talk occurring during conferences on one - or at most two - foci. Her use of language to describe writing practices was consistent and sharp – always aligning with language she used during mini-lessons. Whereas children in Ms. Hanson's class rarely had to infer what was being discussed or taught because of her sharp, consistent use of language and the use of limited foci during conferences, analyses suggested that - in most cases - children in Ms. Spencer's class needed to independently process what occurred during conferences in order to ascertain what they had learned, and often times they were challenged to clearly identify what they had learned in conferences. Ms. Spencer's conferences frequently addressed multiple instructional foci and lacked a clear instructional thread, making it difficult for children to understand what had happened. However (drawing upon disconfirming evidence), there were indeed instances where she brought a limited focus to the conference and children were better able to articulate what they had learned. For example, in Ravi's conference about describing the setting of his realistic fiction story, Ms. Spencer remained focused on helping Ravi learn to "zoom in" on setting through the use of a bulls-eye. In this conference, Ms. Spencer's teaching remained focused on a single instructional focus, and in many instances she supported Ravi in staying on topic when his talk indicated that his thoughts were beginning to wander. Evidence from both Ravi's conversation with Ms. Spencer that recapped what he had interpreted the focus of the conference to be, as well as the corresponding learning conversation suggested that he had understood what he was to have learned during the conference.

Cross-case analyses addressed explicit teaching from two dimensions – the extent to which teachers were explicit in (a) their explanations of *what* they were teaching during conferences, and (b) the instructional methods employed to clearly convey content during conferences. Analyses indicated that explicitness

with respect to either of the dimensions rarely occurred in Ms. Spencer's conferences. Although, in cases where explicit explanations of what was being taught was provided and instructional methods that conveyed corresponding content was enacted with explicitness, children articulated what they had learned more clearly. With regard to Ms. Hanson's teaching, her use of consistent, deliberate language surfaced as one of her overall instructional strengths. While the first dimension of explicit teaching, an explanation of *what* was being taught, did not consistently occur during conferences, her preferred instructional method – guided practice, in which she decomposed writing processes and techniques to make them accessible to her second-grade writers – was attentive to the second dimension of explicitness, clearly conveying content. As previously mentioned, the content covered in conferences often aligned with teaching from previous mini-lessons. Hence, although Ms. Hanson did not explicitly name what was being addressed in conferences, children were still able to articulate what they had been taught. One possible explanation for their success is that because the language, structure, and methods utilized during mini-lessons were conveyed in such an explicit way, children were able to make inferences to connect content from former mini-lessons to that of conferences.

Conclusion

The compilation and synergy of the four themes identified across these cases point to important elements that interact to yield high-quality instruction. Curriculum and resources, expectations about the use of particular approaches to writing instruction and the participation structure inherent in those approaches are typically provided by districts and schools. In some cases, teachers have control and input, yet in others they do not. The other two themes addressed in this chapter, constructing a shared problem space and enacting conferences are without a doubt influenced by curriculum, resources, and participation structure in addition to other elements (e.g. context, teacher's backgrounds and experiences), but teachers maintain more control as they are co-constructed by the teacher and student. In order to achieve coherence, these elements must be

attended to and operate in concert with the understanding that the manipulation of one element has implications for the others. This relationship is especially important in order to develop a better understanding of how we support teachers to not only address and manage these complexities, but also understand how they work together.

In the next chapter, I conclude this dissertation with a discussion of the limitations of the study, implications, as well as directions for future research.

CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

This study expands limited scholarship in the area of elementary writing instruction through fine-grained descriptions of the complexities of writing instruction occurring in writing conferences of two committed teachers of writing. Further, the cross-case analysis sheds light on the factors that make writing conferences so complex. Chapter 7 concludes this dissertation with a discussion of the limitations of the study, implications drawn from the research, and directions for future research.

Limitations of the Study

While this study highlights important considerations for the teaching of writing and preparation of teachers, it is not without limitations. First, although research has shown that teachers revert to their natural ways of teaching and interacting over time, and I was in each of the classrooms for over two months each, it is possible that the presence of a researcher influenced how instruction unfolded. Teachers were aware that I was studying writing conferences, and although they both indicated that the instruction observed had unfolded in a typical manner, it is possible that teachers made more of an effort to confer consistently with children. Further, the presence of the video camera might have shaped both teachers' and children's behavior in their interactions with one another. In fact, at one point during the study a child commented to Ms. Hanson that he was "writing longer and stronger" with the hope of being videotaped soon. While we were entertained by his comment, she responded that had she known a camera would motivate him to be a productive writer, she would have set one up a long time ago.

Another possible limitation is that, as students became familiar with my flow as a videographer and researcher, they were aware that they might be approached for a learning conversation on their conference days. In addition, they were aware that their work would be photographed. The desire to have something to say during learning conferences might have influenced children's motivation to attend to the teacher during conferences. The awareness that their work would be photographed might have influenced their productivity and attention to presentation in their writing.

While the learning conversations provided access to students' perceptions of the teaching and learning that occurred during writing conferences, their reports are superficial in many ways. It is possible that children learned more in conferences than they were able to verbally express. Although I photographed student writing on the days in which they participated in conferences and learning conversations, these artifacts did not always represent student learning. In many cases, the time between the conference and the writing workshop was limited; thus, students did not have sufficient time to thoroughly attempt to apply what they might have learned in conferences. While I did collect end-of -unit published texts, they had undergone a considerable amount of editing from teachers and parent volunteers, and did not prove to be useful in describing student learning; further, the texts that children chose to publish were often texts that had not been discussed during paired conferences. As a result, it is difficult to report what children learned in this study. Further, I used a protocol in an attempt to standardize the conversations I had with children about their writing. While I veered from the protocol to help children understand what I was asking, it is possible that children would have had more to say about what they learned and the ways their teacher supported them in conferences had I asked more targeted questions that reflected the work they were doing on their individual pieces of writing.

Moreover, the design and conduct of this investigation paid little attention to the roles that curriculum and materials played in informing teacher's instruction. While I have shared hypotheses about their influence in the cross-

case analysis, this issue bears further attention. It is possible that teachers' language and methods of instruction were directly influenced or linked to the amount of support they had from curricular resources. Closer investigation of this relationship would require a fine-grained analysis of such materials to identify overlap between instruction and materials.

As a field, we need more investigations that closely analyze the everyday work of teachers in interaction with children in school settings in order to understand the actual work of teaching and not just the way practitioners talk and reflect about it. Yet, these contexts are not laboratories; this research occurs inside of real social contexts for learning. Factors ranging from fire drills to family emergencies, lost teeth to lunchroom bullying, performance pressures to a poor night's sleep can and do influence the instruction that unfolds in classrooms. While this makes the ability to conduct tidy research impossible and requires researchers to sometimes engage with subjects in ways they might not have anticipated, it is what makes this work useful to the field and exciting to engage in.

Implications

This section describes two sets of implications. I begin by discussing implications for those who select writing curricula and materials for adoption. Then, I present implications for teacher educators.

Implications for Decision Makers

This dissertation study points to the important role that well-developed curricula and supportive materials can play. While many districts aim to give teachers the freedom to create curricula and materials that suit the needs of their children, it is important to recognize that this puts great demands on teachers' already demanding list of responsibilities. Further, such freedom and collaboration do not automatically result in coherent learning experiences for children. Thus, it is imperative that those who make decisions about writing curricula and materials understand their role in reducing this demand placed on

teachers. This research underscores the need for writing curricula and materials that are coherent and complete.

There are a number of features that strong curricula and materials for elementary writing should attend to. Given the vast terrain for teaching elementary writing, curricula and materials must attend to the multiple elements of writing (e.g. process, traits, genre, craft) in order to support teachers in identifying and grasping what is important to focus on in instruction. Further, teachers need supports that help them to understand the rapid nature of writing development in the elementary years. Curricula and resources ought to assist teachers in teaching writing to a broad range of learners both across the school year and across grade levels. Moreover, with the emphasis on the need to teach multiple genres each year, curricula and materials also need to help teachers understand the rhetorical nature and features of instructional genres and sub-genres in ways that support them in teaching young children.

It is also important for curricula and materials to cohere with the approach to writing instruction advocated by a district. For example, if a district has adopted a writing workshop approach to teaching writing, supportive curricula and materials would provide a clear scope and sequence for each grade level at both a macro and micro-level (e.g. within a particular unit). They also should include instructional foci for mini-lessons, as well as suggested conferences, while also attending to teaching methods and structures within each component of the writing workshop. It is also imperative that these materials not only discuss how and what to teach, but provide teachers with strong representations of such teaching – drawing attention to specific teacher language and pedagogies that are conducive to teaching particular processes, strategies, and techniques within and across genres. Further, such curricula and materials would provide genre-specific frameworks for assessing writing.

Decision makers must also recognize that while assessment systems like 6+1 Traits have instructional implications, they do not replace the role of a strong writing curriculum or instructional program. While methods for assessing influence the ways in which teachers approach their work with young writers,

they need to be used in concert with other instructional materials and a strong writing curriculum.

While the Common Core State Standards aim to provide a more clear understanding of what learners across grade levels need to be taught, it will be important for those who make decisions about the adoption of writing curricula and materials to investigate the relationship between the standards as outlined in the Common Core and writing curricula and materials. In this time of reform, it may be difficult to identify curricula and materials that align with the Common Core; thus, it will be important to provide teachers with the support and time to develop a strong understanding of how to use the standards, writing curricula and materials in a thoughtful, coherent manner.

Implications for Teacher Educators

No matter how strong a given curriculum and materials to support teachers are, there are still a number of decisions teachers need to make with respect to enacting instruction. Thus, we need to consider how to support teachers in the enactment of instruction. Findings from this study have implications for those who provide support to both pre-service and practicing teachers.

Learning to Teach Mini-Lessons as a Pathway to Conferences

While the writing workshop approach offers many opportunities for teachers and children, this study has helped us to see the prominent role that the mini-lesson has on both children's understanding, as well as the enactment of conferences. Given the complexity of conferences and the need for teachers to understand a great deal about children and content in order to facilitate effective conferences, pre-service teacher educators need to consider the impact of the writing workshop structures they choose to emphasize during literacy methods courses.

Although teacher educators consider the writing conference to be an important instructional activity for teacher candidates to experience, perhaps

mini-lessons would be a more appropriate point of entry. While many would argue that developing the ability to listen carefully to identify a writer's needs as one does in a conference would be an appropriate first step for those learning to teach writing, this research helps us recognize that the type of intentional, interactive teaching that responds to the needs of the writer during conferences is complicated. Teachers must recognize the message of the writer, understand the processes that are supporting and limiting her progress, and provide instruction using methods appropriate for the learner – all within a specific classroom and larger school context. This research speaks to the integral role that the mini-lesson plays - in some cases a more pivotal role - than conferences actually do. As such, it makes sense for teacher educators to support pre-services teachers in learning to conduct clear and focused mini-lessons that at some point in the future can influence the way in which they confer with children.

There are a number of reasons that mini-lessons are an appropriate point of entry for novice teachers of writing. First, they enable thorough preparation to teach. This can take many forms including detailed lessons plans that draw attention to a common language to describe the work of writers, as well as explicit language to convey content to learners. Second, mini-lessons require teachers to apply many instructional methods useful for conferences. For example, teachers often engage in the process of modeling the use of writing strategies, techniques, and processes. My experience as a teacher educator suggests that engaging in robust modeling that makes the processes writers engage in transparent to learners is a difficult instructional practice for teachers to learn to do well. If we support teacher candidates in learning to model well in mini-lessons - a space that allows for more preparation - this will likely inform their abilities to confer in the future. Third, whole group mini-lessons require far less interaction than individual conferences. Thus, teacher candidates can engage in teaching that places less demand on responding to children's individual needs in the same way conferences do. Finally, there is an abundance of professional texts to support mini-lesson teaching (e.g. Calkins, 2011, Calkins et al., 2003; Fletcher & Portalupi, 1998). These texts provide explicit language,

attend to sufficiently decomposed processes, and make suggestions for instructional moves to support teachers in enacting mini-lessons that tackle specific techniques, strategies, and processes in each of the stages of the writing process. While teachers can access these materials in preparing to teach, they do not have the same freedom while facilitating learning. Thus, we need to teach and encourage teacher candidates to access and utilize these materials to acquire the language to describe the work of writers and enhance their own understanding about the teaching of writing.

Learning to Listen

This research also highlighted the challenges teachers face in creating a shared problem space with learners during writing conferences. While this challenge can be attributed to myriad factors, the most salient appeared to be the teacher's ability to listen to children. In turn, it is important for teacher educators to consider how to support teachers in becoming better listeners. Schultz (2003) argues for the need to reconceptualize teaching as listening in order to reach diverse sets of learners and that it is the responsibility of teacher educators to help teachers develop this stance. Still, we must reach beyond what Schultz advocates in order to transform classrooms dominated by teacher talk into classrooms where teachers listen closely to inform their teaching. While listening is undoubtedly influenced by teachers' dispositions toward learners and philosophical beliefs about the role of the teacher and the learner, we must also consider *how* we might teach teachers to be better listeners. We must consider what it is that good listeners do and the sub-practices that are nameable and doable that contribute to effective listening. For example, in the case of Ms. Hanson, we saw three factors at play that might be worthy of focus for teacher educators: allowing space for the child to talk; slowing down interactions to allow for deliberate, thoughtful dialogue; and preparing for interactions by reviewing notes and children's writing. Conferences might be an ideal space in which teacher educators can decompose what teachers do in order to listen well.

The Need to Be Explicit and Precise

This investigation suggested that the explicitness and clarity of explanations and instructional methods influenced children's sensemaking of what teachers addressed in conferences. Scholars have recognized the relationship between explicit teaching and student learning (Duffy et al., 1986; Gersten & Baker, 2001; Purcell-Gates et al., 2007). Teacher education scholars have proposed focusing on the teaching, learning, and assessment of high-leverage practices for teaching as an ideal way to prepare future generations of teachers (Grossman, Loeb, Cohen, Hammerness, Wyckoff, Boyd, & Lankford, 2010; Ball & Forzani, 2009). Given the increased need to deliver content in explicit ways to meet the needs of all learners, this should be considered as an integral high-leverage practice for beginning teachers.

Learning to teach in explicit ways does not come naturally; as such, teachers need to be supported in learning to do so. While this could be addressed across content areas, learning to conduct mini-lessons in the writing workshop would provide multiple opportunities for teachers to learn to be explicit as they identify clear, appropriate teaching points, develop deliberate language to convey these teaching points, practice modeling the use of processes and techniques for writing while narrating explanations of their process in accessible ways for learners, and create and provide opportunities to guide learners in practicing what has been taught in mini-lessons.

Future Research

The findings from this study should be considered by writing researchers concerned with creating fruitful opportunities for children to develop as writers. Future investigations should aim to consider the findings that surfaced in this small-scale case study. My suggestions for future research are, more than anything, influenced by my experiences as a teacher educator. I have striven to help teachers to understand the ways in which equitable instruction attends to the many social justice issues of schools and society. Yet, planning and enacting instruction that meets the needs of all learners and recognizing that teaching and

learning are inextricably linked remains challenging. As such, my suggestions for future research attend to lines of inquiry that would supplement our understanding of teaching with this purpose in mind.

The Role of Curricula and Curriculum Resources

One possible explanation for the differences we saw across Ms. Hanson's and Ms. Spencer's enactment of writing conferences was the influence that curriculum and curricular materials played. This dissertation study provides an initial look at this relationship and provides a foundation from which future studies of the role of curricula and curriculum resources can be grounded. Future investigations of writing conferences and the overall writing workshop ought to aim to look closely at the role that curriculum and resources play in teachers' enactment of instruction. One possible way to investigate this relationship would be through a study that closely resembles the design of this current study, but refines the selection of teacher participants to include teachers who are matched in terms of their backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs about writing instruction. An alternative approach to investigating the role of curriculum and resources would be to study how multiple teachers using the same curriculum and resources.

Structures for Supporting Writing Instruction

Future research should also address whether or not the conference is the most productive structure for supporting the development of young writers. Given the limited amount of writing instruction taking place in schools, we must question whether the instructional structures that have captured our imagination are the most robust approaches to improving students' writing achievement. When we stop to consider the limited number of students who receive conferences each day and the disparities between skilled and developing writers, there might be other structures, such as small group differentiated writing instruction, where teachers could still provide focused, developmentally appropriate instruction in a more structured form that allows for thorough planning and is not as dependent

on a teacher's ability to diagnose in the moment. One possible approach to investigating this topic would be through a quasi-experimental study in which the comparison groups use the traditional conference model while experimental groups engage in small-group differentiated writing instruction in place of one-on-one conferences during independent writing time. It would be integral to capture the discourse between the teacher and student(s), as well discourse between and among students in order to characterize the nature of the talk and scaffolding provided by both teachers and peers.

The Role of Knowledge

Future research should also seek to better understand the role that teacher knowledge regarding writing, writing development and language in general play in teachers' enactment of writing instruction. The degree to which we can study this relationship is reliant upon our understanding of the knowledge base for teaching writing. While many knowledge measures have been developed to investigate teacher knowledge for reading instruction, few attend to the knowledge for teaching writing in the elementary grades. Thus, this research could take multiple pathways. One line of research could aim to develop and study a knowledge measure specific to elementary writing instruction (e.g. knowledge of writing development, genre knowledge, knowledge of writing instruction literature) with the intent to eventually investigate the relationship of teacher knowledge as revealed through the measure and the enactment of instruction. Another possible line of research would use other representations of teacher knowledge (e.g. teacher talk) to investigate the relationship between what teachers know and their enactment of instruction.

Observation/Video Details
Teacher: **Unit:**   **Date:** **Lesson Focus/Session #:**

Mini-Lesson

Start Time: _____   **Finish Time:** _____

Notes:

Transition to Independent Writing

Start Time: _____   **Finish Time:** _____

Notes: What is occurring during this time? Pay attention to arrangements, materials, and teacher's focus.

Conference #_____   Child: _____

Start Time: _____   **Finish Time:** _____
Location: __ teacher table/desk ___ student's work space ___ other: _____

Focus:

Method:
Notes:

Artifacts to be collected: **LC:** Yes / N

Conference #_____ Child: _____
Start Time: _____   **Finish Time:** _____
Location: __ teacher table/desk ___ student's work space ___ other: _____
Focus:

Method:
Notes:

Artifacts to be collected: **LC:** Yes / No

Conference #_____ Child: _____
Start Time: _____   **Finish Time:** _____
Location: __ teacher table/desk ___ student's work space ___ other: _____

Focus:

Method:
Notes:

Artifacts to be collected: **LC:** Yes / No

Transition to Share

IW Finish Time: _____   Transition Finish Time: _____

Notes: What is occurring during this time? Pay attention to arrangements, materials, and teacher's focus.

Share

Start Time: _____   Finish Time: _____
Location: _____ common meeting area _____ in seats _____N/A
_____ other: _____
Method:
Focus:
Notes:

Post-Observation Summary

Duration of Writing Workshop: _____ minutes
Duration of Independent Writing: _____ minutes
Frequency of Writing Conferences: _____ minutes
Total Time Spent Conferring: _____ minutes
Duration of Share: _____ minutes

APPENDIX B
Learning Conversation Protocol

At the start of the study, the researcher will introduce herself to the class and mention that she will from time to time ask them about what they learned or talked about during writing workshop.

Selected students will be asked the following questions during transitional moments:

During Writing Workshop, you had conference where you and [insert teacher name] talked about your writing.
- What did you talk about?
- What did you learn?
- What are your next steps?
- What would have been helpful to your learning?

Artifacts from the conference (e.g. student work, teacher conference records, mentor texts) are to be photographed.

Interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed.

If the child the teacher selected for a Learning Conversation is unable to be interviewed because of limited time or possible interference with the child's learning/progress, the researcher may elect to identify another student. However, every effort should be made to conduct learning conversations with children identified in conversation with the teacher participant.

APPENDIX C
Interview Protocol
Initial Interview
1. Tell me about how you approach the teaching of writing.
   - How do you support second graders in learning to write?
   - What do second graders need know to be successful writers?
2. Do you teach writing across the days?
   - If so…
     - When?
     - Why?
   - If not…
     - Why not?
3. If a visitor unfamiliar to workshop teaching visited your classroom during WW, what would he or she see?
   - Describe the classroom organization and routines.
   - What's typical?
4. What curricular materials do you use to inform your instruction in Writing Workshop? How do you use these materials? How did you find out about them?
5. How closely do you follow the sessions laid out in the curricular materials? How about the district curriculum?
6. How would you describe what occurs during a writing conference to a parent? To a student teacher?
7. Do you use any materials to support the conferences? If so, how?
8. What informs your instructional decisions (what you teach and how you teach it) for conferring? Walk me through your process (e.g. Do you look at writing the night before? Do you plan in the moment?)
9. Tell me about a conference you had with a student that you'd call a shining instructional moment?
10. Now, share one in which you think the conference was poorly executed.
I1. I've noticed that you have a wide array of writing expertise in your classroom. How do you differentiate instruction during conferences?
   - Is there anything in particular you do in your work with ELLs?
   - Struggling writers?
   - Advanced writers?

12. How did you learn to teach writing?
   - What kind of professional training did you receive in teacher preparation?
   - In your school district?
   - In interaction with colleagues?
   - How has your instruction changed over time?

- Are their any professional texts you have found particularly useful over the years?
  - Which ones?
  - Why?

13. Anything else you'd like to share? Any questions for me?

End of Unit Interviews
Stimulated Recall Video: Researcher selected "rich points." Watch together. (4 conferences/ unit)
1. What were you hoping that the child would learn in this conversation?
2. What made you decide to select this instructional purpose?
3. How successful do you think you were? Why?
4. Where would you go next with this writer?
5. What, if anything, would you change next time?
6. How typical was this conference?
7. Describe "target student" as a writer.

Exit Questions
1. How would you describe the classroom organization during observed Writing Workshops as compared to similar days when an observer is not present?
2. Describe a quality piece of writing for first graders in this unit.
3. Are there any particular conference topics that seem to consistently surface during this unit or time of year? Why do you think so?
4. How comfortable are you teaching this writing genre?
   - What did you do to prepare yourself to teach it?
   - What did you do to prepare the children for it?

5. How comfortable were you having the researcher observe the Writing Workshop during this unit?
6. Anything else you think we should know?

Conference Analysis Tool (CAT)

```
FILE NAME: _____
CODER:_____

Date:_____  Conference #: _____        JJ-RF  JJ-NA  DR-HT DR-AM

Start Time: _____         Finish Time: _____
```

Conference	Present	Not Present			
Research					
Gathers information about the writing topic	YES	NO			
Gathers information about the writer's process	YES	NO			
Identifies what the child is doing well	YES	NO			
Detailed	YES	NO			
Brief	YES	NO			
Generative	YES	NO			
Compliment Technique	generalize	process focus	writer identity focus	contrast	combination
Decide					
Identifies and articulates a **teaching point** for the conference	YES	NO			
TP is clear and uses child friendly language	YES	NO			
Aligns with writer's needs	YES	NO			
Conveyed as– something the writer will learn	YES	NO			
Explains why the strategy	YES	NO			

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or technique is important				
Teach				
Provides instruction	YES	NO		
Instruction is focused on the teaching point				
Uses appropriate method (guided practice, demonstration, explain & example) for teaching point	YES	NO		
method: guided practice				
Names teaching point	YES	NO		
When does the T name the TP?				
Guides student in practicing	YES	NO		
Prompts student during practice	YES	NO		
Prompts are precise	YES	NO		
Prompts are lean	YES	NO		
States what the writer does during practice (narrates)	YES	NO		
method: demonstration				
Names teaching point	YES	NO		
When does the T name the TP?				
Demonstrates how to use the strategy or technique	YES	NO		
Narrates the process during the demonstration	YES	NO		
Provides an opportunity for the child to use the technique or strategy	YES	NO		
method: explaining & giving an example				
Names teaching point	YES	NO		
When does the T name the TP?				

Explains a particular strategy or technique	YES	NO		
Gives an example of how this has been used (most likely text)	YES	NO		
Provides an opportunity for the child to use the technique or strategy	YES	NO		
method: OTHER				
Teaching method employed:				

LINK

Restates teaching point	YES	NO		
Uses language consistent with that used in the conference	YES	NO		
Positions the writer to move forward (strategy or plans)	YES	NO		

OTHER

Ideal Conference Structure	YES	NO	Comments:	
LC Classification	*Content Conference*	*Expectation Conference*	*Spelling/ Conventions*	*Process & Quality of Good Writing Conference*
KS Classification	*Instructional Conference*	*Assessment Conference*	*Collaboration Conference (Dialogic)*	
Stage of Writing Process	*Plan*	*Draft*	*Revise* / *Edit*	*Publish*

Teaching Point (if articulated)/ Instructional Purpose inferred by coder (if not):

APPENDIX E
CAT Guide

Instructions for using the analytical tool and glossary, Conference Analysis Tool (CAT) informed by Calkins (year) framework for conferring

Directions for using the CAT
1. Prior to viewing video clip, enter information in top information box based on filename.
Example:
FILENAME: JS_RF_022211_c1_Tristan
Date: 02/22/2011   **Conference #:** 1   **JS-RF** JS-NA DH-HT DH-MM
Start Time: **End Time:**

2. Fill in start time when video clip begins.
3. Watch video clip in entirety making notes in margins or on separate sheet of paper to be attached to final coding sheet.
4. Fill out row to identify either the presence or absence of a particular feature or categorize techniques, conference classifications, and stage of the writing process. *Italicized features should be address only when the feature listed above them is present.*
5. If the teacher articulates a teaching point, record it. Otherwise, record the instructional purpose inferred by the reader.
6. Record any overall comments – timestamps during the interaction that were interesting, puzzling, or raised questions.
7. Watch video clip a second time to confirm codes.
8. Primary investigator will add the child's perspective from transcribed learning conversations after coding is complete.

RESEARCH
Gathers information about writing topic: Teacher elicits information specific to the content the child is attending to in his writing. This can occur through questioning (e.g. What are you writing about?, What's your topic?), making a request (e.g. Read your text aloud to me.), or by reading the child's text.
Gathers information about the writer's process: Teacher elicits information about the processes the child is using as he writes. This can include strategies and techniques, as well as descriptions of the stage of the writing process in which the child is working.

Identifies what the child is doing well: The teacher compliments the child by naming something he is doing well as a writer. Compliments can address a number of factors including, but not limited to writing habits, application of strategies and techniques, attention to specific traits, motivation, and behaviors demonstrating the child is engaged in the work.

> *Detailed*: Detailed comments provide the child with specific information (e.g. *You included all the steps in the sequence of making a birdhouse.*)
> *Brief*: Compliments do not take up the majority of the conference
> *Generative:* Compliments name what the writer is doing well in order as one way of encouraging him to do this again in the future.
> *Compliment Technique:* One compliment technique should be recorded. Mark combination if the teacher uses more than one technique. If the teacher uses a technique not listed, jot this technique in the right margin.
> - generalize
> - process focus
> - writer identity focus
> - contrast
> - combination

DECIDE

While it is impossible to see inside the mind of the teacher during video-viewing, Calkins identifies the "decide" component of writing conferences as the moment in which a teacher steps back and considers what she has learned about a child during the research phase and how she will proceed. As such, the CAT uses a teacher's articulation of a teaching point as a proxy for the "decide" component.

Identifies and articulates a **teaching point** for the conference: Teacher tells child what will be taught or learned during the conference (e.g. *Today I'm going to teach you how writers add details to their stories by taking a moment to stop and picture exactly what things looked like and adding that thinking to their drawings or text in order to help readers get a better picture in their minds*). Teaching points are detailed and specifically focus on what a child will learn to do in the context of a conference.

> *TP is clear and uses child friendly language:*
> *Aligns with writer's needs*
> *Conveyed as something the writer will learn*
> *Explains why the strategy or technique is important*

TEACH

Provide instruction: The teacher engages in some sort of activity or talk to teach the child something to support his development as a writer. If a teacher only names what a child needs to change, provides a compliment, or simply evaluates or assesses writing, this is not considered providing instruction.

> *Instruction is focused on the teaching point:* If the teacher named a teaching point, does the instruction the teacher is providing align with it?
> *Uses appropriate method for teaching point*: Does the instructional method seem to be an appropriate match for what the teacher is teaching?

When responding *YES* to "Provides instruction," go to page 2 and select one of four methods of instruction.

- Guided Practice:

  Names teaching point:
  > *When does the teacher name the TP?*: Although Calkins advocates upfront naming of teaching points, early video review suggested that some teachers name teaching points after their teaching. Thus, if a teacher does name a teaching point, please identify when this occurs.

  Guides student in practicing:
  > Teacher walks the child through the process of applying the strategy or technique to his writing. This might or might not involve the application of the entire strategy or technique.

  Prompts student during practice:
  > Teacher support the child by asking questions or making statements to support the child's use of the strategy or technique.
  > *Prompts are precise*
  >> Prompts use language that deliberately matches that used in earlier parts of the conference.
  > *Prompts are lean*
  >> Prompts are brief and do not distract from the task at hand.

  States what the writer does during practice
  > Throughout the guided practice, the teacher narrates what the child is doing, step by step. This is often followed up with a summarized narration after the application.

- Demonstration:

  Names teaching point:
  > *When does the teacher name the TP?*: Although Calkins advocates upfront naming of teaching points, early video review suggested that some teachers name teaching points after their teaching. Thus, if a teacher does name a teaching point, please identify when this occurs.

  Demonstrates how to use the strategy or technique
  > Teacher shows the child how she or another child uses the strategy or technique. Often times, this occurs through the teacher's application of a strategy or technique on her own writing.

  Narrates the process during the demonstration
  > While Calkins labels this instructional method as demonstration, it is more akin to modeling as the teacher does a think aloud of the process while using it.

  Provides an opportunity for the child to use the technique or strategy
  > Teacher provides the child in thinking about or using part or all of the technique or strategy.

- Explaining and giving an example:

  Names teaching point
  > *When does the teacher name the TP?*: Although Calkins advocates upfront naming of teaching points, early video review suggested that some teachers name teaching points after their teaching. Thus, if a teacher does name a teaching point, please identify when this occurs.

  Explains a particular strategy or technique
  > Teacher provides an instructional explanation that identifies the strategy, how and when it is used, as well as the purpose for using it.

  Gives an example of how this has been used (most likely text)
  > Shares a representation to help the child understand the application.

  Provides an opportunity for the child to use the technique or strategy
  > Teacher provides the child in thinking about or using part or all of the technique or strategy.
- Other: Explain how the teacher supported the child.

  In the case that the teacher did not use any of the instructional methods identified above, please note what instructional method the teacher did use, if any, and note the time stamp.

LINK

[Re]states teaching point
> *Uses language consistent with that used in conference*
> *Positions the writer to move forward*: The teacher exits the conference by helping the writer consider what his plans for moving forward or using the strategy/technique that was taught are.

OTHER

Ideal Conference Structure: Does the conference contain all four components (Research, Decide, Teach, Link) in order?

LC Classification: Calkins suggests four categories of conferences.
- Content Conference: focuses on the content topic of the child's writing
- Expectation Conference: [re]establishes expectations about behavior or habits of writers
- Spelling/Conventions Conference: addresses spelling and conventions either as targeted foci of the conference or as an "editing" conference
- Process & Qualities of Good Writing Conference: teach strategies, techniques, and processes that enable writers to develop more sophisticated texts. Also draw attention to craft.

Stage of the Writing Process*:* Identify the stage of the writing process of the conference. (Stage categories align with those articulated by teachers in the study.)
- Plan
- Draft
- Revise
- Edit
- Publish

APPENDIX F
Excerpt from Calkins & Pessah. (2003).
Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Session II, *Checking for Clarity* pages 11-19

IN THE PREVIOUS SESSION, YOU INVITED YOUR CHILDREN to write books that teach people how to do things. You showed them a book you'd written and said, "List topics on which you could teach." Then, after they had each chosen a topic as a starting place, you urged them to articulate, then sketch, and finally write the steps involved in the activity they wanted to teach.

You begin this session knowing that some of your children got off to a good start and that others need to revisit the sort of thing you want them to write. This means that this minilesson needs to be especially multilevel. For some children, the point will be to give them another big picture of what it means to write How-To books. For other children, you hope to help them take their initial work further.

Your plan is to help all the children understand the purpose and requirements of this genre by showing them that How-To writing must enable a reader to do the activity that is being taught. A writer of directions needs, above all, to give readers the clear, step-by-step instructions necessary so the reader manages to do the job. Writing so that readers learn to do something is the essential characteristic of this genre, and you'll convey this fact today.

199
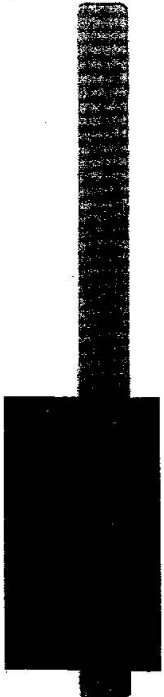
Connection

Report with enthusiasm on the How-To writing that children initiated earlier.

"Most of you have gotten started planning How-To books that teach kids to do something. Sam will teach us how to do a somersault, Serena will teach us how to catch a Frisbee, and Jorge will teach us how to get a dog at the SPCA. It's going to be great to learn all these things!"

Tell children there is one more step in How-To writing: writers read the directions to a learner and watch the learner attempt to follow the directions.

"There is another step I need to add to our book on how to write How-To books: whenever you write How-To books, after you get started, you need to check whether your directions will work. Today I'll teach you one way to do that."

Teach

Suggest that the best way to check whether the directions work is to read them to a friend who tries to follow them.

"The best way to check whether your directions work is to read them to a partner who will try to do the thing you are teaching (for real or for pretend). Then, if your directions don't quite work, you can revise them. So I need to add another step to our book!"

How To Write A How-To Book
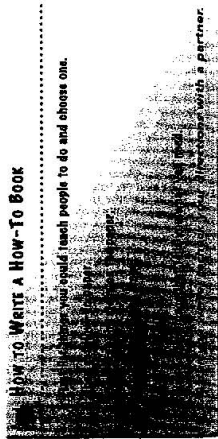
We teach children that good writing is detailed, and the same is true of a good minilesson. These examples provide children with details they can emulate. By citing what some writers have done, I convey the message, "This is the sort of work we should all be doing." This allows the minilesson to reinforce the earlier message. By saying I can't wait to learn what these writers will teach, I highlight the fact that my goal for children is that they write in ways that are instructive.

A couple of lessons can be learned here. First, this minilesson dovetails with and builds on the previous one. It will be far easier for children to remember both minilessons because they build on the same overall injunction. Then, too, I preface my comments with phrases such as "Whenever you write How-To books," which remind children that this minilesson is not meant simply to assign them work for today but instead is meant to inform them about something they can do whenever they write within this genre.

Laurie has turned her notes from the previous session into a chart to which you can add.

Use a child to help you demonstrate what it means to check your directions with a partner.

"I'll show you what I mean by checking that your directions work. Sam is writing a book on doing a somersault. I'm going to be his partner." I brought Sam to sit on a chair beside my chair. "Sam will read me his book (just the start—it isn't done), and I'll do whatever his book tells me to do. Guys, when you do this kind of reading—when you read directions—instead of reading it straight through, it helps to read one step and then do it, then read the next step, then do it."

Sam, sitting in the chair beside me, read, "First put your head down and your legs up." Still sitting on a chair at the front of the meeting area, I tucked my chin toward my chest and sagged my head (remember I was still on the chair). "Okay, I put my head down . . . hmm . . . my legs up?" I raised my feet so they stuck straight out from the chair. "Keep reading."

Sam had covered his eyes in dismay. "Then turn over?" Everyone laughed. "Turn over? I'll hurt myself!"

Sam started to protest that when he told me to put my head down, he meant I needed to put my head on the floor and that of course I needed to get off the chair to do so, but I returned to the role of teacher rather than gymnast-to-be. "Are you saying, Sam, that now you realize you need to make revisions to your directions? That's what happens when you do this step." I tapped on the final item I'd added at the end of the chart:

After you write, recheck your directions with a partner.

Active Engagement

Ask children to think with their partners about ways to revise the original instructions. Collect their suggestions, then try following the revised instructions.

"Would you tell your partner how you might start a book on doing somersaults that could maybe work better?"

"Okay, let's try out another set of directions for doing a somersault. Just tell me your new sense of the steps, and I'll follow them."

"Sit on the floor."

I looked over the children's books ahead of time and selected one that would make the point I wanted to make. I also made sure the writer had a robust enough self-concept and would be game for me to use his or her piece in this fashion.

Have some fun while you teach, and let the kids have some fun, too.

One of the characteristics of a good minilesson is cohesion. The parts fit together. It's important that I cycle back to this chart several times in this minilesson.

First I help the whole class do something, and then I recruit every student to do the same thing more independently. One can almost see the baton being passed, and the transition is as smooth as in a good relay race.

I knew from the start that I wouldn't actually flip around in the air in front of my class! But my kids are enthralled at the prospect, and I'll help them see that their improved directions get me off to a better start than when I tried a somersault from the chair.

"Okay, first you sit on the floor." I added the phrase *first* to the child's text as I clamored off the chair. "Okay, I've done that. What's next?"

"Put your head on the floor."

I touched my face to the floor, not putting my head in the proper position.

"No! Put the top of your head. . . ."

"That's a smart revision! Put *the top of your head* on the floor. You are getting better at realizing the details your readers will need. I don't think I want to do the next steps right now, so let's stop, but that was good work, writers. You are thinking about your reader and trying to say the steps in a way that will work for your reader."

Link

Send children off to read their directions to a partner, who will then try to follow those directions. Children give feedback to writers, who then revise their original directions.

"Today, instead of going back to our places, will you and your partner find a bit of floor space? We're going to start by reading the directions we've already written to our partners. Partner one, read one step, then let your partner do it, then read the next step and let your partner do it. We won't have all the equipment here in this room to actually follow the steps. That'll happen often with How-To writing, so you have to pretend to do the steps. Pretend to be scrambling the eggs or painting the fence—but as you do it, think, 'Would I do the right thing if I follow the directions the writer is giving?' After you've learned what works and what doesn't work in your directions, you can rewrite them—and then keep going."

"Get started in your partnerships. In five minutes, we'll all start writing and rewriting."

In this genre, the writer often writes directly to his or h[er] reader. The writer says, "You need to . . . then you show. In every other genre it is preferable to write with the pronouns I or she/he, not you. This genre is an except[ion]

When you want to praise what a writer has done, ren... the thing so that it can be transferred to another [text] a another day. If you said, "You added that I must put t[he] top of my head on the floor . . . that's smart," this compliment wouldn't easily translate into an injunctio[n] influencing future actions. But by naming the wise act in a generic way—"You thought about your reader an[d] tried to say your steps in a way that will work for you[r] reader"—you help children extrapolate lessons from to[day] that can pertain to tomorrow.

If you worry that this will be an invitation to chaos, y[ou] can settle for asking writers to read directions to thems[elves] and imagine what their readers will make of each step I recommend letting other kids try out the directions.

Use your conferences and strategy lessons to be sure every child is engaged with the central thrust of this unit. Your upcoming minilessons will only work if children have a How-To book underway.

Previously you will have noticed that a few children hadn't yet gotten started writing How-To books. Watch these children's productivity at the start of the writing workshop today, and if it seems that they plan to wait idly until you give them each a personal jump-start, consider convening a strategy lesson; the conference "Partners Can Help Each Other Come Up With Ideas" will help you.

You will no doubt find that when some children reread their rough drafts of How-To books to each other and tried to actually follow each other's directions, they learned their drafts were problematic. It's one thing to know there's a problem and another to have strategies for fixing the problem. See the conferences cited at right.

You will encounter children who will tell you they can't follow each other's directions. "I can't ski in this room, can I?" they'll say. You need to show children that they can read each other's directions and imagine following them, and that doing this can chase out potential problems in the directions. See "Monitoring for Sense."
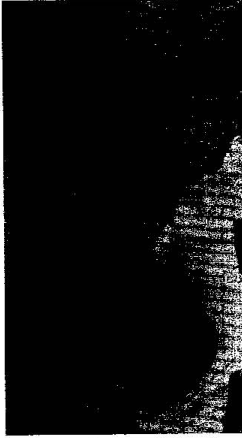
This conference in *The Conferring Handbook* may be especially helpful today:

▶ *"Make a Mental Movie of Yourself Following Your Directions to Test Them for Clarity"*

Also, if you have *Conferring with Primary Writers*, you may want to refer to the following conference:

▶ "Which Part Goes Where?"

Ask children to join you in listening and mentally following one child's directions.

"Today, I saw many of you reading directions not only to your partner but also to yourselves. You reread what you wrote and thought 'If I follow my own directions, will they work?' I have asked Nicole to read her How-To book to us. As she reads, let's close our eyes and see if we can picture ourselves doing each of these steps."

Nicole read her writing. [*Fig. II-1*]

Fig. II-1 Nicole

How to Plant a Flower
First dig a hole.
Then put the seeds in the

Cover the hole with dirt
your flowers.

Then give your flower so
light and take care of yo
flower.

Talk to your flower. Then
flower will grow.

Nicole hadn't yet finished the book, but she told her classmates what she planned to write on the final page: "One day it will start to grow."

"Thumbs up if you were able to see the steps of that happening."

Thumbs went up across the room. "I feel ready to plant a flower right now!"

Send the children off to read aloud to their partners, who will listen, trying to imagine doing the steps.

"Writers, would you get with your partners? Partner two, read your book to partner one, just like Nicole read her book to us. And partner one, listen and see if you can picture yourself doing each step. Are the directions clear? Do you know what to do first and next and next?"
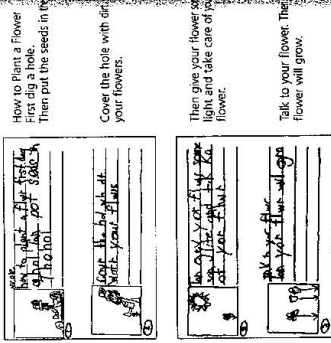
When one child reads or speaks within a whole-class meeting a role is to model what it means to be an attentive listener. This requires not only that we be such listeners but that our body language convey to the large group of listeners the message "Com on, now, let's you and I really listen: "We need to be in solidarity with the class, listening together to the child who speaks or rea

If you really attend to the text, there is at least one confusing thing. The directions suggest that we must cover the seed with dirt. Then it says, "Give your flower some sunlight." Reading this, we envision that a flower has emerged. But book ends, "One day it will start to grow," as if the seed hasn't yet sprouted. Be attuned to this sort of inconsistency but chances are you'll keep it to yourself

I listened in as Troyquon turned to his partner, Rita, and began to read: [*Fig II-2*]

Rita interrupted at this point. "How will it look like a pizza, not a donut?"

I agreed. "Rita is asking a good question. That's so helpful, isn't it Troyquon? With that help, you can go back and reread and think, 'Have I told her enough?'"

Troyquon looked dubious about reconsidering his text, and it was time for the share session to end. Seizing the moment, I said, "I'll tell you what—why don't I take your directions home and try following them. I'd love to eat some pizza tonight!"

Troyquon took a sticky note and carefully wrote his telephone number. "If you need me, call me."

I told the class that I knew they all wanted to plant a flower after hearing Nicole's writing and that I now had dinner plans!

A Cook Book
How to Make Pizza
Throw up the dough.
Spin the dough in your fingers.
Put the dough into a flat circle.
Put tomatoes onto the dough.
Put cheese on the dough.
Put the dough into the pan.
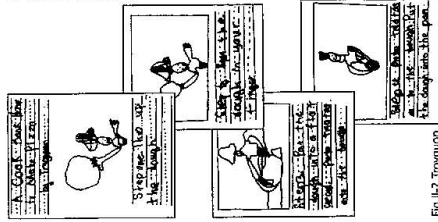
Fig II-2 Troyquon

Notice that I speak of suggestions (or, we could say, criticisms) as help; it's wise for us to act as though we've been given great gifts when someone points us toward revisions, even though the truth is that most of us sympathize with anyone who resists revision!

It is crucial that you find a child who has written a recipe and offer to take it home and do some cooking. It is also crucial for you to get the child's phone number! Look ahead to Session III. This plays a critical role in that session.

If you have time, ask the partners to switch so each child gets a chance to read aloud, but if time is short, this is not essential. Both partners learn even if only one partner's writing is reread and reconsidered—and there is always tomorrow.

When teaching writing, the problems children encounter are not cause for despair. Instead, the problems are crucial because they give us our direction. Study the source of problems so that your next minilessons and strategy lessons address the issues.

If your children are choosing topics that don't set them up to write procedural pieces, spend more time immersing children in the sounds of procedural writing. Read How-To writing aloud. Don't talk this reading to death. Just read and immerse your children in the sounds of the genre. Meanwhile, find opportunities to give the class oral directions. "Today we're going to make butterflies. Let me teach you how. Listen. I'm going to give you all the How-to directions now. First you. . . ." Meanwhile, help children develop lists of topics that match the genre, and key phrases as well: Do you want to know how to . . . ? I will teach you. First you. . . .

If your children are taking giant steps through the process they are trying to teach, assuming that their reader will understand more than the reader could possibly understand, have children continue reading their directions aloud step by step to a partner, who either follows the directions by performing each step or pretends to do this. It will be important for these readers to say "I'm confused" when they feel confused. You could lead a minilesson or a strategy lesson in which you say, "I found this book, How to Make Peanut-Butter-and-Jelly Sandwiches, on my desk this morning [you're pretending—you wrote it] and thought we'd try out the directions. Sammy, would you read it aloud?" So Sammy reads, "Get jelly, peanut butter, and bread." "You put a pretend jar of jelly, peanut butter, and a loaf of bread in front of you and look up for the next step. "Put the jelly on the bread." "You stand the jar of jelly on the loaf of bread. Children will find this very funny, and meanwhile they will learn.

Fig. II-3 Jen

How to Play Piano.
Walk over to the piano.
Sit on your bench. If the bench is too high get a chair.
If that won't work, go on your knees.

ASSESSMENT

There is a rhythm to the start of a unit of study, and this rhythm means that after session one is launched, it can usually run itself. This means that after session one, you can usually run the workshop so you can give them the gift of time, and this need. The support so you can give them the gift of time, and this need. This collect your children's work, and take time to assess it. Therefore, it helps to think, "Okay, have I done my job well? Are the new unit will tell me this. I can think, "Who is struggling here? Who are the children having difficulties? The questions to ask are, "What is well launched?" "Who is in trouble?" "What are the biggest sources of difficulty?"

The next phase of assessment comes a day or two later, when you feel the unit is past the starting block. Now you can stop rescuing kids and can begin to observe the patterns in the room. You should be able to take five minutes during the writing workshop to observe your kids working with the new genre. The workshop will be different because children are writing procedural pieces. Children will be drawing again, but this time the drawings will serve as a guide as much as the written. Some children will churn these books out at a terrific clip. Their writing may take on an informal, oral tone such as you see in Jen's text (Fig. II-3).

Finally, you'll probably discover that a few writers who haven't been particularly adept will shine in this genre. Help this happen. If these children get off to a strong start with nonfiction writing, and if you then use their work as examples for others to emulate, you can build their confidence.

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