Standardized Writing Opportunities: A Case Study of Writing Instruction in Inclusive Classrooms

LAURA E. BRAY

University of Pittsburgh

ALICIA A. MRACHKO

University of Pittsburgh

CHRISTOPHER J. LEMONS

Vanderbilt University

Background/Context: *For an increasing percentage of students with disabilities, writing instruction is taking place in general education classrooms. The practice of instructing students with disabilities in general education classrooms is commonly referred to as inclusion. For elementary and middle school English teachers, inclusion requires that they teach students with varying instructional needs how to write. While numerous studies have examined writing instruction and interventions for students with disabilities, little research has closely examined the phenomenon and implications of providing writing instruction in inclusive classrooms.*

Focus of Study: *In this study, we examined the writing opportunities provided to students in four eighth-grade English classrooms at a full inclusion middle school.*

Research Design: *We employed a qualitative case study design to collect multiple sources of data, including writing tasks, grading requirements, prewriting activities, lesson plans, writing task information sheets, and interviews with teachers. Our analysis sought to triangulate findings from these multiple data sources to examine the types and quality of writing instruction provided in these inclusive English classrooms, along with the factors that influenced this instruction.*

Findings: *The findings from this study indicate the writing opportunities provided to students were of poor quality and were influenced by state standards and high-stakes accountability assessments. Furthermore, students with disabilities were provided with nearly the same writing opportunities as their nondisabled peers, with little differentiation, modification, or accommodation. The study also exposed organizational features and accountability policy pressures that promoted the instructional practice of standardization.*

Conclusions/Recommendations: *Our findings suggest that including students with disabilities into a general education English classroom does not necessarily lead to high-quality*

writing opportunities for those students. Current accountability policy emphasizes the standardization of learning goals and outcomes, with little focus on the actual types and quality of instruction provided to students. We argue that for students with disabilities, focusing solely on teaching grade-level learning standards and improving high-stakes accountability assessments is not the solution for improving instructional opportunities and outcomes. Our findings also revealed that, under certain conditions, standardization of instruction is a potential unintended consequence of inclusive education.

Research indicates that writing is one of the most cognitively demanding skills students learn in the primary grades (Graham & Harris, 2002). For a majority of students with disabilities, writing is a particularly challenging skill to master (Graham & Harris, 2003). According to data from the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress, nearly 94% of eighth-grade students with disabilities scored below the *proficient* level in writing, thereby indicating a lack of grade-level writing skills (Salahu-Din, Perskey, & Miller, 2008). There are several factors that make writing a difficult skill for students with disabilities to learn, including possible deficits in self-regulation, attention, language, and memory (Graham & Harris, 2011). A deficiency in one or more of these skills makes planning for and completing writing tasks an arduous process (Graham & Harris, 1996; Graham, Harris, & Olinghouse, 2007). The key to improving the writing skills of students with disabilities is to provide them with high-quality, evidence-based, and responsive writing instruction (see Palinscar, Cutter, & Magnusson, 2004).

For an increasing percentage of students with disabilities, writing instruction is taking place in general education classrooms. The percentage of students with disabilities spending 80% or more of their school day in general education classrooms rose from 34% in 1990–1991 to 58% in 2007–2008 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). The practice of educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms has been underway for several decades, but recent policies that hold schools accountable for the performance of students with disabilities on tests aligned with the general education curriculum have accelerated this trend (Browder, Wakeman, & Flowers, 2006). The practice of instructing students with disabilities in general education classrooms is commonly referred to as *inclusion*. Inclusion requires general education teachers to simultaneously instruct students with and without disabilities. For elementary and middle school English teachers, inclusion requires that they teach students with varying instructional needs how to write.

While numerous studies have examined writing instruction and interventions for students with disabilities (see MacArthur, Graham, & Fitzgerald, 2006), little research has closely examined the phenomenon and implications of providing writing instruction in inclusive classrooms. It seems particularly timely to explore the writing opportunities provided

in these settings given (a) the increasing number of students with disabilities receiving writing instruction within inclusive English classrooms and (b) the lack of previous research focused on this topic. This case study's purpose is to begin to address this gap in the literature. Using a qualitative case study approach, we examined the writing opportunities provided to eighth-grade students at a full inclusion middle school that had been identified by the state as providing "exemplary inclusionary practices." The following research questions guided this work:

RQ1. What are the quality and types of writing tasks assigned to students in eighth-grade inclusive English classes?

RQ2. What are the types of written feedback provided to students in eighth-grade inclusive English classes?

RQ3. What types of instructional practices and supports do students receive on writing tasks in eighth-grade inclusive English classes?

RQ4. Are writing tasks, written feedback, instructional practices, and grading criteria differentiated for students in the eighth-grade inclusive English classes?

RQ5. What types of accommodations and modifications do students with disabilities receive on writing tasks in eighth-grade inclusive English classes?

RQ6: What were the factors that influenced the teachers' choice of writing tasks, types of written feedback provided to students, and types of instructional approaches employed?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Instruction in inclusive classrooms is governed by two broad and historically distinct federal policies: one primarily pertaining to general education (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965; now referred to as No Child Left Behind, NCLB, 2001) and the other special education (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975; now referred to as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, 2004). NCLB requires the vast majority of students to learn and master grade-level state standards, while IDEA mandates that students with disabilities meet individually determined goals (see Zigmond & Kloo, 2011). IDEA also mandates that students with disabilities receive individualized instructional supports, resources, accommodations, and modifications as outlined in an

Individualized Education Program or IEP. These policy messages place complex instructional demands upon teachers of inclusive classrooms as the teachers are expected to provide high-quality and rigorous instruction to all students while also delivering individualized and direct instruction to students with disabilities.

Attending to the various learning needs of students in inclusive classrooms is often described as *differentiated instruction* or *differentiation*. According to Tomlinson (2001), differentiated instruction is the process of "ensuring that what a student learns, how he/she learns it, and how the student demonstrates what he/she has learned is a match for that student's readiness level, interests, and preferred mode of learning" (p. 30). Differentiated instruction presumably allows all students to have access to the general education curriculum and standards, while also tailoring instruction to attend to the individual needs of students. To differentiate instruction, teachers can provide students with multiple entry points, learning tasks, and learning outcomes (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2003).

Effective differentiated writing instruction is responsive to students' needs (Palinscar et al., 2004). There are some, albeit limited, survey-based studies that have examined whether teachers' writing instruction is responsive to the writing needs of weaker writers. Kiuhara, Graham, and Hawken (2009) found that a majority of high school teachers reported that they used evidence-based writing practices, as well as provided adaptations to struggling writers. With this being said, the teachers also reported they did not frequently use these practices. Graham, Harris, MacArthur, and Fink-Chorzempa (2003) examined primary grade teachers' use of instructional adaptations for weaker writers and found that while a majority reported they were sensitive to the needs of struggling writers, nearly 42% of the teachers made few or no adaptations for students. While these studies begin to shed light on the writing instruction provided to struggling writers in general education classrooms, little research has closely examined the types and quality of writing opportunities provided to students with and without disabilities in inclusive classrooms and the factors that influence these opportunities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

RESEARCH ON WRITING TASKS

Although classroom writing tasks or assignments are an integral part of writing instruction, their usage and impact on students have not been examined until recently. In 2002, Matsumura, Garnier, Pascal, and Valdes piloted measures to gauge the quality of language arts writing assignments.

Writing assignments as well as samples of student work from 181 teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District were examined. After controlling for student background and prior achievement, the researchers discovered that high school students who received higher quality tasks produced higher quality work. In another study, Matsumura, Patthey-Chavez, Valdes, and Garnier (2002) found that, in 29 third-grade classrooms, the quality of writing assignments accounted for a significant amount of variance in the quality of students' final drafts. While research examining writing tasks is still fairly novel, recent work highlights that writing tasks can provide considerable insights into the instructional opportunities provided to students who are engaged in rigorous and high-quality work.

RESEARCH ON WRITTEN FEEDBACK

Research confirms the importance of providing written feedback to students during the writing process (Beach, 1979; Hillocks, 1982; Hillocks, 1986; Van Gelderen, 1997). Several researchers have found that when teachers provide written feedback to students about their work, the quality of the writing improves more than when no written feedback occurs (e.g., Sternglass, 1997; see also Hillocks, 1982). For instance, Beach (1979) found that high school students who received written feedback from teachers on their writing showed greater improvements on drafts as compared to students who received no written feedback or evaluated their own writing. Furthermore, Hillocks (1982) found that students' writing on subsequent drafts improved through positive and focused written teacher feedback. Hillocks concluded that, in order for feedback to improve the quality of students' writing, it should be focused on particular skills and goals.

Several additional studies have also suggested that teachers' written feedback on students' writing plays a pivotal role in students' motivation and direction for future revisions (Graves, 1983). Matsumura et al. (2002) found that teachers' written feedback primarily focused on superficial aspects of students' writing (e.g., grammar, mechanics, and word choice) instead of responding to the ideas, argument, and flow of the paper. Research indicates that attention to superficial features of writing early on in the writing process leads to minor improvements in students' writing (Ferris, 2001). Studies examining written feedback provided to college-level students indicated that instructors often provide feedback that is confusing to students (Butler, 1980), overly judgmental and harsh (Grant-Davie & Shapiro, 1987), attached to a grade and/or used as an assessment (Hausner, 1975), and focused on grammatical errors (Searle & Dillon, 1980; Sommers, 1982).

RESEARCH ON THE WRITING PROCESS FOR STUDENTS WITH
DISABILITIES

Numerous studies have highlighted the need to provide students with dis-
abilities explicit scaffolding throughout the writing process and direct in-
struction and feedback on their writing (Campbell et al., 1991; Dowis &
Schloss, 1992; Harris & Graham, 1985). Several of these studies have indi-
cated that an effective approach in improving students' writing is providing
intense direct instruction of strategies for planning, revising, and editing
writing (Campbell, Brady, & Linehan, 1991; Dowis & Schloss, 1992; Harris
& Graham, 1999). Research also indicates that having students work with
peers to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions improves students'
writing in subsequent drafts (MacArthur, Schwartz, & Graham, 1991).
Other research highlights that explicitly teaching students with disabilities
strategies for producing a written summary of reading material makes it
easier for them to write about it (Nelson, Smith, & Dodd, 1992; Placke,
1987). Additional evidence-based practices include setting clear goals
(see Graham, MacArthur, & Schwartz, 1995), using direct instruction to
teach grammar (Dowis & Schloss, 1992), teaching students text transcrip-
tion (Graham, Harris, & Fink, 2000), using a word processer (Morphy &
Graham, 2012), teaching writing and reading together (Mason, Snyder,
Sukhram, & Kedem, 2006), encouraging students to monitor their writing
(Shimabukuro, Prater, Jenkins, & Edelen-Smith, 1999), and reinforcing
positive aspects of students' writing (Hopman & Glynn, 1989).

METHOD

SAMPLING

The teachers selected for this study had already been selected to participate
in a broader project focused on developing an opportunity-to-learn screen-
ing measure to assist IEP teams in determining which children should qual-
ify for a modified assessment (Elliott et al., 2009). While collecting data for
the broader project, we used critical case sampling (Patton, 2002) to iden-
tify a school that would allow us to investigate the phenomenon of writing
instruction in inclusive classrooms. Sampling criteria included identifying
a school that had a successful model of inclusion as perceived by the state,
with school and district leaders who strongly supported inclusive education.
After interacting with teachers from several schools, we selected Wilson
Middle School (WMS). WMS had a full inclusion program that had received
sustained attention and support from state and district leaders, including
ongoing professional development and monthly planning time for collabo-
ration between general and special education teachers.

Eighth-grade was selected, based upon the parameters of the broader project. With this being said, eighth-grade is a grade in which federally mandated assessments are taken. It is also the last year of a student's education before entering high school. As such, it provides an optimal time to assess a student's learning before entering the secondary grades. Furthermore, by the end of eighth grade, students are generally expected to write multiparagraph informational and persuasive pieces, use appropriate conventions of writing (i.e., spelling, grammar, and punctuation), and edit and revise their own work.

SETTING

Miller School District (MSD) was located in the suburbs of Pennsylvania. There were about 600 students in the school, with nearly 300 in the eighth grade. Approximately 48% of the students were African American, and nearly 70% qualified for free or reduced price lunches. The mission of the district was to "create a community that works together to provide an excellent education for all students."

A hallmark of the district's academic philosophy was its full inclusion program. Nearly 95% of students who received special education supports and services were educated in inclusive settings. Students in the inclusion program received all of their instruction within general education classrooms, with pullout permitted for specific special education services (e.g., speech therapy), testing, or instructional support. The remaining 5% of students with disabilities received instruction in self-contained classes. These classes included an autistic support classroom and a life skills classroom. MSD's inclusion program was the recipient of an award from the state for using effective instructional practices that resulted in the successful inclusion of students with disabilities into general education classrooms.

At the time of the study, however, MSD was under tremendous pressure to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) as defined by NCLB and determined by student scores on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). After not making AYP for four consecutive years in the same subject areas, MSD was placed into "Corrective Action 1." It was also identified by the state as a "persistently low-achieving school." To assist MSD in improving PSSA scores, the state awarded the district with a School Improvement Grant to develop a teacher evaluation system and provide teachers with incentive pay for student performance. The following year, after intense state oversight, MSD was placed into "Making Progress in Corrective Action 1."

Meanwhile, WMS was placed into "School Improvement 2" after three consecutive years of not making AYP in a subject area. Administrators and

teachers were under immense pressure to improve students' performance on the PSSA. WMS had restructured its school day to provide students with additional instructional time in reading, language arts, and mathematics. Teachers from the school were receiving training from the state on using active learning techniques and state standards to drive instruction.

PARTICIPANTS

Four eighth-grade English teachers from WMS were recruited to participate in this study. All four of the teachers were female, Caucasian, held a master's degree, and had been teaching for three to seven years. All were certified in general education, and one teacher also had a special education certification. Two of the teachers taught language arts, while the other two taught reading. The language arts curriculum was centered on exposing students to the writing process through prewriting, drafting, revising, proofreading, and publishing work. The reading curriculum was focused on exposing students to a variety of literary genres. However, the reading curriculum also emphasized the use of writing to critically reflect and respond to literature. Although all students with disabilities were included in general education classrooms, the students were tracked into classes based upon reading fluency scores, PSSA scores, and grades. In an attempt to capture potential differences in writing instruction, we selected both a low- and average-tracked language arts class and a low- and average-tracked reading class.

The number of consented students in each of the focal classrooms ranged from 5 to 10 students (average number of students per class was 7.25) for a total of 29 students (see Table 1). For each of these students, information was collected on demographics, disability status, category, and PSSA achievement. The number of consented students identified with a disability in each classroom ranged from two to six. Out of the 29 students, 13 were identified with a disability (11 specific learning disabilities, 1 intellectual disability, and 1 speech and language disorder).

Table 1. Characteristics of Students by Classroom Teacher

	Number of Students						
Classroom Teacher	Students	Free and Reduced Lunch	African American	Disability	Learning Disability	Intellectual Disability	Speech and Language
A	5	5	2	2	1	1	0
B	9	8	7	2	2	0	0
C	5	4	5	3	3	0	0
D	10	10	5	6	5	0	1
Total	29	27	19	13	11	1	1

PROCEDURES

At the beginning of the 2010 school year, the four English teachers were contacted to participate in the study. Teachers were mailed packets that contained information on the study. They were instructed to submit information on two typical writing tasks, including lesson plans, prewriting activities, and grading requirements. Teachers also completed a writing task information sheet that included questions regarding the learning goals of the tasks as well as the modifications and accommodations provided to students during the writing process. In addition, teachers were asked to submit student work (rough and final drafts, along with any written feedback provided to students) from children who were participating in the larger study. Three out of four of the teachers also participated in interviews (ranging from 45 to 60 minutes) with the first author about their writing practices. A transcription services company transcribed the interviews. Teachers were provided with a payment of $200 for completing the study.

MEASURES

Quality of Writing Tasks

To assess the quality of the writing tasks, we used the Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) Middle School Language Arts Assignment Rubric (Matsumura, Pascal, Steinberg, & Valdes, 2002). The rubric consists of the following six dimensions: cognitive challenge, clarity of the goals for student learning, clarity of the grading criteria, alignment of learning goals and task, alignment of learning goals and grading criteria, and overall quality of the assignment. Table 2 provides a description of these dimensions. Each dimension was scored using a four-point scale (1= poor quality and 4 =excellent quality). The first author blindly coded each task on each of the six dimensions. To examine inter-coder reliability, a second trained coder (second author) blindly coded two randomly selected tasks (20%) on the six dimensions. The overall agreement between the two coders was 90%.

Table 2. Dimensions of Rubric to Assess Quality of Writing Tasks

Dimension	Description of Dimension
Cognitive Challenge	Measures the level of higher level thinking that a task requires of students to complete.
Clarity of the Goals for Student Learning	Measures how clearly a teacher states the skills, practices, and concepts that students will learn through completing the task.

Dimension	Description of Dimension
Clarity of the Grading Criteria	Measures the clarity of the teacher's grading criteria and if the criteria provide guidance on how students could improve their writing.
Alignment of Learning Goals and Task	Measures the alignment of learning goals to the actual writing task.
Alignment of Learning Goals and Grading Criteria	Measures the alignment of the learning goals to the actual grading criteria.
Overall Quality of the Assignment	Measures the overall quality of the writing task with a focus on the cognitive challenge of the writing task.

TYPES OF WRITTEN FEEDBACK

The types of written feedback provided on students' drafts were rated using the dimensions on the Pennsylvania Writing Rubric. The Pennsylvania Writing Rubric consists of the following five dimensions: focus, content, organization, style, and conventions. Table 3 provides a description of these dimensions. When reviewing the feedback, every instance of feedback was coded using a dimension of the Pennsylvania Writing Rubric. The first author blindly coded the feedback provided on students' drafts using the Pennsylvania Writing Rubric. To examine inter-coder reliability, the codes were reviewed and discussed with colleagues (second and third authors, as well as several doctoral students in education) for meaning and consistency. To examine intra-coder reliability, the first author blindly recoded randomly selected feedback on student drafts (20%) on the five dimensions. The overall agreement between the codes was 95%.

Table 3. Dimensions of Rubric to Assess the Quality of Students' Writing

Dimension	Description of Dimension
Focus	The single controlling point made with an awareness of task (mode) about a specific topic
Content	The presence of ideas developed through facts, examples, anecdotes, details, opinions, statistics, reasons, and/or explanations
Organization	The order developed and sustained within and across paragraphs using transitional devices and including an introduction and conclusion
Style	The choice, use, and arrangement of words and sentence structure that create tone and voice
Conventions	The use of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage, and sentence formation

Note. * Descriptions of dimensions are derived from the Pennsylvania Writing Rubric.

Evidence-Based Instructional Practices

A rubric was created to identify evidence-based practices that teachers implemented to support students with disabilities during the writing process based upon the work of Graham & Harris (2011). Table 4 provides a description of the 10 dimensions of the rubric. The teachers' writing tasks, grading requirements, prewriting activities, lesson plans, feedback on students' work, and writing task information sheets were blindly coded by the first author for instances of evidence-based practices using the 10 dimensions on the rubric. To examine inter-coder reliability, the codes were reviewed and discussed with colleagues (second and third authors, as well as several doctoral students in education) for meaning and consistency. To examine intra-coder reliability, the first author blindly recoded randomly selected artifacts (20%). The overall agreement between the codes was 85%.

Table 4. Dimensions of Rubric to Assess Evidence-Based Instructional Practices

Dimension	Description of Dimension
Revising	Teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and editing compositions
Peer Work	Having students work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions
Summary	Teaching strategies for producing a written summary of material read
Goals	Setting clear and specific goals that students are to accomplish in their writing
Direct Instruction	Using direct instruction to teach grammar and usage skills
Transcription	Teaching students text transcription skills (handwriting, spelling, and typing)
Word Processing	Using word processing and related software as a tool for writing; teaching writing and reading together
Reading	Teaching writing and reading together
Monitoring	Encouraging students to monitor one or more aspects of their writing performance
Positive	Reinforcing positive aspects of students' writing

Types of Differentiated Instructional Opportunities

The writing tasks, written feedback, lesson plans, and writing task information sheets were examined to identify instances of differentiated instructional practices on four dimensions: writing tasks, writing feedback, instructional strategies, and assessment/grades. The first author coded the

data for instances of differentiated instruction. To examine inter-coder reliability, the codes were reviewed and discussed with colleagues (second and third authors, as well as several doctoral students in education) for meaning and consistency. To examine intra-coder reliability, the first author recoded randomly selected artifacts (20%). The overall agreement between the codes was 90%.

Types of Modifications and Accommodations

The types of modifications and accommodations provided to students on writing tasks were identified from teachers' responses on their writing task information sheets. On the writing task information sheet, teachers were asked to identify any modifications and accommodations provided to students during the writing process. It also asked them to describe any instructional supports students received during the writing process. The first author coded the writing tasks information sheets for instances of modifications and accommodations. To examine inter-coder reliability, the codes were reviewed and discussed with colleagues (second and third authors, as well as several doctoral students in education) for meaning and consistency. To examine intra-coder reliability, the first author recoded randomly selected writing task information sheets (20%). The overall agreement between the codes was 95%.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of data was an iterative process in which we systematically measured and examined the different sources of data to capture the writing opportunities provided in each classroom (see Miles & Huberman, 1994). We first coded and examined the writing tasks, written feedback, evidence-based writing practices, differentiated instructional opportunities, and accommodations and modifications. Summary sheets were then drafted for each of the writing tasks; summaries included information of the type and quality of task, types of written feedback provided to students, instructional practices and goals of the task, how much time was spent on the task, and how the task was assessed. We then examined the summary sheets for patterns in the types and quality of writing opportunities provided to students in each of the classrooms. Matrices were then developed to display the data for each teacher and for all of the teachers as a group. These matrices allowed us to examine and identify emergent patterns.

We then identified factors that were influencing the teachers' instructional practices by examining data from the following sources: interviews, lessons plans, writing task information sheets, the writing tasks,

and the written feedback provided to students. The interviews were first coded to identify any factors that teachers cited as influencing their instructional practices and choice of writing tasks. The coding categories were emergent. The overarching coding categories were lack of support and training, inclusion and tracking of students, teaching the standards, PSSA guides instruction, and PSSA pressure. These factors were then further categorized into organizational features and accountability policy pressures that influenced the teachers' instructional practices. We then blindly coded the artifacts for evidence tending to support or contradict the existence of the identified factors. To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of our analysis, we triangulated data using multiple sources and considered counter-hypotheses to understand and explain the emergent themes (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005).

FINDINGS

Our findings are presented in the following categories, which align with our research questions: quality and types of tasks, types of written feedback, evidence-based instructional practices, differentiated instruction, accommodations and modifications, and factors that influenced instruction.

TYPES AND QUALITY OF TASKS

To examine the types, quality, and variation of writing tasks provided to students in inclusive settings, we first identified and described the writing tasks and then rated them using the CRESST rubric. Out of the eight typical writing tasks submitted, two were poems, one was a diary entry, one was an informational essay, three were persuasive letters, and one was a biographical essay. The reading teachers had students draft poems about novels they were reading in class. One of the poems was historical and the other was a cinquain poem. One of the reading teachers submitted a diary entry, which she had students draft on a novel they were reading. The two language arts teachers and one of the reading teachers submitted persuasive letter tasks. The biographical and informational essays were both submitted by language arts teachers. There was no variation in the type of task provided to students within the same classroom.

The overall quality of the tasks based upon the CRESST rubric ranged from 1 to 2 points (out of a possible 4 points). Based upon the CRESST rubric, 1 equates to a poor quality and a 2 equates to a limited quality in terms of the "level of cognitive challenge, clarity and application of learning goals, and grading criteria." The average overall quality of the tasks was 1.6. Based upon the six dimensions of the CRESST rubric (i.e., cognitive challenge, clarity of the goals for student learning, clarity of the

grading criteria, alignment of learning goals and task, alignment of learning goals and grading criteria, and overall quality of the assignment), the total points tasks scored using the CRESST rubric ranged from 11 to 16 (out of a possible 24 points). The average total score was 13.1.

TYPES OF FEEDBACK

To examine the types and variation of written feedback provided by teachers to students on their rough drafts, we coded the written feedback using the PSSA writing rubric. Very little feedback was provided on content, organization, and style. Three out of the four teachers did not provide any written feedback on students' rough drafts in the areas of content and organization. In addition, two of the teachers did not provide any written feedback on style. Teachers provided limited feedback on focus. Out of the 44 student rough drafts submitted by teachers, only seven received feedback on focus. However, all four teachers provided the majority of their students with written feedback on conventions. Out of the 44 student rough drafts submitted, 35 had written feedback on conventions. There was little variation in the types of written feedback provided to students in a classroom.

EVIDENCE-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

The writing tasks, written feedback, grading requirements, writing task information sheets, and lesson plans were coded using a rubric to identify if teachers were using instructional practices that have been proven effective for improving the writing skills of students with disabilities. The average number of displayed evidence-based practices for the eight tasks was 3.6 (out of a possible 10 instructional practices). The range of evidence-based instructional practices present in a task was 1 to 5 practices. Six of the eight tasks submitted displayed evidence of teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and editing compositions; having students work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions; and setting clear and specific goals for what students are to accomplish in their writing. The writing tasks from the two reading teachers each displayed evidence of teaching writing and reading together. Only three of the tasks displayed evidence of allowing students to use word processing and related software as a tool for writing. Two tasks displayed evidence of teaching students text transcription skills (handwriting, spelling, and typing). One task displayed evidence of teaching strategies for producing a written summary of material read (this was for a reading teacher's task), and only one task displayed evidence of reinforcing positive aspects of students' writing. None of the tasks displayed evidence of using direct instruction to teach grammar and usage skills or encouraging students to monitor one or more aspects of their writing performance.

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

To examine whether teachers provided differentiated instruction, we analyzed the writing tasks, writing task information sheet, written feedback, grading requirements, and lesson plans for instances of variation or use of differentiated instructional strategies. There was no variation in the four writing tasks provided to students. In other words, there was no variation in the writing prompt on the eight writing tasks (e.g., no variation in the directions, materials, and/or response requirements). Within classrooms, there was little variation in the types of written feedback provided to students. As previously noted, the majority of feedback provided was on conventions. Three of the teachers had students peer conference on the writing tasks. Furthermore, seven of the eight tasks included a prewriting exercise. However, only two out of eight tasks had evidence of teacher conferencing. There was no evidence of tiered writing activities, tiered writing assignments, compacting writing instruction, use of learning centers, flexible grouping of students, use of learning contracts, or use of writing portfolios. There was no specific mention of differentiated instructional practices on any of the writing task information sheets. In regard to grading criteria, two of the teachers stated that they graded each child differently based upon their past performance and abilities. With this being said, there was no evidence of variation in the grading rubrics or criteria used on the eight writing tasks.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS

To examine the types of accommodations and modifications provided to students with disabilities on the writing tasks, we analyzed the writing task information on which teachers were asked to identify any accommodations and modifications provided to students. Based upon our analysis, very few accommodations were provided to students. The language arts teacher with the dual certification in general and special education provided the most accommodations. She wrote on her writing information sheet, "Accommodations were provided on an individual basis. If students needed help developing content, they were given material to copy. Time extensions were also given to finish. Grading is also very different for each kid. I know their abilities, and grade accordingly." Regarding modifications provided to students, she wrote, "All adaptations and modifications were mostly given orally in regard to paragraph structure and sentence development." On four of the writing tasks, teachers provided no accommodations. One teacher provided a student with extra time to finish an assignment and another allowed a student to use a computer

to type her paper due to a broken arm. None of the teachers provided modifications on the tasks or mentioned the IEP document on the writing task information sheet.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED INSTRUCTION

To understand the factors that influenced the teachers' instructional practices, we examined interviews, lesson plans, writing task information sheets, and writing tasks. We identified organizational features (lack of support and training as well as inclusion and tracking of students) and accountability policy pressures (teaching the standards, PSSA preparation, and PSSA pressure) that influenced the teachers' writing instruction.

ORGANIZATIONAL FEATURES

Lack of Support and Training

Two of the teachers expressed concern over the amount of support provided to students with disabilities in their classrooms. One of the teachers, who had dual certifications in special and general education, stated that she tried to provide students with direct instruction, but struggled due to the large number of struggling students in her classroom. She explained,

> In the resource room, I did have an instructional aide . . . Having an aide is really nice when you're dealing with special ed. kids because they can do types of formative assessments, fluency indicators, comprehension indicators, you know, means of tracking progress. They can do that once a day for you. You can still maintain a classroom while you've got testing going on; you've got progress monitoring going on. And then I lost that. So it was just very, very difficult.

Another language arts teacher stated, "I don't think that WMS does the best job because they're just fully included." She went on to explain,

> There's definitely areas where it would be nice to have someone to be like a crutch where I could take these students on, but then a lot of times that's where I just pick another student to kind of help and then move that one on. It's like a performance every day.

She also stated, "When I have that class with five children with IEP or disabilities, having that ability to have that person come in and help, I think would be really helpful." However, on one of the teachers' writing task information sheets she indicated, "The special ed. facilitator was in my

room during the project. She walked around helping all of the students complete the task." With this being said, on the other teachers' writing task information sheets, they indicated that they did not receive support from instructional aids and/or special education teachers.

One of the teachers explained that she was confused by the fact that general education teachers, with no training in special education, were expected to teach students with disabilities.

> The interesting thing here is, with inclusion now in our target class, I think we have two kids that are not identified, seven that are. I do have a special ed. background. However, the two other teachers that teach the same exact thing that I teach here, they don't have a special ed. background. So you're working with probably 80 percent special ed.; one or two kids that don't have it, but you're with a regular ed. teacher, something I think that causes issues in the setting.

This teacher went on explain how she used her special education training to provide direct instruction to students with disabilities in her classroom, but believed special education students in her colleagues' classrooms did not receive direct instruction because of the teachers' lack of training. She stated,

> So they do get that a little bit from me [direct instruction], but that's because I'm special ed. Now the other two teachers, they never had direct instruction class. So once again, it would be nice if there was something uniform across the board because, right now, each kid in special ed. can be getting something different because we're not all certified in the same thing. Our specialties aren't in the same thing. So you know we're doing our best but, at the same time, our system here is a little bit odd for having such a large population of special ed. kids.

A general education teacher with no special education training noted that this was her most challenging year because of special education students. She stated,

> I literally used to come home like I am not doing my job. Like I said, my roommate's a special ed. teacher, so she helped me a lot. But I used to come home like in tears. "They're not learning anything. This is terrible. I can't do this. What do I do?"

This teacher went on to state that she was unable to provide students with the individual attention they needed. She explained,

> And it's hard because if you're sitting over here waiting too long for my time, then you're getting snappy and I'm like, "Hold on, I'm coming, I'm coming." That was really hard. "You don't care about me." And I'm like, "Oh God, please let me find a way to help you!"

Inclusion and Tracking of Students

All three of the teachers indicated that students were tracked into their classrooms based upon fluency scores, previous PSSA scores, and grades. Thus, the teachers indicated that most of the students in a classroom had similar learning abilities and instructional needs. This practice of tracking also resulted in the majority of students with disabilities being taught in the same classes. The lower track language arts teacher stated, "Now, I don't consider myself to be a regular ed. teacher when I have a 90 percent special education." She went on to explain, "Initially, I was hired as a special education teacher. But my role did change, even though my setting here really hasn't changed much." One of the teachers explained that because all the students have the same needs in her classroom, it is not difficult to differentiate—"with that in place the past two years [tracking], differentiating instruction for these kids is not all that difficult." Another teacher indicated that

> It's probably like a month and a half before I actually even know which students are special ed., by the time they get all their paperwork out and all that stuff. So basically, I play it as though—I start everyone the same here. I can tell who is excelling faster and so I just differentiate everything. So, across the board.

ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY PRESSURES

Teaching the Standards

All of the teachers interviewed stated that they aligned their instruction to the PA standards. The teachers' lesson plans and writing task information sheets on which they listed the PA standards supported this. One teacher explained that the standards that she was expected to cover were provided to her, "We're given a curriculum of everything we have to cover storywise, and with the different stories, there are specific skills and standards that we have to cover." When another teacher was asked about the learning goals of her lesson, she stated, "As far as the goals that I wanted them to complete, they were in accordance with the standards."

Interestingly, this teacher also stated, "Even here [at WMS], even some of our lesson plans, they don't really get looked at very much. So you don't have to be very specific with standards and anchors, and that's just the nature of the beast."

PSSA Guides Instruction

Two of the teachers interviewed stated that previous PSSA assessments and PSSA preparation materials influenced their instruction. A reading teacher explained,

> Our kids aren't used to taking tests in this format [PSSA format]. We are actually in the process of going through our curriculum and rewriting all the tests and assignments, trying to put them in a PSSA format so the kids aren't freaking out in this sort of format. We've learned, even with practice tests, if it's in that format, they're doing worse because they're not used to reading the two columns of this and the way the questions are worded. So, we've caught ourselves rewording questions a lot with our instruction to go on the PSSA level, which is not necessarily the everyday use of how you would ask the questions.

When this teacher was asked about how the PSSA influenced her instruction, she stated,

> We actually do a lot of PSSA prep packets, where I take the released items off of the website and we actually read them together and go over them in class. That's a day or two of instruction because a lot of times, we'll take the open-ended and we'll get the responses others have given and grade them ourselves as a different way to have them look at it.

Another teacher explained, "Everything you do is data driven here. So PSSA, we study literally the whole entire year. So, I do break down a lot of grammar and we start right at the beginning." She went on to state,

> You're just—I mean you're just—it's like you're just strictly focused on it [the PSSA]. I mean that's what everything revolves around. You're using your anchor terms always. You're just repeating, like we have words that we're supposed to use in the classroom, so everyone's on the same page.

Interestingly, the only teacher who did not explicitly discuss how the PSSA influenced her instruction during the interview indicated that her use of Venn diagrams was influenced by the PSSA:

> That was a big push this year [the use of Venn diagrams], especially with PSSA, teaching kids to compare and contrast, similarities, differences. I almost try to do a Venn diagram with every story. For these kids, when they see this on a test, they need to know what it is.

This teacher indicated on her writing task information sheet that she did not provide students with disabilities modifications or accommodations on writing tasks because students would not receive extra help on the PSSA. She wrote, "No students were given different outlines, templates, or essay formats simply because this assignment is to prepare them for the PSSA, which they will receive no writing help." On her other writing task information sheet she wrote, "As in the previous task, all students are/were expected to complete a three paragraph letter, due to practice for the PSSA." Based upon our review of the previous years' PSSA writing prompts and reading questions, four of the writing tasks were similar to previous PSSA writing prompts (i.e., an informational essay and three persuasive letters) and two of the writing tasks had students analyze and write poems that were similar to poems on the reading section of previous PSSAs. In an interesting digression from the PSSA, one of the language arts teachers had her students write biographical essays for a school writing contest for African American History Month.

PSSA Pressure

All three of the teachers indicated that they were under tremendous pressure to improve PSSA scores and that this pressure had an impact on their instruction. One teacher stated,

> I've been here the longest and, almost every year—almost every year—we don't make it because of the IEP category. You know, you've got all this staff; we all look at the information together. We go over the high school and they pull the whole district together to look at this stuff and it's like they made it, they didn't. I know that my colleagues don't look at me and expect me to do this because a lot of them have those kids in science and social studies; they're behavior problems. They know that that they're not going to achieve. But you still feel pressure because that's your—that's you. You're their teacher.

She went on to explain,

> So there's pressure because there are people that just tell you right out that you're not going to make it. Then there's people

that are very understanding, that kind of cushion you and you know you're going to take that fall. You don't want to face it, but they're not going to be like it's your fault. So yeah, there's a lot of pressure. There's a ton.

Teachers at the school were receiving ongoing professional development on improving PSSA scores. In addition, the teachers were using PSSA supplemental booklets with the students in both English and math.

DISCUSSION

Concern over the quality of writing instruction students receive is nothing new (see Graves, 1983). However, over the past few years, there has been a renewed interest in improving writing instruction, particularly for struggling writers. While not every student with a disability struggles with writing, a majority do (Graham & Harris, 2003). Increasingly, students with disabilities are receiving writing instruction in inclusive settings (see U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Although a few studies have examined the writing instruction provided to struggling writers in general education classrooms (Graham et al., 2003; Kiuhara et al., 2009), little work has examined the types and quality of writing instruction provided to students with disabilities in inclusive settings. This exploratory study examined the types and quality of writing opportunities provided to students in four eighth-grade inclusive classrooms. Our findings indicate a need for increased concern over the quality of writing instruction provided in inclusive classrooms. Our findings also raise several questions regarding the unintended consequences of organizational features and accountability pressures that promoted the instructional practice of standardization.

QUALITY OF WRITING INSTRUCTION

The data paint a fairly bleak picture of the writing opportunities provided to students in these four inclusive classrooms. In general, students were provided with a writing prompt on which they received minimal feedback on grammatical and spelling errors. Although the teachers' instruction was not observed, their writing task information sheets and lesson plans indicated that little time was spent on direct instruction of writing skills, conferencing with peers and/or the teacher, and editing subsequent drafts. Unfortunately, these findings are not particularly surprising. A 2006 report based upon NAEP data indicated that while there had been an increased emphasis on writing, there has been little increase in the time spent on writing instruction (Applebee & Langer, 2006).

DIFFERENTIATION, AND ACCOMMODATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS

Our findings also highlight that there was nearly no differentiation of writing opportunities occurring in these classrooms, and students with disabilities rarely received modifications or accommodations on their work. We found that teachers provided little, if any, differentiation on the instructional tasks, feedback, approaches, and/or assessment. This lack of differentiated writing instruction was unexpected, in part, because WMS had been selected for its exemplary inclusion program. However, these findings align with those of Graham et al. (2003), which found that nearly 42% of primary grade teachers made few or no adaptations for struggling writers.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED STANDARDIZATION

Several organizational features and policy pressures were influencing the teachers' instruction. Taken together, these factors promoted and resulted in the standardization of writing opportunities.

Organizational Features

Although the school was a full inclusion middle school, students were tracked into classrooms based upon fluency scores, previous PSSA scores, and grades. The school's education model of full inclusion and tracking ultimately resulted in classrooms of students with similar instructional needs. It also resulted in a high number of students with disabilities in the same classrooms. This lack of instructional diversity resulted in little need to differentiate instruction or provide adaptations. In other words, what may be differentiation, accommodation, or modification in a classroom of diverse learners became standardized practice for all (in a homogenously grouped classroom).

In addition, the teachers noted that they did not have support (i.e., manpower) or training to attend to the needs of students in their classrooms. In many ways, the school's method of inclusion was similar to more restrictive education settings, such as a self-contained special education classroom, in that all of the students with disabilities were predominately instructed in the same classroom. However, unlike a self-contained special education classroom, a general education teacher was the primary instructor, and there was a higher student-to-teacher ratio with no instructional aids or specialized curriculum and resources. With such high numbers of students with instructional need, along with a lack of support, resources, and/or training, teachers focused on teaching the general education curriculum and grade-level academic standards with little differentiation or adaptation made to instruction.

Accountability Policy Pressures

The types and quality of writing instruction provided within these classrooms were strongly influenced by accountability policy pressures. Teacher interviews, writing task information sheets, and lesson plans indicate that the teachers were extremely aware of the state standards and accountability assessments, and used them to plan for and guide their instruction. For instance, state standards were listed on each of the teachers' lesson plans. Likewise, the teachers provided students with writing tasks that were actual PSSA writing prompts or strongly influenced by them. The teachers would provide the students with the writing prompt similar to how it was administered on the PSSA. There was little instruction provided, but rather, the task alone was intended to serve as practice for the PSSA. As such, students did not receive much instruction on writing, but rather, they practiced taking a test. This practice of test preparation or teaching to the test has been exposed in schools under similar accountability pressures (see McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001).

Another unexpected and troubling phenomenon discovered was that one of the teachers was not providing students with disabilities differentiated writing opportunities in order to prepare them for the PSSA. In other words, she was standardizing instruction as a means to have students achieve the standards and obtain proficiency on the PSSA. This teacher indicated that since students with disabilities would not receive additional help or support on the PSSA, it was counterproductive to provide it to them in the classroom. Furthermore, the teacher indicated that they did not differentiate the writing tasks or grading requirements because all students would receive the same PSSA writing prompt and would be assessed using the same PSSA rubric. As such, it appears that one of the teachers may not have provided different writing tasks or grading requirements in order to prepare students for the PSSA.

INCLUSION AND STANDARDIZATION

Inclusion is a broad term used to describe the instruction of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Over the past three decades, students with disabilities have increasingly spent a greater percentage of their school day in general education classrooms (see U.S. Department of Education & National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). This trend has been influenced by both IDEA's mandate to instruct students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment and NCLB's requirement to hold a majority of students to grade-level academic standards. However, how schools organize to support inclusion and the types and quality of

instruction provided to students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms has generally not been supervised.

Our findings indicate that the teachers responded to the organizational and accountability policy demands of inclusion by standardizing instruction. Standardization of instruction resulted in students with disabilities receiving nearly identical writing opportunities, resources, and supports as their nondisabled peers. This practice of standardization is extremely troubling in light of research that highlights the challenges that students with disabilities commonly encounter during the writing process (see Graham & Harris, 2003). While research supports that good instruction is often good instruction for all students, it also indicates that good instruction for students with disabilities is more intense and direct, and may require different instructional approaches, interventions, curriculums, therapies, and techniques.

LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations of this study. First, the study was a case study of four teachers writing instruction within one school, which limits the general scope of the findings. The school's organizational structure, history, and state oversight greatly influenced the teachers' instructional practices. As such, our findings are specific to this school, although they may provide insights into schools with similar organizational features operating under comparable accountability pressures.

Another limitation of this study was that we examined only writing instruction. Both the language arts and reading teachers spent a considerable amount of their time and energy on reading instruction. The teachers' focus on reading instruction is not particularly surprising. WMS was under tremendous pressure to make AYP and, although writing was assessed on the PSSA, it did not count toward the calculation of AYP. This begs the question: if we had examined reading instruction, would we have found higher quality and more differentiated instruction? We may have, but our findings indicate that the teachers' writing instruction was strongly influenced by the state standards and the accountability assessment. Furthermore, the teachers expressed concern and a desire for their students to do well on the writing assessment. As such, we hypothesize that although the teachers placed greater emphasis on reading instruction, their practice of standardizing instruction more than likely remained the same. Ultimately, we believe that the teachers viewed standardization as what they were expected to do (i.e., hold all students to the same standards). However, in doing so, they lost sight of the fact that providing standardized learning opportunities was not a means to this goal.

In addition, we did not have access to the IEPs of students included in the study. Access to the students' IEPs may have provided us with greater insights into their present academic and performance levels, as well as specific modifications and accommodations. However, we did have access to the students' PSSA scores, disability categories, and written work. All of the students with disabilities included in this study scored below proficient on the PSSA reading section. The students' writing drafts also indicate that most were struggling writers. This aligns with research indicating that a majority of students with disabilities struggle with writing (Graham & Harris, 2003). Teachers were also asked to indicate all accommodations and modifications provided to students on the writing task information sheets. While we were unable to compare the modifications and accommodations indicated on the students' IEPs with the teachers' actual instruction, we were able to capture the overall frequency and types of modifications and accommodations provided to students on the writing tasks.

Lastly, the teachers' actual instruction of the writing tasks was never observed. If we had observed instruction, we may have noted practices that were not accounted for in the writing task information sheets, lesson plans, student work, teacher feedback, writing tasks, grading criteria, and interviews. Notwithstanding observation, we triangulated multiple data sources in an attempt to capture the actual practices occurring within the classroom. We believe that the artifacts we collected, as well as the interviews, provide a fairly accurate picture of the practices occurring in the classrooms.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

The findings of this study emphasize that including students with disabilities in a general education classroom does not necessarily lead to high-quality learning opportunities for students with disabilities. While this may seem intuitive, discussions and policies surrounding special education often focus on the least restrictive environment, with little consideration or mention of the quality of the learning opportunities provided within an educational setting. Some may argue that current accountability policy focuses on improving the quality of instruction provided to students with disabilities within inclusive settings, but our findings suggest otherwise. Accountability policy emphasizes the standardization of learning goals and outcomes with little focus on the actual types and quality of instruction provided to students. For students with disabilities, focusing solely on teaching grade-level learning standards and improving high-stakes accountability assessments is not the solution for improving instructional

opportunities and outcomes. Students with disabilities frequently need more direct, individualized, and intense instructional interventions and supports than their non-disabled peers.

Our findings also highlight several organizational and instructional challenges that the teachers encountered when instructing students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Ultimately, the teachers were conflicted by their desire to attend to the unique learning needs of their students, while also holding them to grade-level standards and preparing them for high-stakes accountability assessments. Future research should explore teachers' frustrations with the demands of instructing students with disabilities in high-stakes inclusive settings. This work would provide greater understanding of the current context of inclusive education in an era of high-stakes accountability.

Lastly, our findings also expose that, under certain conditions, standardization of instruction is a potential unintended consequence of inclusive education. Standardization was promoted by the school's organizational features and accountability policy pressures that resulted in inclusive learning environments in which teachers did not have the training or resources to attend to the unique learning needs of students, and instruction was squarely focused on preparing for and improving high-stakes assessment scores. Standardization of instruction coupled with an inclusive setting essentially equates to students receiving a general education— nothing more or less. For students with disabilities, who are already at risk of academic failure, the practice of standardizing instruction may result in increased frustration and risk of dropping out of school. Future work should continue to examine the prevalence of the practice of standardizing instruction in other inclusive settings and subject areas.

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Appendix A

Semistructured Interview Protocol of Writing Practices

BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE
1. Can you briefly describe your background and teaching experience?
   • How long have you been teaching?
   • How long have you been teaching at this school?
   • What subject areas do you teach?
   • What grade level(s) do you teach?

INCLUSION PROGRAM
2. Can you tell me a little about the school's inclusion program?
   • How are students supported in inclusive classrooms?
   • How are students placed into inclusive classrooms?

3. In general, can you tell me about the range of students' writing abilities in your inclusion classes?
   • Does this impact your instruction? If so, how and why?

4. Can you tell me about the benefits and challenges of teaching writing in inclusive settings?

WRITING PRACTICES
5. Can you tell me about the writing skills and concepts that students are expected to learn in 8th grade English?

6. Can you describe for me the types of writing tasks you normally provide to students? How do you select these writing tasks? Do you vary the types of writing tasks or requirements of writing tasks for students within in your classes? If so, how?

7. Do you or someone else provide writing modifications or accommodations to students? If so, can you tell me about these modifications and accommodations?

8. What are your goals for teaching writing to your students? Do these goals vary for students in your classroom? If so, how?

STANDARDS AND PSSA
9. Can you tell me a little about the writing standards?
   • Do they influence your instruction? Why, why not?
   • Do they influence your planning? Why, why not?

10. Does the PSSA have an impact on what and how you teach? If so, how?

REFLECTION AND WRAP UP

Is there anything I haven't asked you related to the writing instruction in inclusive English classes that you would like to share?

Appendix B

Questions on Writing Task Information Sheet

1. What were the learning goals of the writing assignment?

2. How did you support students during the writing process? When did you introduce the task? When did you collect the task? How many days in class were spent on the task?

3. Did anyone else support the students on the writing assignment (e.g., peers, special education teacher, and instructional assistant)? If so, who and how? In addition, which students received this support?

4. Did you provide any students with accommodations on the writing assignment? If so, please describe the types of accommodations provided, and whom you provided them to.

5. Did you provide any students with modifications on the writing assignment? If so, please describe the types of modifications provided, and whom you provided them to. If you provided any students with modified assignments or assessment criteria, please attach a copy of these documents.

6. Did any students struggle in completing the writing assignment? If so, who struggled and what were they struggling to do? For the students who were struggling, how did you attend to their learning needs?

7. Can you describe how you assessed the students' work? Did you assess any of the students' work differently? If so, which students' work did you assess differently? How was it assessed differently and why?

8. Out of the student work submitted, which paper do you feel represents

   a. the most improved from the first to final draft (please provide the student's project code)? Why?

   b. the best final draft (please provide the student's project code)? Why?

   c. the worst final draft (please provide the student's project code)? Why?

   d. the average/typical final drafts produced by students in the classroom (please provided the student's project code)? Why?

Appendix C

Overview of Coding Process and Analysis

Step 1: Labeled data sources with project codes

Step 2: Coded data using measures

	Data Source(s)	Measure	Coding Process
Quality of Writing Tasks	Writing Tasks	CRESST Rubric	• First Author Blindly Coded • Second Author Blindly Coded Randomly Selected Tasks (20%) • 90% Overall Agreement
Types of Written Feedback	Student Work	PA Writing Rubric	• First Author Blindly Coded • Codes Reviewed and Discussed with Colleagues • First Author Blindly Recoded Randomly Selected Student Drafts (20%) • 95% Overall Agreement
Evidence-Based Instructional Practices	Writing Tasks, Grading Requirements, Prewriting Activities, Lesson Plans, Feedback on Student Work, and Writing Task Information Sheet	Evidence-Based Practices Rubric	• First Author Blindly Coded • Codes Reviewed and Discussed with Colleagues • First Author Blindly Recoded Random Artifacts (20%) • 85% Overall Agreement
Types of Differentiated Instructional Opportunities	Writing Tasks, Grading Requirements, Lesson Plans, Feedback on Student Work, and Writing Task Information Sheet	Differentiated Instructional Practices Rubric	• First Author Blindly Coded • Codes Reviewed and Discussed with Colleagues • First Author Blindly Recoded Random Artifacts (20%) • 90% Overall Agreement
Types of Modifications and Accommodations	Writing Task Information Sheet	Modifications and Accommodations Rubric	• First Author Blindly Coded • Codes Reviewed and Discussed with Colleagues • First Author Blindly Recoded Random Artifacts (20%) • 95% Overall Agreement

Step 3: Created summary sheets for each writing task

Step 4: Created matrices to display data

Step 5: Coded data for factors that influenced instruction

	Data Sources	**Coding Process**	**Emergent Codes**	**Broad Categories**
Factors that Influenced Instruction	Interviews, Lesson Plans, Writing Task Information Sheets, Writing Tasks, and Feedback on Student Work	• Read Transcribed Interviews • Identified Emergent Codes through an Iterative Process of Memoing and Discussing Codes with Colleagues • Coded Interviews for Emergent Codes • Coded Artifacts for Evidence to Support or Contradict Identified Codes • Triangulated Data • Considered Counter-Hypotheses	• Lack of Support and Training • Inclusion and Tracking of Students • Teaching the Standards • PSSA guides Instruction • PSSA Pressure	• Organizational Features • Policy Pressures

Appendix D

Examples of Matrices Used to Display Data Between Teachers

Example 1: Matrix Overview of Data Between Teachers on Tasks

Teacher	Task	Quality of Task		Types of Feedback					Evidence of Differentiation			
		Quality Score	*Total Points*	*Focus*	*Content*	*Organization*	*Style*	*Conventions*	*Tasks*	*Instruction*	*Feedback*	*Grading*
A	1	2	16	1/5	0/5	0/5	3/5	2/5	No	Min.	No	No
	2	2	15	1/5	0/5	0/5	0/5	5/5	No	Min.	No	No
B	1	2	13	0/3	0/3	0/3	0/3	2/3	No	Min.	No	No*
	2	1	11	1/7	0/7	0/7	0/7	4/7	No	Min.	No	No*
C	1	1	11	1/4	0/4	0/4	0/4	2/4	No	Min.	No	No
	2	2	15	0/4	0/4	0/4	0/4	4/4	No	Min.	No	No
D	1	1	11	3/8	7/8	0/8	2/8	8/8	No	Min.	No	No*
	2	2	13	0/8	5/8	8/8	0/8	8/8	No	Min.	No	No*

Teacher	Task	Evidence-Based Practices									
		Revising	*Peer Work*	*Summary*	*Goals*	*Direct Instruction*	*Transcription*	*Word Processing*	*Reading*	*Monitoring*	*Positive*
A	1	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
	2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
B	1	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
	2	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
C	1	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
	2	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
D	1	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
	2	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes

* Teacher stated they graded differently on writing task information sheet, but no evidence in actual grading and/or grading rubric

Min. refers to minimal evidence of possible differentiation (i.e., prewriting activity, student peer conference, and/or teacher conferencing), no specific strategies for differentiation or mention of differentiation in lesson plans or writing task information sheets.

Example 2: Matrix of Modifications and Accommodations Between Teachers on Writing Task Information Sheets

Teacher	Task	Accommodation(s)	Modification(s)
A	1	No accommodations	No modifications
	2	Use of computer	No modifications
B	1	No accommodations	No modifications
	2	No accommodations	No modifications
C	1	No accommodations	No modifications
	2	Extended time	No modifications
D	1	Additional resources and extended time	No modifications
	2	Additional support and feedback	No modifications

Appendix E

Triangulation of Data Within Teachers by Using Multiple Data Sources

SAMPLE FROM TEACHER A: PSSA GUIDES INSTRUCTION

SOURCE 1: EXCERPTS FROM INTERVIEW

We're given a curriculum of everything we have to cover story-wise, and with the different stories, there are specific skills and standards that we have to cover. There are different skills and standards we have to cover, and for Anne Frank, it's actually just learning about drama, acts, and scenes. That was newly added to the PSSAs this year from what our reading coaches told us, so we actually reviewed it really quickly. The skill that went with it is the acts and scenes with drama. Well, we had to cover it before PSSAs, in this story specifically because of the interest level put for after PSSAs. So, I had already taught those skills using weekly reader magazines. I just pulled these very short plays and we'd act it out a day or two to make sure they had the skills for the test. So my focus, I chose was characterization just because I thought there were a lot of characterization things you could pull from the story. So I chose the characterization and we've spent so much time, especially in my lower classes, just discussing characterization and how can you tell this sort of character, until I finally feel like they have it.

Some of it is probably good pressure. Some of it is stress pressure. On the good pressure end of it, it's an accountability system. You are making sure, did I teach this skill? and it's making sure the students have what they need as far as skillwise. As far as stress pressure, the standardized tests stress our kids out a lot. They are not used to taking tests in that format. We are actually in the process of going through our curriculum and rewriting all the tests and assignments, trying to put them in a PSSA format so the kids aren't freaking out in this sort of format. We've learned, even with practice tests, if it's in that format, they're doing worse because they're not used to reading the two columns of this and the way the questions are worded. So, we've caught ourselves rewording questions a lot with our instruction to go on the PSSA level, which is not necessarily the everyday use of how you would ask the questions.

We actually do a lot of PSSA prep packets, where I take the released items off of the website and we actually read them together and go over them in class. That's a day or two of instruction because a lot of times, we'll take the open-ended and we'll get the responses others have given and grade them ourselves as a different way to have them look at it. What score would you give this? Okay, now remember, somebody is doing that to your work, so make sure you're writing so you would give yourself these points and it makes them look at it a different way. There's that, the coach books.

There are also PSSA coach books—one for reading and math. They provide a lesson setup for a skill and then test practice. Reading and language teachers use these to assess students' reading scores.

It's kind of a scripted lesson [the coach book]. It's set up specifically on a skill though. Like, today's skill will be characterization. Today's skill is—here like vocabulary and word recognition. Lesson one is roots, prefixes, and suffixes. Lesson two is synonyms and antonyms. After they learn lesson one and lesson two, there's a test practice. It was kind of left for each team to pick up a little bit of how they wanted to do it, but the way we chose to do it is, it's on the reading and the language teacher to do the test practice for reading. Now, there are two weeks of lesson. On the first Wednesday, our history teacher will teach lesson one, roots, prefixes, and suffixes, going specifically out of the book. There's a lesson provided, which is the worksheet he would go off of. And then the next Wednesday, he would teach synonyms and antonyms. Fridays is when we do our work.

SOURCE 2: WRITING TASKS

Task 1: Historical poem

The prewriting activity was taken from a PSSA coach book. Students read a poem and are taught strategies for analyzing rhyme and rhyme scheme. Task 1 asks students to write a poem.

Task 2: Diary entry

Prewriting activity includes having students read a poem and locate historical content.

SOURCE 3: LESSON PLANS

Lesson plan task 1

Standards listed on lesson plan
Learning Goal: "Students were to analyze the historic content in a piece of literature. Student will follow the rhyme scheme from a given poem and write an original poem following the same format."

Lesson plan task 2

Standards listed on lesson plan
Goals: "Using the author's purpose to determine content, writing from an alternate point of view, writing with empathy."

REFLECTION OF TRIANGULATION

Teacher A indicated during the interview that she used the PSSA prep packets and coach books to guide her instruction. She provided concrete examples of how the PSSA resources influenced her instructional practices (i.e., the skills and materials she covers). She also indicated that she provides students with instruction on and practice taking the PSSA. Writing task 1 had students complete a prewriting activity taken from the PSSA coach book. In addition, similar to questions on previous PSSA reading assessments, writing task 1 had students practice analyzing poems. Furthermore, writing task 2 had students write a diary entry on a novel that was recommended in preparation for the PSSA. Students also had to analyze a poem as part of the prewriting assignment. Teacher A's lesson plans provided no direct support or contradiction that the PSSA was influencing her instruction. However, the learning goals listed on the lesson plans reiterate her focus on standards and skills that would be assessed on the PSSA. Overall, the data indicates that Teacher A's instruction was influenced by the PSSA.

Appendix F

Exploring Counter-Hypotheses within Teacher Data

SAMPLE FROM TEACHER B: PSSA GUIDES INSTRUCTION

Hypothesis*: Teacher B's instruction is guided by the PSSA.

Counter-Hypothesis: Teacher B feels pressure from the PSSA, but it does not guide her instruction.

Summary Matrix of Data:

Data Sources	Summary of Data	
Interview	"Everything you do is data driven here. So PSSA, we study literally the whole entire year. So, I do break down a lot of grammar and we start right at the beginning."	
	"You're just—I mean you're just – it's like you're just strictly focused on it [the PSSA]. I mean that's what everything revolves around. You're using your anchor terms always. You're just repeating, like we have words that we're supposed to use in the classroom, so everyone's on the same page."	
Writing Task	Task 1	Biographical Essay
	Task 2	Persuasive Letter
Grading Rubric	Task 1	Similar to PSSA writing rubric
	Task 2	Similar to PSSA writing rubric
Lesson Plan	Task 1	Standards listed, no mention of the PSSA
	Task 2	Standards listed, no mention of the PSSA
Writing Task Information Sheet	Task 1	No standards listed, no mention of the PSSA
	Task 2	No standards listed, no mention of the PSSA

Reflection: During the interview, Teacher B stated that everything is data driven and that they study the PSSA the whole year. She then indicated how studying the PSSA informs her instruction (i.e., focusing on grammar and using anchor terms). However, Teacher B's task 1 was not similar to the previous year's PSSA writing prompt or specific skills tested on the PSSA, although, task 2 was very similar to the previous year's PSSA writing prompt. In addition, she used a grading rubric similar to the PSSA writing rubric to assess students. Teacher B did not mention the PSSA on her lesson plans or writing task information sheets. Based upon the evidence, it appears that Teacher B's instruction was influenced by the PSSA.

LAURA E. BRAY is an advanced doctoral student in the Learning Sciences and Policy program at the University of Pittsburgh. Her research examines the effects of educational policy, organizational features, and instructional practices on the learning opportunities and academic outcomes of students, with a particular focus on students with disabilities. Her current research examines the intersection between high-stakes accountability policy pressure and inclusive education. She recently co-authored an article in *Education Policy Analysis Archives* entitled, "Crafting Coherence from Complex Policy Messages: Educators' Perceptions of Special Education and Standards-Based Accountability Policies."

ALICIA A. MRACHKO is an advanced doctoral student in early intervention in the Department of Instruction & Learning at the University of Pittsburgh. She is a board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA) and her research interests include children with autism and children with intellectual disabilities in inclusive settings. Her current research examines teacher behavior in inclusive elementary classrooms. She recently coauthored an article in *Exceptional Children* titled "Effectiveness of Decoding and Phonological Awareness Interventions for Children with Down Syndrome."

CHRISTOPHER J. LEMONS is an assistant professor of special education at the Peabody College of Vanderbilt University. His research interests include literacy intervention and related assessment for students with disabilities. His research has been published in *Exceptional Children, Reading Research Quarterly*, and other peer-reviewed journals.