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ADOPTION AND INTEGRATION OF BEST PRACTICE METHODS IN  
SECONDARY ENGLISH TEACHING

by

Gretchen Rumohr-Voskuil

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the  
Faculty of The Graduate College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of English  
Advisor: Dr. Allen Webb

Western Michigan University  
Kalamazoo, Michigan  
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# ADOPTION AND INTEGRATION OF BEST PRACTICE METHODS IN SECONDARY ENGLISH TEACHING

Gretchen Rumohr-Voskuil, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2009

Commencing with a critical examination of the history and rhetorical force of the term "best practice," this dissertation undertakes a qualitative study of three secondary English teachers, considering their adoption and integration of best practice methods. The subjects, represented by urban, suburban and rural secondary schools, were National Writing Project participants identified as "exemplary teachers" by a NWP site director. "Best practice" methods analyzed included the process model for the teaching of writing and literature, student decision-making, and a low-risk writing environment. Factors that were found to influence the adoption of best practice methods included undergraduate and preservice experiences, intern teaching, self-reflection, school administration, graduate-level methods courses, commercial curricula, professional literature, modeling, metacognition, and a constructivist or objectivist world view. Drawing on Joyce and Showers' continuum of levels of transfer, the subjects' classroom practices were analyzed to consider the transfer of knowledge across pedagogical practice, or what Joyce and Showers term "integrated use." This study found that the adoption of a "best practice" method does not necessarily result in its integration into other areas of classroom teaching, but that factors such as a writer-as-teacher and reader-as-teacher identity formation, metacognition and knowledge-based world view increased the likelihood of

integration. Considering these findings, the study concludes with implications for relevant areas of the field, including paradigm shifts, teacher training, school administration, and the National Writing Project.

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Gretchen Rumohr-Voskuil

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	ii
LIST OF TABLES .....	xii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xiii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Introduction to Study .....	1
History of Best Practice .....	1
Rethinking Best Practice Rhetoric .....	14
Derrida and Best Practice .....	19
Returning to the “Flawed” System of Best Practice and Exploring Other Options .....	21
Proposal and Research Questions .....	27
Overview of Chapters .....	28
II. METHODOLOGY .....	31
Type of Research, Research Paradigm, and Type of Study .....	31
Context and Participants .....	33
Data Collection .....	35
Data Analysis .....	40
Selection in Terminology of Influences and Methods .....	41
Dissemination of Results .....	44
Toward the Study’s Results .....	45



## Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER	
III. PROJECT-DRIVEN CHANGE .....	46
Gary’s Teaching Journey.....	46
Context and Undergraduate Training .....	46
Teaching Realities and Reflections .....	47
Turning the Corner .....	49
More Extensive Changes .....	50
Present Practice .....	51
Adoption of Best Practice-Related Teaching Approaches .....	52
Undergraduate/Preservice Experiences .....	53
Self-Reflection.....	53
Administrative/Collegial Support .....	53
Existing Professional Materials .....	54
Professional Literature .....	55
Modeling .....	55
Identity.....	56
Metacognition.....	56
Knowledge-Based World View.....	56
Further Discussion.....	57
IV. INTEGRATING GARY’S PRACTICE.....	59

## Table of Contents—Continued

### CHAPTER

Gary's Writing Instruction.....	60
College Writing .....	61
An Analysis of the Transfer of Teaching Approaches in Gary's Writing Instruction.....	64
Process-Based Approaches to the Teaching of Writing .....	64
Student Decision-Making .....	67
Low-Risk Writing Environment.....	68
Gary's Literature Instruction.....	69
College Literature.....	70
An Analysis of the Transfer of Teaching Approaches in Gary's Literature Instruction .....	73
Process-Based Approaches to the Teaching of Literature.....	74
Student Decision-Making .....	77
Low-Risk Reading Environment .....	80
Factors that May Influence Gary's Presence/Absence of Integrated Instruction.....	81
Undergraduate/Preservice Experiences .....	82
Self-Reflection .....	82
Administrative/Collegial Support .....	83
Existing Professional Materials .....	84

## Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER		
	Professional Literature .....	84
	Modeling .....	85
	Identity.....	85
	Metacognition.....	85
	Knowledge-Based World View.....	86
	Moving to Other Research Subjects.....	87
V.	NEW TEACHER, NEW PRACTICE .....	88
	Rebecca’s Teaching Journey.....	88
	Context and Preservice Training.....	88
	The Existing Curriculum.....	90
	A Summer of Reflection and Summer Institute Opportunities.....	91
	Present Practices .....	92
	Adoption of Best Practice-Related Teaching Approaches .....	96
	Undergraduate/Preservice Experiences .....	96
	Self-Reflection .....	97
	Administrative and Collegial Support .....	97
	Existing Professional Materials .....	98
	Professional Literature .....	102
	Modeling.....	102
	Identity .....	102

## Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER		
	Metacognition .....	103
	Knowledge-Based World View.....	103
	Further Discussion.....	105
VI.	INTEGRATING REBECCA’S PRACTICE.....	106
	Rebecca’s Writing Instruction .....	106
	An Analysis of Levels of Transfer in Rebecca’s Writing Instruction .....	110
	Process-Based Approaches to the Teaching of Writing.....	110
	Student-Decision Making.....	111
	Low-Risk Writing.....	111
	Introduction to Literature Vignette.....	112
	The Giver.....	113
	Accelerated Reader Instruction .....	117
	An Analysis of the Transfer of Teaching Approaches in Rebecca’s Literature Instruction .....	119
	Process-Based Approaches to the Teaching of Literature .....	119
	Student-Decision Making.....	121
	Low-Risk Reading Environment.....	124
	Factors That May Influence Rebecca’s Presence/Absence of Integrated Instruction .....	125
	Undergraduate/Preservice Experiences .....	126
	Self-Reflection.....	126

## Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER		
	Administrative/Collegial Support.....	127
	Existing Professional Materials.....	128
	Professional Literature .....	128
	Modeling .....	129
	Identity.....	129
	Metacognition.....	129
	Knowledge-Based World View.....	130
	Moving to the Final Research Subject .....	130
VII.	BEST PRACTICE ADOPTION IN ALTERNATIVE SETTINGS.....	131
	Cheryl’s Teaching Journey.....	131
	Context.....	131
	Life Before Alternative Language Arts Teaching .....	132
	An Unlikely Match .....	133
	Present Situation and Practice.....	136
	Adoption of Best Practice-Related Teaching Approaches .....	138
	Undergraduate/Preservice Experiences .....	138
	Self-Reflection.....	139
	Administrative/Collegial Support.....	139
	Existing Professional Materials.....	140
	Professional Literature .....	141

## Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER		
	Modeling .....	145
	Identity.....	145
	Metacognition.....	146
	Knowledge-Based World View.....	148
	Further Discussion.....	148
VIII. INTEGRATING CHERYL’S PRACTICE .....		150
	English 10.....	150
	English 9.....	154
	An Analysis of the Transfer of Teaching Approaches in Cheryl’s Classroom .....	156
	Process-Based Approaches to the Teaching of Writing and Literature .....	157
	Process-Based Approaches to the Teaching of Literature.....	159
	Student Decision-Making.....	163
	Low-Risk Literature and Writing .....	166
	Factors That May Influence Cheryl’s Presence/Absence of Integrated Instruction .....	168
	Undergraduate/Preservice Experiences .....	169
	Self-Reflection.....	169
	Administrative/Collegial Support.....	170
	Existing Professional Materials.....	170
	Professional Literature .....	171

## Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER		
	Modeling .....	172
	Identity .....	172
	Metacognition.....	173
	Knowledge-Based World View.....	175
	Toward Findings and Implications.....	175
IX. BEYOND METHODS: SUMMARY .....		176
	What Factors Encourage an Exemplary Teacher to Adopt Certain Approaches Deemed “Best Practices?” .....	176
	Preservice and Undergraduate Experiences .....	176
	Self-Reflection.....	177
	Administrative and Collegial Support.....	178
	Existing Professional Materials.....	179
	Professional Literature .....	181
	Modeling .....	183
	Identity.....	184
	Metacognition.....	186
	Knowledge-Based World View.....	187
	Once an Exemplary Teacher Adopts Best Practices, How Does the Teacher Integrate Knowledge of Such Methods into Other Areas of Classroom Teaching? .....	188
	Identity.....	189
	Metacognition.....	191

## Table of Contents—Continued

### CHAPTER

Knowledge-Based World View.....	192
Implications of the Study .....	193
Paradigm Shift.....	194
Teacher Training .....	194
Administrators.....	196
National Writing Project .....	198
Limitations and Further Questions .....	199
Sample Size .....	199
Observation Time .....	200
Participant Source.....	200
Time Frame .....	200
Applications.....	200
Concluding the Study .....	202
WORKS CITED .....	205
APPENDICES	
A. Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Letter.....	211
B. Anonymous Student Questionnaire.....	213
C. Permission to Use Materials from <i>Spelling Sourcebook</i> .....	216



## LIST OF TABLES

1. Gary's Student Survey Questions .....	80
2. Rebecca's Student Survey Questions.....	123
3. Cheryl's Student Survey Questions .....	168

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Joyce and Showers' Continuum of Levels of Transfer.....	60
2. A Night Out with Henry and Lenina.....	73
3. Gary's Student Survey Data.....	80
4. Fix-It Activity .....	107
5. Compound Sentences Activity.....	109
6. <u>The Giver</u> Quiz .....	114
7. Reading Strategy: Summary Sheets.....	115
8. "Utopia" Writing Activity.....	116
9. Accelerated Reader Contract .....	118
10. Rebecca's Student Survey Data .....	123
11. "Phenomenal Woman" Graphic Organizer.....	151
12. "What They Said About Me".....	152
13. <u>The House on Mango Street</u> Reading Packet .....	155
14. Cheryl's Student Survey Data.....	168

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction to Study

This chapter examines the rhetoric of best practice, as well as its historical origins. Using this knowledge of rhetoric and history to deconstruct best practices, the chapter then considers possibilities beyond best practice methods which include not just the rote use of best practice, but the intentional integration of best practice approaches into other areas of instruction. After establishing this concept, the chapter outlines the main ideas of a qualitative dissertation which seeks to explore not only how exemplary teachers adopt best practice methods, but how they integrate their knowledge of such methods into other areas of classroom teaching, and what factors influence such integration.

#### History of Best Practice

Describing professionally established principles, guidelines, and procedures, the phrase “best practice” has come into common use in a number of fields. Margaret Taylor Stewart argues that “we have become obsessed with using the term *best practices* in almost every aspect of our lives,” detailing mental health services, divorce agreements and bank telling (4). It is no surprise that the phrase has increased in popularity in educational discourse as well as secondary English teaching.

Best practice in the field of education emerges from a variety of sources, including progressive educational theory and ideas about scientific management. The progressive movement was first recognized by Joseph Mayer Rice, and its main effort was to “cast the school as a fundamental lever of social and political regeneration.” In

addition, the movement “viewed education as an adjunct to politics in realizing the promise of American life” (Cremin 22, 88). In this way, the progressive movement was not just an educational theory, but a set of beliefs that aimed to transform society.

The application of the progressive movement’s beliefs is considered to begin with the Quincy method, which was articulated and executed by Francis Wayland Parker in the late 1870’s. The Quincy method encouraged teachers to be “child centered” and to “understand [children’s] interests through observation and systematic analyses in order to help children progress through the natural stages of their development” (Shannon 9). With the Quincy method, literacy lessons were student-centered, “constructed from the systematic observation and survey of children’s natural development and interests” (10). Although the application of the Quincy method was short-lived for various reasons, its progressive beliefs persisted in the ideas of Herbert Spencer, who also believed that curriculum should be based upon “the child’s own developing needs and expanding activities” (Egan 15). The Quincy method’s emphasis on student-guided, student-centered education established important principles for progressive education, and this consideration of students’ experience and self-direction is common in progressive teaching today.

By 1901, the progressive movement had gotten the attention of both professionals and laypeople. Psychologist George Stanley Hall wrote of the difference between “fitt[ing] the child to the school” and “fitt[ing] the school to the child.” Hall’s work helped the public to view student-centered teaching in a positive light, “shift[ing] the focus of teaching to the student” (Cremin 103).

In the early 1900's, the individualist, progressive theories of Parker, Spencer and Hall were extended more fully with the ideas of John Dewey. Described as "distinctly American," Dewey's ideology appealed to many Americans because of its emphasis on individualism. The movement "espoused schooling as child centered, where creativity, self-expression, critical thinking, and individualism would be nurtured" (Berube 13). Dewey's conception of education as "development from within" led him to wonder whether students learned naturally or by submitting to "habits acquired under external pressure" (Dewey 1). Like Parker and Spencer, Dewey theorized that education began with the child, not the teacher. For Dewey, "the conscious effort of intelligence, or the acquisition of knowledge, [was] directed by an individual's understanding of his or her own needs" (Shannon 63), and it was essential to engage the child's interest and will.

Dewey desired a quality, holistic education for each individual child, and argued that traditional education did very little to serve the needs of each learner (Berube (a) 14). In the interests of fostering the "whole child," progressive teachers avoided making students memorize facts, instead wanting to develop "higher level critical thinking—development of a child's intellect, of a social sense, development of a moral sense, and development of an aesthetic sense" (Berube (b) 1). Although the teacher was responsible for the curriculum, the responsibility to learn was placed on the child, and learning was best achieved by doing. In the same way, the teacher could also learn by doing, and with such active learning, improve his or her craft by observing the needs and interests of the student and tailoring the curriculum to meet them. In this way, progressivism was more than just a teaching method; it was also a philosophy based on respect for each learner's unique qualities.

Although Dewey's progressive idea of education focused on the individual, it also recognized the importance of community and role of the individual in a democracy. Progressive classrooms reflected democratic principles including human rights, respect for difference, participation in decision-making, and responsibility to other members of the community. Educators part of the broader Progressive Movement argued that "democratic social arrangements" would best foster learning. The teacher's role, then, was "cooperative educator," not dictator. Progressive education sought to intentionally connect students' learning experiences with students' role as citizens in a democratic society (Dewey 59).

Progressivism's emphasis on "child-centered" learning brought with it the idea that every child learns best in his or her own way. However, in the early 1900's, another movement was influencing educational thought. In 1911, Frederick Taylor, a mechanical engineer, wrote *Principles of Scientific Management*, a book theorizing factory management and labor. Taylor observed workmen doing various tasks and then speculated about how tasks could be more perfectly performed, believing that the action of every worker in any job could be "reduced to a science." Insisting on maximum productivity, Taylor wrote that "among the various methods and implements used in each element of each trade there is always one method and one implement which is quicker and better than any of the rest." In other words, if a person had the best workers trained under the best circumstances, working with the best managers, tools, and conditions, it was possible to maximize output. This articulation of "one best way" was revolutionary, and introduced the idea of best practice to the industry as well as to society at large. In fact, Taylor did not limit these best practices to industry, stating that "fundamental

principles of scientific management are applicable to all kinds of human activities, from our simplest individual acts to the work of our great corporations, which call for the most elaborate cooperation” (Taylor). For Taylor, even teaching methods could be engineered to perfection with the help of science.

Ensuring the success of his plan, Taylor placed responsibility not on individual workers, but the managers. He felt that they should compile the knowledge that workmen previously possessed and then “classify, tabulate, and reduce this knowledge to rules, laws and formulae which are immensely helpful to the workmen in doing their daily work.” Taylor recommended that managers plan the workers’ jobs the day before, with each worker receiving “complete written instructions, describing in detail the task which he is to accomplish, as well as the means to be used in doing the work” (Taylor). Thus, it was essential that these managers not only clearly state goals for their workers, but also specifically direct how these goals would be fulfilled by each worker.

Hailing the “productivity” resulting from his “one best way” method, Taylor specified that the success of his method depended on not only substituting science for worker’s judgment but also “the intimate cooperation of the management with the workmen, so that they together do the work in accordance with the scientific laws which have been developed, instead of leaving the solution of each problem in the hands of the individual workmen” (Taylor). For Taylor, there was little faith in the workmen’s abilities to make decisions, but valid promise in the workmen’s abilities to be productive—provided they were suited for the job and had the best, most “scientific” direction.

Taylor argued that his “scientific methods” did not limit originality. He reasoned that, like a surgeon who is first trained and then allowed to “use his own originality and ingenuity to make real additions to the world’s knowledge,” the worker “cooperating with his many teachers under scientific management... has an opportunity to develop which is at least as good as and generally better than that which he had when the whole problem was ‘up to him’ and he did his work entirely unaided.” Taylor’s emphasis was on “science, not rule of thumb; harmony, not discord; and cooperation, not individualism,” not the autonomy of workers. Yet Taylor articulated a tension—between autonomy and community, represented by “individuality” within the context of the community of workers, especially when

each man performs the function for which he is best suited, each man preserves his own individuality and is supreme in his particular function, and each man at the same time loses none of his originality and proper personal initiative, and yet is controlled by and must work harmoniously with many other men. (Taylor)

It was in such tension between originality and harmony that Taylor recognized the productivity that was possible when each worker did exactly as directed.

Though Taylor never explicitly articulated his beliefs as a practice for schooling, it is still possible to apply his management theories to educational contexts. For example, Taylor’s insistence on “one best way” in all areas of life implied that it was possible—even for teachers—to use “one best way” in order to foster the greatest learning. Taylor’s emphasis on managers as decision makers could be seen as faith in the school administration to make the “best” decisions for teachers and students. In a Taylorist application to the schools, then, the administration provides the “best” curriculum, with



the “best” teachers using the “best” methods, resulting in maximum student learning. Today, this application is evident in the “highly qualified” rhetoric of No Child Left Behind mandates, the emphasis on “scientific” educational research (*viz* the National Reading Panel), uniform standards and common assessments.

At first glance, it seems that the ideas of John Dewey aren’t in agreement with Taylor’s, since Dewey believed in child-led learning with a “cooperative educator” (management from the bottom up) as opposed to Taylor’s administration-directed learning (management from the top down). However, that was not the position taken by Dewey, who, in fact, was influenced by Taylor. Indeed, Evelyn and John Dewey’s 1915 publication titled *Schools of Tomorrow* profiled a Gary, Indiana school that mirrored many of the democratic ideals espoused by both Dewey and Taylor.<sup>1</sup> Dewey actually believed in “one best way” in education, in the thought that “the findings of scientific psychology should ultimately control the methods to be used in the learning process of any discipline” (Hook xxxiv). Dewey also believed that “in a democratic society, all children have a right to the kind of schooling that will enable them to develop to the fullest reach of their desirable capacities” (xxxiv). For the Deweys, their Taylorist belief in the *right implements* resulting in students’ “fullest reaching” capacities placed them in line with some, but not all, of Taylor’s ideas.

The Gary Plan, an application of Deweyian philosophy within the context of the Gary, Indiana Public Schools, further illustrated the Deweys’ belief in Taylorist practices. In this particular school, which strove to prepare students properly for the workforce, classrooms were mini-factories, preparing students to reach their “desirable capacities” in

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<sup>1</sup> John Taylor Gatto’s *Underground History of American Education* (2001) led me to Dewey’s essay and emphasis on the Gary Plan.

industry. The Deweys suggested that “the ideal is not to use the schools as tools of existing industrial systems, but to use industry for the reorganization of the schools” (402). In other words, schools wouldn’t simply be preparing students for work in future industries; instead, by incorporating into schools the organizational and managerial ideas from industry, it was possible to prepare future workers while educating them at the same time—and benefit both areas simultaneously.

Exploring Taylorist principles in *Schools of Tomorrow*, John and Evelyn Dewey profiled William Wirt, the superintendent of Gary Public Schools. Similar to Taylor, Wirt believed that principals should act as managers of the schools. However, Wirt also believed that “school principals and supervisors have been too greatly handicapped” by being business as well as educational managers (326). Instead, Wirt proposed that “the school principal or superintendent should be a business manager, an administrative officer simply for the building or for the city. The educational policy of the schools, the program, and methods should be looked out for by experts who are free from the details of administration” (326). Thus, by leaving big decisions in the hands of “experts,” the Gary Public Schools definitely followed the manager-heavy style of Frederick Taylor.

Although many of the ideas described in the Deweys’ *Schools of Tomorrow* seem Taylorist, it is difficult to truly ascertain how the Deweys felt about all of the ideas of Frederick Taylor. However, it appears that they viewed the *structure* of the schools as just as important as the *style of instruction*. Their desire for industrial-minded schooling and a “one best way” managerial style seems to agree with the ideas of Taylor, but the Deweys also lamented the losses brought with modern industrialization. They critiqued “the machine worker...[who followed] blindly the intelligence of others instead of his

own knowledge of materials, tools and processes...” (359), taking issue with Taylor’s insistence that the worker trust the manager—or the teacher trust the curriculum specialist—for the best possible outcome. The Deweys also directed that workers “must have some understanding of the physical and social facts behind and ahead of the material and appliances with which they are dealing” (363), a position which would appear to oppose the rhetoric of Taylor, who advocated instead that the worker let the manager assess his strengths and assign all tasks, without the worker necessarily understanding the entire process. These tensions, between Progressive thought and Taylorism and evident in Dewey’s own writing, remain present in the best practice movement and language today.

Even with such tensions between Progressive thought and Taylorism, the progressive movement flourished until the 1950’s for a variety of reasons, one being that “the movement became a victim of its own success.” More specifically, progressive advocates became too rigid and “found themselves wedded to specific programs, unable to formulate next steps” (Cremin 349). In other words, the progressive movement, a movement based upon flexibility, failed to be progressive in its application and instead became prescriptively Taylorist.

Even in the face of the movement’s decline, progressive ideas were adopted by the Humanist movement which “[used] the Progressive philosophy of tending to children’s needs in education” (Wittenburg and Johnson 10). With the realities of Sputnik, post-1957 educational movements took a different direction. Leila Christenbury reports that some schools began emphasizing an elective curriculum in which “teachers selected, designed, and implemented the courses...” Based on student choice, the

curriculum seemed to engage and excite students more than traditional curricula (Christenbury 18). However, the elective program “withered and died” by that 1980’s, mostly due to “competency and accountability and what was touted as a return ‘back to the basics’” as well as teacher fatigue and a lack of administrative support. Christenbury notes that “issues of student and even teacher control, attention to student interest, and encouragement of creativity and innovation were not part of the 1980’s educational landscape,” with its emphasis on competency and “survival skills” (19-20). In other words, the elective program’s progressive sentiments, embodied in an emphasis on a student-centered curriculum, were overpowered by the accountability movement.

Although it is difficult to definitively say exactly when the phrase “best practice” emerged in educational discourse, a comprehensive review of scholarly literature suggests that the phrase “best practice” surfaced most prominently in education in the 1990’s. Steven Zemelman, Harvey Daniels and Arthur Hyde drew together what was then the “current, national consensus recommendations about ‘best educational practice.’” Their process of determining best practice paralleled the approaches of Taylor more than Dewey. Acting as Taylorist managers and gathering “all the traditional knowledge” in order to determine the “best” methods, these authors used “neutral,” “non-partisan”, “mainstream” sources to promote “research-based,” “state-of-the-art instruction.” Creating a “sixteen-page tabloid” titled “Best Practice 1,” they “printed 55,000 copies, and dropped 570 carefully addressed bundles—one for each school building in the city—on the loading dock at the Board of Education” (Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde vii). From such humble beginnings, this short “tabloid” has sold over 400,000 copies and generated a series of articles and books.

Zemelman, Daniels, Hyde and Marilyn Bizar utilize Taylorist language to assert that best practice in education is a movement based upon “solid, reputable, state-of-the-art work in a field.” Despite their series’ Taylorist origins, Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde claim that many of their best practices are based on Progressivism, utilizing “thirteen interlocking principles.” In fact, they specifically point out that their best practice ideals “can fairly be called a progressive resurgence. ANOTHER progressive resurgence” (16). Ultimately, Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde’s desire for progressive, best practice approach is to “[turn] the traditional transmission-model classroom upside down: students become active, responsible, and self-motivating learners, while the teacher drops the talking-head role in favor of more powerful functions as model, coach and collaborator” (Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde 201).

The *Best Practice* series seems undyingly progressive in its orientation. In fact, to these authors, Best Practice, a phrase they actually capitalize, describes an evolving educational process where teachers of all subjects are well-informed, flexible and leading classrooms that are “student centered, experiential, holistic, authentic, expressive, reflective, social, collaborative, democratic, cognitive, developmental, constructivist and challenging” (Daniels, Bizar, and Zemelman 13-14, 27). Connecting their best practice ideals to progressive principles, they point out that best practice’s depiction of reading as a cognitive, reflective activity constructed individually by children develops from Dewey’s emphasis on the natural ability of children to learn. Thus, it could appear that such an approach moves away from a Taylorist effort to simply train. Echoing Dewey’s emphasis on the student-centered classroom, Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde advocate for instruction that begins with the student’s own interests in mind. They state that

“schooling should be student-centered, taking its cues from young people’s interests, concerns and questions” (12). Not forgetting the Deweyian ideals of community and democracy, Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde point out that literacy is a socially-constructed activity and that collaboration is an essential part of a democratic best practice classroom (43-44). Affirming such community, Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde state, “children grow better amid rich and regular interaction, in classrooms where expression and collaboration are the norm, where there are many chances to read and write and talk with other readers” (58).

The *Best Practice* series by Zemelman, Daniels, Bizar and Hyde attempts to discourage the “one-size-fits-all” instruction akin to Taylorism. In fact, it encourages teachers to see their recommendations as “elements of a process and not as examples of perfection” (28), saying that “The teacher working daily with students knows most concretely what their specific needs, conditions and obstacles are” (269). However, even with this emphasis on “process, not perfection,” the series still goes into *practice* itself, directing teachers to specific best practice *strategies*. Such direction to practice is surprising, given that Dewey himself hailed against some of these formulas, saying the “the main test of learning is the ability of individuals to meet new social situations with habits of considered action,” directing that teachers should use progressive theories flexibly (Cremin 136). However, Zemelman, Daniels, Bizar and Hyde’s support for cognitive, reflective reading translates specifically into avoiding drill-and-fill reading guides in favor of literature circles, which encourage students to reflect on student-chosen texts in collaborative groups. In secondary English teaching, authenticity and choice are evident in the recommendation that “teachers must help students find real purposes to

write and real audiences to reach” (86) and with strategies such as allowing students to choose writing topics and publish writing in various community venues. Strategies that foster student-centeredness in the study of English may include considering the student’s point of view when choosing texts, ultimately allowing students a choice in what they read (Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde 57), or structuring writing assignments around a student’s interests or abilities. Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde also propose that English teachers “decrease round-robin oral reading,” which heighten anxiety and jeopardize “rich and regular” meaningful interaction with text, in favor of “silent reading followed by discussion,” which helps students to read at their own pace and collaborate on the text’s meaning (77). For a series that suggests that a good teacher is an “experimenter” (27), many of the *prescribed* practices seem more in line with the managerial style of Taylor rather than the more process-guided, progressive style of Dewey.

Other texts explore the concept of best practice and, similar to the *Best Practice* series, struggle to make distinctions between progressivism and Taylorist thought. One recent collection of writings, *Best Practice in Writing Instruction* edited by Steve Graham, Charles MacArthur and Jill Fitzgerald, provides clear-cut teaching methods based on “scientific research” with the goal to improve students’ writing. Contrasting with such direct prescription, *Best Practices for Literacy Instruction* acknowledges that “Good teachers of writing find themselves somewhere in the middle, borrowing the best from both product [Taylorist] and process [Progressive] approaches to develop writers who are fluent, competent, and independent” (Bromley 152). After detailing many standards that drive language arts instruction, the book’s editor, Karen Bromley, describes teachers who employ specific strategies such as rubrics, Writing Workshop,

and Author's Chair, and then suggests that writing teachers establish classrooms that "celebrate and encourage individuality, creativity, meaning, standard form and the conventions of language." Although Bromley lists all of these factors in Taylorist fashion, she also concedes that good teachers also "grow and change in their beliefs from year to year," giving much flexibility to her definitions of good teaching (160).

### Rethinking Best Practice Rhetoric

The Taylorist sentiments of best practice, with their "one best way" goals, raise serious concerns. The word "best" has an air of unquestioning authority, which is problematic given the great complexity of learning language arts skills. In addition, language arts teaching addresses a variety of goals simultaneously, including both skills and content, and entails working with students with different abilities, knowledge levels, and backgrounds. It is unlikely that any specific "best practices," when used formulaically, can "best" serve the needs of every student or reliably produce specific results. In fact, Gambrell and Mazzoni aptly state that "no matter how well a particular practice is shown to be effective by research, optimal assessment and instruction can only be achieved when skillful, knowledgeable, and dedicated teachers are given the freedom and latitude to use their professional judgment to make instructional decisions that enable each child to achieve their literary potential" (13). With this critique of Taylorist, top-down management, Gambrell and Mazzoni argue that decisions should be made by the workers themselves, specifically that professional teachers should decide which instructional practices are "best" given specific contexts and goals. And Peter Smagorinsky asserts,



I must consider the likelihood that there is no one best practice, even as my friends and I continue to write about the methods that we learned and built on through are studies and long relationship with Hillocks. For the right teacher in the right situation, we believe that these methods can produce some pretty powerful teaching; we still get enthusiastic responses when we present our ideas and materials, so something must be working. And yet the NCTE Annual Convention rooms are filled with sessions promoting other methods, so NCTE's diverse constituents are seeing their instructional needs met in many different ways. (20)

There are cultural critiques of best practices as well. While some “best practices” may be effective in many classrooms, “the very concept of universalized best practices is really a chimera in light of the wide body of research that conceptualizes learning as a profoundly cultural process” (Bailey and Pransky 20). Many “best practices,” with their Taylorist and Progressive roots, do not necessarily address the diverse learning needs of students in specific ethnic minority populations—populations with different cultural practices and expectations, failing to “embody the best practices of all communities and all peoples” (21). For example, although many professionally-acknowledged best practices extol the importance of constructivist ideas such as student ownership and choice, some culturally and linguistically diverse learners are “not oriented to [this approach]” (24). Ironically, Norman Dale Norris points to research from Jeanne Chall and Lisa Delpit that argues that “children from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to fare better when taught via more traditional, teacher-centered methods” (74).

There are further concerns with “best practice.” The word “best” implies an “end-of-the-road” approach to teaching, giving an air of finality instead of encouraging teachers to conduct classroom research on how to improve instruction and find *better* or alternative approaches beyond those suggested by the established best practice experts. For example, what if something better than literature circles surfaces in the secondary English classroom? Does this mean that literature circles are no longer “best” in favor of this new approach? Maja Wilson thinks along the similar lines, saying, “the word *promising* offers the possibility of exploration. The question would no longer be, ‘Are you following best practice?’ but ‘Are you exploring, discovering, and creating practices with promise?’” (xxii). Such a question draws on constructivist learning theory to propose that the nature of knowledge is not fixed, but plastic, reliant on the “active construction” of new teaching knowledge as new classroom situations present themselves. Although advocates of best practice may actually assert that new, more promising practices can be created, they may not realize that by drawing on state standards and “scientific research” in order to label certain instructional practices as “best,” they give their practices a “finished” quality, not necessarily encouraging teachers to “explore, discover, and create” as Wilson describes.

There exists a final concern with best practice: that it often fails to differentiate between best practice methods and mental processes. As stated previously, with some best practices, there is a discrepancy between a Taylorist “formula for success” (i.e. “Do the “best” methods—Writing Workshop, authentic assessment, Literature Circles, and your classroom will succeed”) and a teacher’s more general, progressive mental processes (such as a commitment to self-awareness, flexibility, and reflective teaching).

Certainly, best practice methods such as Writing Workshop have been considered to be successful through research in specific classrooms, but such research typically does not explore how a teacher's own mental processes (such as reflection) have contributed to the overall success of these "best" methods.

This difference, between methods and mental processes, is at times overlooked in favor of quick solutions. For example, in *Best Practice: Today's Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools*, Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde use an "increase/decrease" table to advocate for certain *methods*—not mental processes—for teachers, recommending that the teacher "increase time for independent reading" and "decrease exclusive emphasis on whole-class or reading-group activities" (77). Some teachers may have found that methods such as increasing independent reading will help students to become more literate; however, a teacher that fails to reflect on how to actually execute this independent reading time in the classroom—and revise the method in the future—might not necessarily ensure a student's success with this strategy. To illustrate, a teacher intent on a formulaic use of best practice could try to increase independent reading in her class and find a group of students who are off-task and uninterested. If this teacher is indeed non-self-reflective, a few things could happen: first, she could cancel independent reading without revising her methods to ensure that her students to read successfully. Second, the students could become disinterested and frustrated as well and dismiss independent reading entirely. On the other hand, it is possible that a teacher who utilizes mental processes such as reflection could try independent reading in his class and, after considering how the activity met or failed the teacher's expectations, and making needed changes for future use, succeed in fostering

meaningful literacy for his students. Gambrell and Mazzoni aptly stress the teacher's need to "bring principles into practice in a meaningful way for his or her particular community of learners" (13). It could be argued, then, that a teacher's own mental processes such as reflection could help a teacher develop more contextualized, user-specific best practice techniques such as literature circles and authentic assessment.

The importance of questioning and reflection has been articulated by other researchers. Richardson cites Bussis, Chittenden and Amarel when she notes that teachers improve their craft when they are "engaged in 'personal exploration, experimentation, and reflection'" (104). Vinz argues that "[engaging] in active questioning and reflection," teaching with a "spirit of inquiry" instead of "following...a recipe" are all successful parts of teaching. Furthermore, Vinz maintains that reflection gives teachers a "distinct opportunity for the development of insights about teaching" and helps teachers "rethink...assumptions and beliefs" (20). Janet Alsup also advocates that teachers reflectively inquire about their craft, "[asking] questions and then [searching] for answers in their own classrooms...basing practice on close observation and reflection." In addition, Alsup affirms that "teacher thinking and problem solving should be highly valued, especially when it leads to positive change" (73). And Arthur Applebee mentions "principled practice," which

challenges teachers to think about what is appropriate given the unique intersection that their classroom provides for their many and varied students; their beliefs about teaching and learning; the materials available for them to use; and the public, professional, and policy contexts in which they teach. The notion of

principled practice focuses on the *why* of teaching: why teaching methods work in particular ways in particular settings. (Smagorinsky 20)

In other words, Applebee does not advocate for absolute, cut-and-dried best practice approaches, but for practices based on a teacher's classroom situation—practices that require careful mental attention.

In acknowledging concerns with best practice and recognizing the value of certain mental processes such as reflection, it is probable that actual best practice methods could be prioritized over the mental processes that accompany their successful execution—and in this disconnect between concrete methods and mental processes lies the biggest concern with best practice instruction.

#### Derrida and Best Practice

At this point, many concerns with best practice have been explored, including best practice's alignment with progressive principles yet ironically recognizable relationship with Taylorism, the justification of best practice methods using Taylorist means, the implications of best practice's "end-of-the-road" approach and the difficulty in separating best practice methods from more important mental processes. Mary Klages articulates that with Derrida's theory of deconstruction, one looks for "binary pairs of oppositions—things that are supposed to stay neatly on their own side of a slash." In recognizing the progressive roots of best practice and Taylorism, and finding that elements of these seemingly opposite phenomena do not "stay neatly on their own side...", the structure of best practice has been deconstructed. Jacques Derrida would argue that at this point, we could discard the entire structure of best practice, saying that it's of no use, and attempt to construct another, perfect structure—one that doesn't have "inconsistencies" (Klages). It

is impossible, however, to build such a structure, as all structures are flawed—and will thus deconstruct—in one way or another.

Claude Levi-Strauss offers another option: to continue to utilize the structure of best practice, but to acknowledge its flaws. For Derrida, this means that we must not recognize the structure of best practice as an unquestioned truth, but instead, “to see that system as a system, as a construct, as something built around a central idea that holds the whole thing in place, even though that central idea...is flawed or even an illusion” (Klages).

Derrida uses the word “bricolage” to describe the use of a flawed system—the ability for a person to use “what’s there to get a particular job done.” Drawing on the concept of “tinker toys,” Klages explains the concept of bricolage helpfully:

Even though I may not have a complete set, and some of the parts are broken or don’t fit together any more, I don’t throw out the whole set and buy a new one (or a set of Legos); I keep playing with the tinker toys, and I can even incorporate things that aren’t from the original tinker toy set (such as legos, or alphabet blocks, or soup cans) to make what I want to make. That is bricolage. (Klages)

In our case, a “bricoleur” could be an informed, intentional teacher—one who carefully utilizes best practice methods while reflecting on these methods’ potential shortcomings, drawing on other methods or philosophies as different classroom situations arise. There is support for such bricolage; Sprinthall, Reiman and Sprinthall emphasize Huberman’s 1991 study of teachers, which found that good teachers, labeled as “positive focusers,” did not really participate in “schoolwide innovations” such as inservices, but rather “tinkered” – a word that connotes flexibility and, of course, bricolage—within the walls

of their own classrooms (679). And bricolage could certainly fall within the realm of constructivist thought, which recognizes the ability for individuals to draw upon existing knowledge, conversations, and experiences in order to create new solutions—new knowledge—for their classrooms.

#### Returning to the “Flawed” System of Best Practice and Exploring Other Options

In recognizing flaws of the best practice “system,” yet not completely discarding it, it is essential to recognize that exemplary teaching does not always necessitate the use of best practice methods, just as the use of best practice methods does not always result in exemplary teaching. Instead, exemplary teaching relies on a bricolage of carefully chosen methods. Thus, the simple, rote use of best practice methods is simply *not enough* for exemplary teaching. But this shortfall of simple best practice must be explored further, beginning with an exploration of the adoption and enactment of professionally-acknowledged best practices, as well as the mental processes that accompany such adoption and enactment.

At this point, Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers, authors of *Student Achievement Through Staff Development*, provide a helpful continuum of “levels of transfer” that describes a range of ways that teachers employ learned practices (102). This continuum can be applied to English teaching, and of course runs the risk of becoming a prescriptive gauge for teaching ability; however, the continuum can serve as a flexible tool, a lens, a way to better understand how certain best practice teaching methods are employed; it may also provide a window into the mental processes that accompany the transfer of knowledge in methods adoption.

At the bottom of Joyce and Shower's continuum is Level One, known as "imitative use." Imitative use is known to be *exact* replication of lessons that teachers have observed in a given setting, with imitations of these lessons *only* in that given setting. Such imitation is similar to Ruth Vinz's description of "replicating ideas" (9). For example, if a teacher were using a best practice-related method at the first level, she may have learned how to use clustering as a way to help students prewrite as part of Writing Workshop for a writing assignment, and would only use clustering with this assignment during every academic year. Level Two is labeled "mechanical use" or "horizontal transfer," and represents a teacher's ability to apply certain strategies to other, very similar situations. For the teacher employing the clustering method, this could mean deciding to try clustering for a memoir writing assignment, too, but with little variation in the instruction, guiding students through the activity in the same exact way as before. Known as "routine use," Level Three occurs when "certain activities, types of lessons, and objectives become identified with specific models of teaching." For example, the teacher may decide to use clustering for the "specific model" of prewriting with all writing assignments, but may not consider alternatives to clustering that could also work. Joyce and Showers say that a Level Three level of transfer could also be signified as the failure of "curriculum objectives" to be "thought of in other than a lower-order, concrete fashion." Thus, in this example, a teacher could see clustering as an activity solely for prewriting and nothing else. Moving higher on the continuum, Level Four is known to be "integrated use," and resembles bricolage. Joyce and Showers report that in Level Four, "the proportion of imitative to innovative, subject-specific use has become quite small." For instance, the teacher could use clustering in integrated ways similar to bricolage, such



as having students cluster their responses to each other's writing not only as a prewriting strategy but also as a peer-review strategy, yet still not understand why clustering works for certain students or when such a strategy might be most appropriate for classroom use. Finally, Level Five, or "executive use," is known to be "a complete understanding of the theories underlying the various models learned, a comfortable level of appropriate use for varieties of models of teaching, and the ability to select specific models and combinations of models for objectives within a unit as well as across subject areas." This may mean, then, that a teacher would know that Gabriele Rico created the concept of clustering as a way to wed brain research and writing instruction, would understand this brain research, and, in turn, comprehend why the clustering technique is effective for certain students, ultimately using this information to help guide the appropriate use of clustering in the future. This teacher would also understand the underlying theory and suitable use of alternative methods and, as an established, well-informed bricoleur, feel comfortable choosing from an array of techniques in order to arrive at exemplary instruction (102). The teacher could even disagree with some of Rico's findings and not completely embrace the concept of clustering altogether, but, using the act of bricolage, "tinker" with clustering for a variety of classroom tasks.

Although Joyce and Showers do not articulate as such, it is possible to apply their continuum when considering not only specific teaching practices, but larger approaches such as teaching concepts and philosophies. For example, a more imitative use of a concept such as student choice could mean that a teacher encourages students to choose a genre for a writing assignment without more executive, or expert, use, such as being

familiar with the philosophies of Nancie Atwell, who would advocate for student choice in other areas of the classroom as students choose their own texts for a reading workshop.

Used flexibly, not formulaically, the ideas of Joyce and Showers highlight a concept beyond the formulaic use of best practice methods: that such methods don't simply stand on their own, but can be integrated into other areas of instruction with a teacher's careful consideration. And while it may be significant that a teacher adopt certain best practices, the informed integration of such methods—including the bricolage and transfer of knowledge to other areas of classroom teaching—are of even greater importance.

Considering Joyce and Showers' continuum also brings the question of how teachers can be encouraged to not only adopt, but integrate or executively employ, best practices. Emphasizing the role of past experience in a teacher's chosen methods, some scholars cite past experience as influencing a teacher's chosen methods. Lortie labels this past experience as the "the apprenticeship of observation" (Hammerness et al 359). And Ruth Vinz emphasizes the importance of past experience when she acknowledges the "ghosts" that haunt teaching methods. She states that "what we saw, heard, appreciated, or resisted in our own school experiences with teachers must have an effect on our beliefs and practices" (5). Vinz even describes teaching methods as undoubtedly historical, "comprised by the stock of experiences that informs it," and emphasizes that all of teachers' past experiences—including how teachers themselves have been taught—contribute to their own understanding of the craft. Including in her list of past experiences "what the teachers learned from other teachers, what those other teachers learned from their experiences, and what has been appropriated from others," Vinz

emphasizes the hybridity and social nature of teacher knowledge, and asserts that “teaching engenders a continual contestation beyond teachers’ present and future knowledge—challenging, mixing, testing and ultimately transgressing what the teacher knows ‘how to do’ or has ever done before” (168). It is certain that this study’s consideration of such hybridity—such past experience, especially considering a teacher’s past educational experiences—can shed light on how teachers decide to use best practice methods for their own classrooms.

Other scholars suggest a variety of ways that they believe it would be best for teachers to learn, or unlearn, certain teaching practices. They often do so paying scant attention to how teachers, do, in fact, actually learn new methods. For example, there is the question of formal training by way of the methods course. Smagorinsky and Whiting cite the purpose of methods courses as “[providing] a positive experience for preservice English teachers” (100). Such a purpose seems a bit naïve to English educators who see the English methods course as a non-negotiable part of methods adoption. However, Hammerness and his colleagues point out Simon’s (1980) observation that “there is a major difference between ‘knowing that’ and ‘knowing why and how’” (359). One purpose of this study is to examine how undergraduate and preservice experiences, especially methods courses, influence the adoption of best practices.

There is also the question of ongoing formal training, for example district-mandated inservices and graduate-level methods courses. Some researchers assume that inservices and continuing studies can dramatically impact a teacher’s development. As stated before, Huberman’s study of teachers emphasized “tinkering” over “schoolwide

innovations.” This study, therefore, will attempt to determine how formal training affects teachers’ adoption of best practices.

Yet another aspect of the adoption of certain methods involves the value of mental processes such as reflection, which is discussed earlier in this chapter. This emphasis on teacher reflection as the source of teachers’ methods has been a focus for scholars for a number of years. Dewey argued that “genuine interest on the part of the individual” is an “essential part of reflective thought” (Ross 187). In 1998, Paulo Friere iterated that teacher development has little to do with correcting mistakes time and again; instead, “humble and open, teachers find themselves continually ready to rethink what has been thought and to revise their positions.” In other words, teachers’ willingness to flexibly inquire about their craft ultimately contributes to their development, and “their learning lies in their seeking to become involved in their students’ curiosity and in the paths and streams it takes them through” (52). This collective affirmation for self reflection for teachers cements its importance for teacher development; however, it is still unclear just how this reflection affects the adoption of best practice methods.

With more than 200 sites on U.S. college campuses and 135,000 participants annually, a well-established source of best practice-related teacher knowledge is the National Writing Project (NWP), which was founded in 1974 in order to “[make] central the knowledge, leadership, and best practices of effective teachers [as well as promote] the sharing of that knowledge with other teachers” (US Fed News Service; National Writing Project). The NWP highlights various sources of teacher knowledge, including “theory and research, the analysis of practice, and the experience of writing,” and espouses a teacher-as-writer philosophy and stresses the importance of “ongoing

opportunities for teachers to...examine theory, research and practice together systematically” with a community-based, collaborative “teachers-teaching-teachers” model. Utilizing a “Summer Institute” which serves as an intense demonstration of process-based, teacher-as-writer approaches, the NWP also relies on ongoing opportunities such as in-school teaching demonstrations from NWP “fellows” as well as teacher support groups in order to provide ongoing teacher development. The NWP is not wedded to specific teaching approaches, and believes that “there is no single approach to teaching writing; however, some practices prove to be more effective than others.” While the NWP is a significant source of knowledge for many teachers (including the exemplary teachers profiled in this study), it is difficult to determine how the Summer Institute and various philosophies and practices of the NWP affect the adoption of best practice methods.

Beyond past experiences, preservice training, ongoing training, reflection, and the National Writing Project, there are other factors that may surface when considering how exemplary teachers adopt best practice methods. This study will explore these further influences, including administrative and collegial support, a teacher’s existing curriculum, professional literature, modeling, a teacher’s sense of identity, metacognition, and a teacher’s views on how knowledge is created.

### Proposal and Research Questions

While recognizing the shortfalls of rote best practice instruction yet acknowledging the value of integrating such instruction through bricolage, this study aims to examine exemplary English teachers’ practices closely and utilize the ideas of Joyce and Showers, considering how these teachers adopt and revise best practice-based

methods as well as transfer their knowledge of these practices to other areas of their classroom teaching. This study also explores the role of specific factors that help or hinder exemplary English teachers as they adapt and transfer knowledge of such approaches. Thus, if the goal of exemplary teaching is not simply adopting certain methods (and using them imitatively) but also deliberately integrating them into other appropriate areas of instruction, we must examine several questions:

1. What factors encourage an exemplary teacher to adopt certain approaches that are deemed “best practices?”
2. Once an exemplary teacher adopts certain best practices, how does the teacher integrate knowledge of such methods with other areas of classroom teaching?
3. What factors affect the integration of certain best practice methods into other areas of instruction?

Examining how exemplary teachers adopt specific methods will provide context as the integration of such practices is also explored. Since Joyce and Showers’ continuum runs the risk of a more standardized, less qualitative assessment, utilizing the *spirit* of the continuum (i.e. are the practices and beliefs transferred imitatively or have they reached a more integrated level of use?) can help when examining such practices and beliefs closely.

### Overview of Chapters

As this dissertation’s methodology, Chapter Two utilizes current qualitative research recommendations to describe the research methodology for the classroom research component of this study. Included is a sound rationale for various aspects of the

research design, including subject selection, data analysis, and communication of the study's findings.

Titled *Project-Driven Change*, Chapter Three details how Gary arrived at some of his best practice-based approaches, investigating certain factors that helped or hindered his decision to adopt these methods.

Chapter Four, titled *Integrating Gary's Practice*, provides descriptive vignettes in order to describe Gary's writing and literature instruction. Analysis sections follow these vignettes, exploring Gary's integration of certain best practice approaches. The chapter concludes by investigating certain factors that have helped or hampered such integration.

Chapter Five, titled *New Teacher, New Practice*, describes how Rebecca adopted some of her best practice-based approaches while considering how certain factors influenced this adoption.

Titled *Integrating Rebecca's Practice*, Chapter Six describes Rebecca's best practice methods through descriptive vignettes. As with Chapter Four, analysis sections follow these vignettes, accounting for Rebecca's integration of certain best practice approaches. The chapter concludes by investigating certain factors that have encouraged or discouraged Rebecca's integration.

Chapter Seven, titled *Best Practice Adoption in Alternative Settings*, details how Cheryl arrived at some of her best practice-based approaches, exploring certain factors that helped or hindered this decision to adopt such methods.

Chapter Eight, titled *Integrating Cheryl's Practice*, provides a descriptive vignette in order to describe Cheryl's writing and literature instruction. Analysis sections follow this vignette, exploring Cheryl's integration of best practice approaches in her alternative

setting. The chapter concludes by investigating certain factors that have assisted with—or blocked—Cheryl’s integration.

Chapter Nine, titled *Beyond Methods: Summary*, reviews the purpose and methodology of the dissertation, summarizes the dissertation’s main findings, and then considers how these findings might be applied in the field of English education. The chapter also acknowledges the study’s shortcomings and considers possibilities for future research.

As Ruth Vinz states, “who will have the knowledge for ‘enhancing the capacity of all teachers’? Will the responsibility for ‘professionalizing’ teachers be kept out of their hands?” (127). By focusing on real teachers, their educational contexts, the adoption and integration of their methods, and data that reflects their authentic perspectives, it is hoped that this teacher-focused study—a study that relies on many of the experiences of, and influences on, exemplary secondary English teachers—will actively create new knowledge, changing the classrooms of teachers and students alike.



## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

Having reviewed the research on best practice as well as the transfer of knowledge of teaching practices, this chapter moves to an explanation of the methods utilized for the qualitative classroom research component of this study which involved interviews with a National Writing Project director, three teachers, classroom observations, and student questionnaires in order to examine the use of best practice methods and their integration across classroom teaching. From its inception to its completion, this study was carried out with consideration for the type of research, research paradigm, type of study, context, participants, data collection, methods of analysis, dissemination of research, and terminology.

#### Type of Research, Research Paradigm, and Type of Study

I chose a primarily qualitative study because especially in educational research I am skeptical of “pure objectivity” and, like Hatch, believe that all situations are “unique, dynamic and complex” (9). I also believe in the dialogical nature of knowledge—that it is necessary for the researcher to avoid presenting themselves as simply “find[ing] the truth and mak[ing] pronouncements on it,” but instead, as Donald Murray suggests, framing discoveries as part of a “continuous professional conversation” (qtd. in Hatch 221). My focus is on interaction with others, including initial interviews, classroom observations and follow-up interviews. I have attempted to avoid reducing participants “to an isolated variable or to a hypothesis,” as quantitative research may do, but instead, as Bogdan and Taylor suggest, to view the study’s “settings and the individuals within those settings holistically” (Hatch 6). While I did use some quantitative data when

considering student questionnaire results, this quantitative information was carefully triangulated with the study's more comprehensive teacher interviews and observations. Throughout this mostly qualitative study, it was essential to analyze data critically, and at the same time view my participants sympathetically given the enormous challenges and lack of support that each of them face.

While I was familiar with a wide variety of possible research paradigms, many of them skeptical of "pure objectivity," my work was primarily constructivist, assuming that "multiple realities exist that are inherently unique because they are constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage points" (Hatch 15). Constructivism also "assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretive understanding of subjects' meanings" (Charmaz 510). My research was based in an interaction of perspectives, including the teachers' perspectives and self-analysis as communicated by interview, as well as my observations and field notes on these teachers' practices. I found that the data from interviews and observations emerged fluently in the form of short, descriptive vignettes; this is not unlike Hatch's assertion that

knowledge produced within the constructivist paradigm is often presented in the form of case studies or rich narratives that describe the interpretations constructed as part of the research process. Accounts include enough contextual detail and sufficient representation of the voices of the participants that readers can place themselves in the shoes of the participants at some level and judge the quality of the findings based on criteria other than those used in positivist and postpositivist paradigms. (16)

This study's type is in line with what Hatch would categorize as "participant observation" for several reasons, including the time allotted for the study, the study's specific questions, and the approach's emphasis on experimentation. For example, unlike the broader scope and "extended periods of time doing fieldwork" required of ethnography, my study required specific interview questions as well as field observations over a short and focused time period. As a researcher, I "[entered] the field with specific interests...and specific questions." Participant observation's "tighter focus" allowed me to "do fieldwork on interesting and important topics without spending the time required to do and write full-blown ethnographies." This approach allows researchers to draw on the basic tenets of ethnography and experiment with and refine methods of collecting and reporting on data (Hatch 22).

### Context and Participants

Since this study relied on the perceptions and practices of exemplary teachers, I recruited subjects carefully, following guidelines set forward in a HSIRB-approved proposal. The goal was to identify teachers that had, in some way, been recognized as "exemplary," themselves likely using recognized "best practice" methods. Based on consultation with my committee, I contacted the National Writing Project (NWP) director in Grand Rapids, Michigan. One of the leading organizations supporting best practice teaching in teacher professional development, the NWP is especially relevant to research in secondary English. Because participation in the NWP is on a volunteer basis, identification of teachers using "best practices" would avoid the professional power dynamics that might exist if school administrators were invited to select "best practice teachers." If the NWP director identified an exemplary teacher and that teacher declined

to participate in the study, there would be few, if any, repercussions for the relationship between the director and the teacher. For these reasons, I contacted the local National Writing Project site director, explained my study, and asked him to identify several exemplary Writing Project teachers that, in his opinion, used “best practice.” The director was able to identify several teachers as well as reflect on what made them “exemplary.” It was this method of chain sampling (asking an informant to identify another subject) with a desire for an intensity sample (consisting of “individuals who manifest the phenomenon [of being exemplary] intensely...”) that led me to three exemplary local English teachers (Hatch 98).

The teachers recruited for this study were assigned pseudonyms; identifying details from their schools or National Writing Project sites were changed. That being said, the three participants were from several different contexts in the greater Grand Rapids area: Gary taught at a large, mostly white, middle-class, suburban school, Rebecca at a small, mostly white, middle-class, middle school, and Cheryl at an urban alternative high school. Although my sample size was small, it was diverse. More specific details on each of these contexts have been incorporated into later chapters.

One consequence of identifying teacher subjects in this way was that this study ends up closely identifying “best practice” with some of the philosophies and practices that have resulted from teachers’ involvement with the National Writing Project. Such examination could be of value to the NWP: if the study identified certain aspects of the NWP that strongly influenced a teacher’s adoption of best practices, such information could provide validation for existing practices or even make a case for strengthening these practices further. In addition, the study’s sole focus on NWP-identified exemplary

teachers could mean that exemplary teachers outside of the NWP were excluded from the study.

### Data Collection

With such a small sample size, it is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of each participant's background, perceptions and classroom practices. Therefore, throughout my data collection phase, I focused on only one subject at a time, first conducting and transcribing an initial interview, then making classroom observations, and finally conducting and transcribing a follow-up interview. It was only after finishing each follow-up interview that I moved to the initial interview with my next participant. (Some specific follow-up questions were also asked of the teacher subjects during the writing phase of the dissertation as set forward in the modified HSIRB proposal attached as Appendix A.)

My initial interviews could be classified as formal because they were “planned events that [took] place...for the explicit purpose of gathering information from an informant,” and they were tape recorded for complete transcription (Hatch 94). Despite the “formal” nature of these interviews, they were flexible in that I had guiding questions, but asked impromptu follow-up questions depending on the nature of my participants' answers. Guiding questions included, but were not limited to:

- Tell me about your own journey into teaching, and what has made you into the teacher you are today.
- How would you describe your teaching style? Would you say it's effective? How do you know?
- How would you define best practice?

- Do you use any methods that could be described as “best practice”? How do you know that these methods are “best practices”? Do you feel as though they actually are best practices?
- How do your students/colleagues/administration/own professional development opportunities influence your teaching methods?

After each interview was completed, I transcribed it and then conducted an analysis that included reading through these transcripts multiple times, noting any emerging themes in the margin of the page. I used these notes to guide my classroom observations of my participants. For example, if a teacher mentioned certain methods that made up his or her teaching style, I noted that I should look for ways that the teacher executed these methods during my classroom observations. I also noted further questions for each participant so that I could ask these questions in follow-up interviews.

Initial interviews were followed by classroom observations, which took place for a half day, every day, for five days. This amounted to around 15 observation hours per participant, or 45 hours total. During these classroom observations, my goal was to “capture naturally occurring activity.” With my desire to gather “natural” data, I took on a role that Wolcott would likely term “limited participant”; I did not interact with students or the teacher other than for normal, non-research conversation (Hatch 73). As a constructivist researcher, I acknowledge the role of my own perceptions especially at the classroom observation stage of my data collection. Hatch notes that especially in observations, “Our own perspectives color what we see and when we look. We decide what settings to study, what to pay attention to, and what to write down—all interpretive acts.” In response, I produced what Wolcott would describe as “reportable data”—data

“recorded in sufficient detail that you can report it verbatim” (qtd. in Hatch 79). Thus, in this teacher-focused study, I focused mainly on each teacher, recording relevant teacher-driven data: the classroom setup, the teaching script, the responses to students, and what was written on the board. I also collected teacher-created artifacts such as handouts and quizzes. Similar to my brief analysis of initial interviews, I read through my observations multiple times, noting any emerging themes in the margin of the page. Taking careful field notes that addressed each teacher’s words, classroom arrangement, responses to students, and artifacts yielded rich data—data that, when read carefully and analyzed, directed me to carefully-triangulated conclusions as well as questions for follow-up interviews.

Follow-up interviews took place during the week after classroom observations so that any classroom practices that needed explanation would still be fresh in the participants’ minds. Questions resulting from initial interviews and classroom observations guided these interviews. While each interview varied, it was common for guiding questions to ask participants to comment on the source of certain methods, or define and comment on certain terms used while they were teaching. Also, at the time of the first follow-up interview, I had begun to incorporate a more deconstructive criticism of best practice into my review of literature. Anticipating that I might need to recognize this at some point in the dissertation, I added “Are there times when you feel that “best practice” is not best for your classroom?” to my list of guiding questions.

A final portion of the classroom study included student data. The HSIRB approved the use of anonymous student questionnaires for this study (See Appendix B). These questionnaires allowed me to briefly gather data—mostly data involving student-

centeredness—in order to triangulate data gleaned from interviews and observations. These questionnaires were innocuous, anonymous, and administered by a volunteer a week after my observations and interviews concluded, so there was no chance of the classroom teacher learning of students’ individual responses (and therefore very little student risk). The results of this student data are the only aspect of this dissertation that is quantitative; however, such quantitative data has served to add valuable perspective to the conversation and triangulate—or challenge—existing research hunches. Results for each research subject can be found in the “Student Decision-making” sections of Chapters Four, Six and Eight.

With the close, careful analysis that followed participant interviews and observations, an important focus emerged: the consistent use of best practice, mainly in the areas of literature and writing. Arriving at this theme pushed me to research teacher development and led me to Joyce and Showers’ ideas regarding the transfer of knowledge. Due to this emerging focus, I analyzed the interviews and classroom observations more carefully and arrived at new conclusions, including the importance of teacher identity and metacognition in the overall transfer of teaching knowledge. However, I needed to confirm this new theme before I moved forward to write about the results. I also found that I needed to contextualize my vignettes and thus desired more background information about how the teachers prepared for, and ended, their works of literature. Therefore, I drafted and gained approval for a follow-up study that asked teachers to answer several questions by email. This email contained the following questions:



- When did you first become familiar with using the process approach to writing (prewriting, drafting, revising, publishing, etc.)? Be sure to clarify whether it was when you were a student or teacher.
- When did you first learn how to teach the process approach to writing?
- Has using the process approach affected other areas of your classroom (such as your teaching of literature)? If so, how?
- How did you introduce the ideas in *Brave New World*/ *The Giver*/ *House on Mango Street* to your students (before starting the novel) last year? Please describe any activities/handouts/discussions you employed.
- Please describe how you ended *Brave New World*/ *The Giver*/ *House on Mango Street* with your students (any projects/papers/tests) last year.
- Do you feel that reflecting on your teaching approaches affects your teaching? If so, how? If not, why not—and how do you know? Please explain.

All three teachers replied to my email with detailed answers—many of which validated previous findings. At this point in the study, when I was confirming conclusions, I was especially fortunate to “co-construct” data with them in constructivist fashion.

With data collection comes the idea of reciprocity—the idea that while I gathered valuable data from interviews and classroom observations, the teachers also gained something from their participation. In this study, the participants benefited in several ways. At the individual level, the time spent in interviews provided the opportunity for teachers to reflect on their practices, contexts, and own reflective habits. In other words, my conversations with participants provided metacognitive space. At the practitioner level, this study’s findings advocate for teachers in a variety of ways by emphasizing

needed support and resources for teachers in similar circumstances. It is my hope that this study's findings and implications will foster beneficial change at the institutional, administrative and policy levels.

### Data Analysis

While some of my methods of analysis are briefly described in the section above, more specific details about my data analysis need to be shared. Three overarching data analysis methods were used in this study: typological, inductive, and written.

Hatch quotes Le Compte and Preissle when he describes typological analysis as “dividing everything observed into groups or categories on the basis of some canon for disaggregating the whole phenomenon under study (257). In other words, typological analysis moves from the general to the specific, first finding themes and then looking for confirmation and challenges to that data. In my case, I began with very general information about best practice from my interviews and observations; reading through them carefully, noting emerging themes, reviewing emerging themes between subjects, and *then* arriving at an actual focus for my data (e.g. the presence of best practices in the participants' methods); such an approach was more typological. However, once I began researching transfer of knowledge, I found that I had a loose, yet predetermined, typology: Joyce and Showers' continuum. Thus, while I used typological analyses to arrive at the presence of best practice, I used more inductive analysis when considering where certain teachers' practices might fall on the continuum, or looking specifically for what helps or hinders a teacher's adoption or integration of certain best practices. Given the role of mental processes in the executive level of transfer, and because it was difficult to determine teachers' specific mental processes and thus conclude that specific practices

had reached executive use, it became more plausible to consider whether a teacher's method had reached integrated use.

My own writing process played an integral part in my data analysis. Writing about the themes that emerged as I analyzed data helped me to see these ideas in print and provided a recursive space where the data and my interpretation of it could join. As I wrote, certain themes became more apparent, encouraging me to go back to the data to confirm the themes. In this way, writing itself provided much-needed mental space as I wrote up my results, examined my writing, noticed more emerging themes, went back to the data for validation, and continued in revising my writing.

#### Selection in Terminology of Influences and Methods

When writing about the study's results, it was necessary to narrow the scope of the data as the study considered factors that informed exemplary teachers' adoption and integration of best practice methods. Thus, the factors that consistently emerged in each participant's story helped to focus and clarify data, especially when reporting results. Definitions of each of these factors are as follows:

*Undergraduate/Preservice Experiences:* Any pre-teaching experience. Examples include experiences as a secondary student, experiences in an undergraduate literature course, methods course experiences, and teaching internships.

*Self-reflection:* The act of considering whether certain teaching approaches have succeeded or failed; may include thoughts on reasons for such success or failure. Examples may include a teacher reading final multigenre projects, considering the quality of writing, and then arriving at ways to change the project for the future as a result of such consideration.

*Administrative/Collegial Support:* Support from supervisors such as principals or superintendents as well as from other teachers. Such support may include allowing a new approach to be piloted in the district, purchasing needed materials, or offering new ideas and resources as part of a professional learning community.

*Existing Professional Materials:* The curriculum, professional development, or assessment materials available—and perhaps required—when a teacher begins his or her job in a district. An example could include the Six Traits writing curriculum that some schools implement.

*Professional Literature:* Material such as books, blogs, and practitioner journal articles that aim to help teachers improve their teaching approaches. An example could include *English Journal*, published monthly by NCTE.

*Modeling:* The act of demonstrating a particular teaching approach for others. May include the desire (and requirement) that observers to enact a similar approach after modeling.

*Identity:* The way that a teacher views herself, whether it be as a teacher, writer, reader, or student.

*Metacognition:* Involves examining one's habits as part of identity. May require that a teacher first construct that identity (considering what a writer is, for example), then take on that identity, and then closely examine his or her behavior within that identity. For example, *metacognition* could include a teacher identifying himself as a writer and then closely examining his own writing habits.

*Knowledge-based world view:* A teacher's opinions, whether stated or implied, about how knowledge is generated. For example, a constructivist believes that

knowledge is not a fixed concept, but rather, that people are “active creators” of their own knowledge, “reconciling” this new knowledge with “previous ideas and experiences, maybe changing what [they] believe, or maybe discarding the new information as irrelevant” (Thirteen Ed Online). In contrast, an objectivist world view assumes that knowledge is “some entity existing independent of the minds of individuals.” Known to be the opposite of constructivism, the objectivist perspective assumes learners to be “empty vessel[s], to be filled by the instructor” (Objectivism, Edutech Wiki).

In addition to narrowing and defining factors that influence the adoption and integration of best practice methods, it was also necessary to more carefully choose the very methods to analyze for integration. Because this study recruited National Writing Project participants, it was possible to focus on approaches that participants may have learned, or were more fully supported to use, as a result of their involvement with the National Writing Project’s Summer Institute or ongoing professional development opportunities. These approaches emerged in the participant data, and definitions of each of these approaches are as follows:

*Process-based approaches to the teaching of writing/literature:* The idea that reading and writing are not fixed, predictable, formulaic acts but are instead informed—and structured by—a variety of other processes, including personal identification with a topic or text, comprehension, collaboration, teacher opinion, and opportunities to share the final result with others. An example would include the writing process, which includes varying combinations of prewriting, drafting, revising, collaborating, and publishing. While the writing process is an idea with comprehensive research support, reading as process is a less familiar concept. However, the collaborative, constructivist

notion of Reader Response approaches to literature as well as the idea of literature as workshop have been explored by Sheridan Blau in *The Literature Workshop*. The idea of reading as process may include pre-reading activities, re-reading activities, and collaborative meaning-making activities that employ a Reader Response approach to literature.

*Student decision-making:* Giving choices to students. For example, a teacher may encourage students to choose a writing topic or new book to read.

*Low-risk approaches:* While low-risk may seem to connote the idea of not taking risks, the opposite is accurate. Low risk approaches seek to minimize students' *perceived* risk, helping them to try new things—even in the face of possible failure. Low-risk approaches seek to help students feel comfortable in trying these new things, and an example could include encouraging a student to interpret a text with a new mode of criticism. In addition, low-risk does not mean low expectations; this study will look for teaching that encourages students toward reading, writing and thinking that challenges them in meaningful ways.

#### Dissemination of Results

As I wrote up the results of this study, I employed several genres. For describing how my participants initially adopted certain best practice methods, I found that narratives helped with such description. Following such narratives, I discovered that brief sections that examined each kind of contribution (such as a section that examines the contribution of administrative support in the adoption of Gary's best practice methods) helped organize data and answer research questions. I noticed that a similar approach was helpful in the "integration of best practice" chapters. For these chapters, I

employed short, descriptive vignettes of classroom practice, followed by brief sections that examined each research category and summarized findings. Overall, these succinct sections—whether narratives or vignettes—are followed by concise analytic sections, which not only help to organize data carefully but also work toward a cogent argument.

### Toward the Study's Results

Having described the research paradigm, type of study, context, participants, data collection, methods of analysis, dissemination of research, and terminology of this study, the next chapter moves to an examination of the first of three research subjects, Gary. This chapter will narrate Gary's adoption of best practice methods and conclude with a thorough examination of the factors that helped or hindered such adoption.

## CHAPTER III

### PROJECT-DRIVEN CHANGE

Beginning with a narrative that details how Gary learned about best practice-related teaching approaches, this chapter explores factors that helped or hindered Gary's adoption of best-practice approaches. Chapter Four examines how Gary transfers these methods to other areas of his instruction.

#### Gary's Teaching Journey

Gary's adoption of writing-related teaching approaches depended on his teaching context, his preservice training, and his involvement with the National Writing Project. Crucial to this process has been Gary's reflection, administrative and collegial support, professional literature, modeling, identity and metacognition. The narrative is shared from his point of view, looking backward from the present, during the interview.

#### *Context and Undergraduate Training*

Gary has been teaching for ten years in a middle-class, suburban high school—the very school he attended as a secondary student. Labeled “blue-ribbon” by the State Board of Education for “outstanding improvement strategies,” the school is located next to electronic superstores, fine clothiers and specialty grocery shops. Of the approximately 1900 students at Gary's school, ninety percent are Caucasian, four percent are Hispanic, three percent are African American, and three percent are Asian. Thirteen percent of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Gary teaches College Literature, College Writing, and Freshmen English; his classes range from 17 to 28 students.

Gary's teacher training began at a small-town, liberal arts college, where he learned “great stuff” but mostly “old school instruction,” described by Gary as simply



being lectured about the latest educational research, not actually discussing or enacting it. According to Gary his undergraduate training did not include challenging old approaches or modeling new ones. At this institution, Gary became familiar with the idea of the writing process, but saw it as a formulaic checklist, thinking, “I’ve done prewriting and drafting; now it’s time for revising.” His student teaching experience involved ten weeks in a high school classroom and seven weeks in a middle school classroom; both classrooms espoused what Gary described as “traditional” approaches, with “assigned” writing. While Gary says that he “got some excellent mentorship in the areas of relating to students and classroom management,” he learned very little about “the latest research in best practices or writing philosophy...”

#### *Teaching Realities and Reflections*

When Gary was hired after graduation, his department had adopted the John Collins writing curriculum, which encouraged teachers to focus their attention on certain grammar mistakes, otherwise known as Focus Correction Areas, and categorize writing by specific levels of formality, from Type One (a rough, low-risk draft) to Type Five (publishable writing). This technique was new to Gary, but he did learn to use it in his classroom. Gary says that he “gave lip service to process writing,” stating that this mechanical routine usually consisted of “Today is drafting day. Tomorrow your rough draft is due, and then we’ll peer conference by having you check off a very formulaic list of all of the things I’ve asked you to do.” Gary also described his classes as “lit class[es] [where] we would do the five-paragraph essay and little bit of kill and drill with the grammar stuff.”

After several years of teaching with this curriculum and becoming critical of its “programmed” nature, Gary spent time reflecting on his teaching. He says, “I got to the point that I thought, ‘Okay, I don’t think this is really good, but I just don’t know what else to do.’” Although he could recognize the faults in his teaching approaches, Gary was unsure how to remedy the situation.

Needing direction at this point, Gary states that he could have gotten help from “more experienced teachers” in his department. However, Gary points out that these teachers were responsible for the current curriculum, were accustomed to teaching the same way year after year, and to Gary, seemed focused on giving their students exams that mirrored MEAP [Michigan Educational Assessment Program] questions.

Seeking help from administrators was also a possibility Gary considered, but in Gary’s eyes, these administrators also affirmed MEAP-directed instruction, focusing almost exclusively on higher scores. Gary describes pressure from administrators, saying that he had to make his instruction and assessment “look like the MEAP and help prepare kids for the MEAP.” Considering this focus on the MEAP, Gary did not find his administrators to provide direction on how to revisit—or revise—his methods.

Continuing to search for ways to teach in less “programmed” ways, Gary tried professional literature, including reading articles in *English Journal*. Gary shares that ultimately, he would think, “Oh, that would never work for me” when trying to contextualize the suggestions he encountered. In a pedagogical crisis, and, in his mind, lacking support from colleagues, administrators and professional literature, Gary thought, “I don’t know what to do with this; I know what I’m doing is not completely working, but I’m not sure how to fix it.”

### *Turning the Corner*

It was at this time that Gary took a graduate class, a writing methods course taught by the director of a local site of the National Writing Project. The instructor taught the course using many of the workshop approaches suggested in texts like Atwell's *In the Middle*. Gary reports that the class required him to read and write “interesting things” that couldn't be communicated in a simple five-paragraph essay. Gary believes he had a chance to invest himself in his writing as he wrote about subjects that he cared about, in the spirit of Atwell's suggested approaches. At this point, Gary realized that having his students read and write interesting essays, poems, stories, and journal entries—things beyond the five-paragraph essay—was also possible.

Gary shares that after this graduate class, he recognized that there were alternatives to the traditional modes of instruction he had been using. At the same time, Gary acknowledged the reality of his context as a “very structured system where I have to get through this many stories.” His colleagues had established a prescribed curriculum and his administration required common, MEAP-driven assessments, and now he desired to “tweak” his teaching practices. Gary's senior literature class saw a few minor changes. For example, his students wrote more often in response to literature, and could also choose which essay they wanted to turn in for final grades, as Gary attempted to foster an atmosphere of student ownership. Still, Gary says that he felt little freedom to revise other classroom approaches because it would be difficult to “get all six people [in his department] to agree to this change.”

### *More Extensive Changes*

Continuing to earn graduate credit hours required for his Michigan professional teaching certificate, Gary enrolled in the National Writing Project's Summer Institute. Describing this experience as an "incredibly intrinsic motivation of three free credits," Gary says that he "stumbled upon the best professional experience in his career by chance." A four week opportunity described as "summer camp for teachers," the Institute allowed Gary to nurture his writing abilities, be part of a writing community of other teacher-writers, and read and discuss professional literature related to the teaching of writing. For Gary, the National Writing Project was a "transformative force" in his teaching, helping him realize the value of a flexible writing workshop rather than a structured, formulaic way to teach writing.

Gary's transformation to "writer and writing teacher" meant that he could not, "in good conscience," continue to teach as he had. Called to action, Gary says that he telephoned his principal at home during the Institute, sharing his excitement over new, "research-based" practices. Gary then asked his principal if he could "go off the grid as far as what everybody else [was] doing," "try these changes and see how they work," and, overall, "pilot" the teaching approaches encouraged by the Summer Institute. Saying that Gary needed to talk to the department and get their approval for such change, "with the idea that down the road this is reform that everybody can buy into," Gary's principal gave his consent. Then, Gary obtained approval from his colleagues after assuring them that he would continue to read the same works of literature but that the writing component of the class would be different.

With the Summer Institute experience fresh in his mind, Gary began to revise his classroom practices. He changed his college writing class, for example, “to be like what [he thought] writing instruction should be” and “put his fingerprints” on the class, turning writing into a “much more personal kind of thing.” At the time of his interviews, Gary continued to use these revised approaches.

### *Present Practice*

Gary’s new teaching practices developed from his Writing Project experiences. Gary acknowledges that, at present, he uses a lot of the methods that resulted from his involvement with the National Writing Project because such practices and philosophies “were things that I’ve seen modeled and that I thought [would be helpful].” In other words, because of the journaling, ownership, peer support, and low-risk writing that he experienced in the Summer Institute, Gary also employs teaching approaches similar to low-risk writing invitations, choice, collaboration, and flexibility in the classes he teaches. These new, best practice-based approaches to the teaching of writing include multigenre research projects and process-based portfolios. Differing from the more formulaic “everyone sitting quietly there 45 minutes, diligently working,” Gary describes his classroom as a “workshop” atmosphere. He says, “when we’re working on writing, it’s very noisy, because they’re talking, they’re interacting and it’s taken some time [to get used to it], but I’m okay with that; in fact, I think it has to look like that.”

Recognizing his own habits as a writer, Gary says that this chaotic atmosphere now mirrors some of his own writing process. He says,

...maybe I will write for 10 minutes and then I’ll get up and wander around...and so often we expect kids to do something that I wouldn’t even do...you know, like

I'll write and then I'll check my email and then get up and get a drink, and then go out and get the mail...the traditional classroom doesn't allow for that, not at all, so getting to the point where I felt comfortable enough to do allow that [was important]...

Gary's own habits as a writer have also influenced his approach with writing deadlines.

Gary says,

Ever since I did the Writing Project...I realized I always tell kids [that] these are hard and fast dates, like in the real world that's what it will always be like, but it's not always... even as a professional writer, there's dates, but you can fudge them a bit, like there's a little time...

Gary's new guideline, then, is that students need to keep him aware of where their writing is; they need to talk to him ahead of time about extending deadlines. This new, "flexible" approach has benefited Gary as well as his students. He states, "It's a lot easier for me, too; the kids do better and I'm not having to keep track of [whether a paper is] one day late or later in the day."

#### Adoption of Best Practice-Related Teaching Approaches

Although Gary's writing instruction approaches will be described in much greater detail in the next chapter, at this point the chapter will examine factors that helped and hindered Gary as he adopted his new approaches to the teaching of writing. Such exploration will provide a helpful background when reflecting on the transfer of Gary's writing-related approaches to other areas of instruction.

### *Undergraduate/Preservice Experiences*

According to Gary, his undergraduate and preservice experiences both utilized traditional, product-based approaches and only “lip service” to more innovative ones, which did not help him explore alternative methods when he initially began teaching and also when he was searching for other ways to teach.

### *Self-Reflection*

Gary’s adoption of best practice writing approaches started with reflection. Recognizing the failures of the “programmed” nature of his curriculum and approaches, Gary began searching for alternatives when he realized that he didn’t know “what else to do.” While Gary’s reflection may have served as a catalyst for his search for alternatives, it did not actually provide him with ideas about how to address his problem.

### *Administrative/Collegial Support*

Administration and colleagues played an important role in Gary’s adoption of best practice writing methods. Initially, MEAP-related pressures, as well as a status-quo atmosphere perceived by Gary, kept him from exploring more innovative methods. Gary also felt that he needed his principal’s as well as his colleagues’ permission in order to adopt new methods. Such permission-seeking illustrates the careful tightrope that Gary walked, between individual decision-making, collaborative decision making and administrative mandates. Gary’s principal did grant permission for him to change his approaches as long as the department approved, but this situation nonetheless points to the balance between individual experimentation and collaborating with colleagues that Gary faced.

### *Existing Professional Materials*

When Gary began teaching, the existing professional materials included MEAP-driven curricula as well as the John Collins Writing Program, a program based on the idea that writing is a process. With this program, teachers are encouraged to write across the curriculum as well as use different types of writing, from Type One (having students prewrite) to Type Five (publishable writing). The program also encourages the use of focus correction areas (FCA's), which help teachers to assess their students' writing by focusing on a few errors with each writing assignment.

The Collins website asserts that “since its beginning, [it] has been grounded in research and incorporated best practices methodology” and that “Dr. Collins (sic) proven techniques have...been singled out for recognition by the National Council of Teachers of English” (Collins Education Associates). However, the John Collins program is an example of “best practices methodology,” such as the *idea* of writing across the curriculum, or the *idea* of the process model for writing, being applied in very Taylorist ways. Often, the Collins program is adopted district-wide, as outside representatives from Collins—representatives that are often unfamiliar with teacher contexts as well as the students they are ultimately affecting—inservice entire schools, exacting specific methods such as certain FCA's that may be appropriate to use in certain settings. While many of the ideas from the Collins approach are well meaning, likely to help students succeed as they develop their writing, the machine-like quality of the program—from the Type One to the Type Five to the expensive district inservices—bring concerns. In Gary's case, the formulaic nature of the John Collins program as well as the fact that it



was a department-wide expectation that he use it, did not contribute to his adoption of best practice methods.

### *Professional Literature*

When Gary was in the midst of his pedagogical crisis, professional literature was of little assistance as he reports that he had difficulty applying the professional ideas he encountered to his own context. His first graduate-level writing methods course modeled some of the possibilities suggested by professional literature and helped open Gary's mind to changing his approaches. However, after Gary actually witnessed, participated in, and actually identified with new approaches to the teaching of writing described in—and modeled by—professional literature from the Summer Institute, he felt compelled to adopt these approaches in his own teaching.

### *Modeling*

Gary reported that his undergraduate training modeled traditional teaching approaches; perhaps it is not surprising that he employed these approaches despite his disillusionment with them. The modeling provided by the first graduate-level writing methods course did help Gary consider that other approaches were possible; Gary himself recognizes this modeling when he says that his use of “new” language and approaches “were things [he’d] seen modeled...” during his NWP experience. However, this modeling did not completely contribute to Gary's transformation; in fact, the identity formation and metacognition brought on by modeling he experienced in the Summer Institute ultimately helped Gary to revisit, revise and adopt new “best” practices for the teaching of writing.

### *Identity*

Gary's movement from traditional teaching to a workshop-driven model depended largely on seeing himself as not only a teacher, and not only a writer, but writer-as-teacher. While Gary did find a community with the National Writing Project, he did not define himself in terms of this new relationship, but instead by the very act of writing and teaching.

### *Metacognition*

Gary's new identity as a writer encouraged him to examine his own writing habits, such as his need for breaks while writing and the flexible nature of deadlines. Such self-focused metacognitive strategies encouraged him to consider this knowledge about his own writing habits in order to revamp his curriculum and practices to match "what real writers do."

### *Knowledge-Based World View*

When he began teaching, Gary's craft depended on strategies that acknowledged the "fixed" nature of knowledge. Despite its "programmed" nature, Gary used the John Collins approach; he still had to "get through so many stories" as part of his district-mandated curriculum. However, his participation in the National Writing Program's Summer Institute for Teachers, and its ability to help Gary revise his identity and metacognitive abilities, has also helped Gary utilize a more constructivist view of writing, which allows him and his students to become "active" creators of [their] own knowledge (Thirteen Ed Online). At this point, Gary views knowledge as flexible rather than fixed, and such flexibility has helped him to adopt his best practice approaches. Gary has employed this flexible, collaborative knowledge-making by turning writing into a more

“personal” approach, with emphases on “collaboration” of writing knowledge surfacing in best practice approaches such as portfolio instruction and multigenre projects.

#### Further Discussion

Gary’s transformation to writer-as-teacher, and the revised methods that evolve from this changed identity, illustrate many factors in Gary’s adoption of best practice writing approaches. While mental processes such as reflection may have initiated Gary’s transformation by helping him become more aware of his dissatisfaction, self-reflection alone did not lead Gary to change his pedagogy. In addition, external factors such as collegial support, administrative support and professional literature were not primary contributors to Gary’s revised approaches. The modeling provided by Gary’s first graduate-level writing methods course was Gary’s first realization that approaches beyond traditional methods were even possible, yet even modeling did little to help Gary change his existing methods. Ultimately, it was not reflection, not administrative nor collegial support, not professional literature, not even modeling alone, but metacognition—and identity revision—that fueled Gary’s transformation from traditional teacher to teacher-as writer. Such identity and metacognitive revision also highlights Gary’s revised views on the creation of knowledge in his writing classroom—views that have also helped him adopt best practice approaches.

Having established the importance of metacognition, identity and knowledge-based world view in Gary’s adoption of best practice writing methods, the next chapter will describe Gary’s practice in more detail, using Joyce and Showers’ ideas in order to examine how the methods adopted from Gary’s Summer Institute experience have been

integrated into other areas of classroom practice. After such examination, the chapter will consider several factors and how they contribute to integrated use.

## CHAPTER IV

### INTEGRATING GARY'S PRACTICE

Joyce and Shower's continuum moves from imitative to executive use, detailing the process by which a teacher adopts certain practices. At the imitative end, the teacher simply enacts the teaching approach verbatim; no reflection or revision is involved. Without reflection, revision and understanding, the practice stands alone, isolated from application to other areas of classroom teaching. On the other end of the continuum, executive use entails that the teacher adapt approaches to meet the needs of his/her students, understand the background of this particular approach, and apply this teaching approach—to transfer this knowledge—to other relevant areas (Figure 1).

Having previously explored Gary's transition from formulaic writing instruction to a workshop-based teacher-as-writer approach, this chapter examines how Gary's best practice writing methods transfer to other areas of his classroom practice. This chapter provides a vignette of Gary's writing instruction, which establishes the presence of the best practice-related writing approaches detailed in the previous chapter. In order to explore whether these elements have reached at least a routine level of use, this chapter will then analyze this vignette and triangulate it with interview data. After establishing the presence of—or absence of—routine use of best practice elements of writing instruction, this chapter will explore whether these elements have transferred to other areas of instruction, and thus reached integrated use, by examining another area of language arts instruction: the teaching of literature.

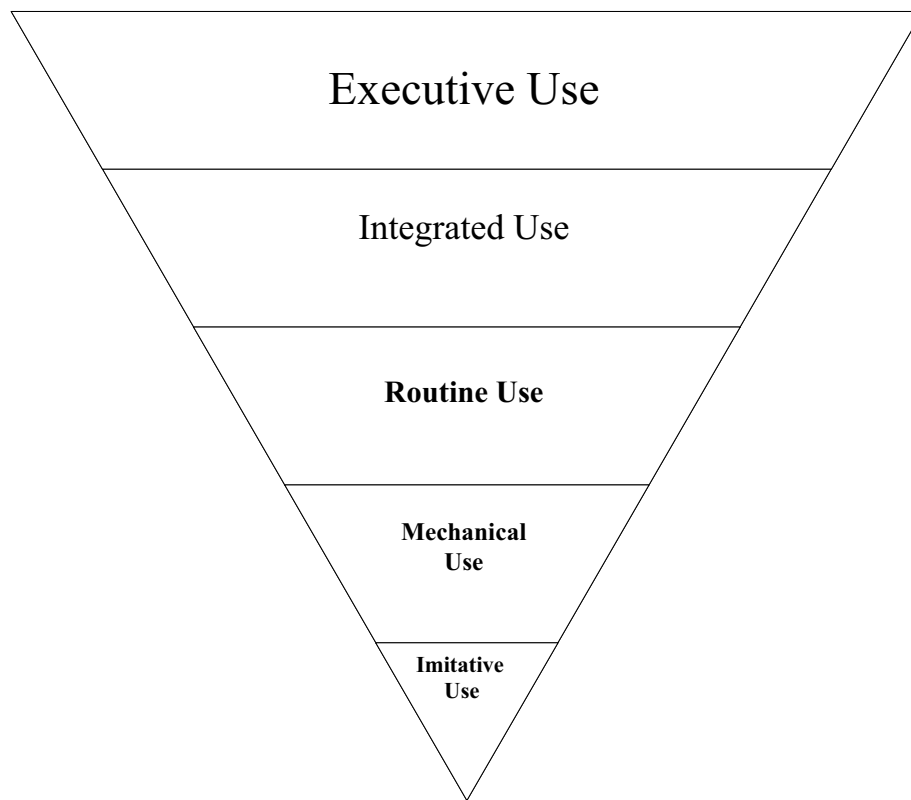


Figure 1: Joyce and Showers' Continuum of Levels of Transfer

#### Gary's Writing Instruction

The following vignette illustrates Gary's writing instruction that resulted from his National Writing Project experience. The vignette illustrates several days of instruction of Gary's College Writing class in which he is guiding his students through a multigenre research project—a project similar to that described in Romano's *Blending Genre, Altering Style*. During the class periods under analysis, Gary is finishing up a creative writing assignment from the previous unit as well as leading students through the research process, including helping them choose a topic, find and document sources, take research notes, and write creatively about their research. While this vignette addresses

several teaching practices, the analysis following the vignette will focus on process-based approaches, student decision-making, low-risk writing, and metacognition.

### *College Writing*

Today, College Writing students are receiving Gary's feedback from a previously-submitted assignment, and they quietly read his comments. Gary affirms this reading, saying, "That's an emotional pat on the back that you care about what I wrote... Thank you!" He continues, explaining his comments and alerting his students to an upcoming deadline:

There was a lot of variety...a variety of topics. I was impressed with the amount of creative work you showed. I felt like people took a step and tried to push themselves as writers. So what I tried to do, as always, was to say, "Here's some things that I like and here's some questions that I have, and some things to consider" as you make another draft of this for your portfolio as you get a final grade for the semester. As a reader, I tried to say, "Here's one more step that you can take..." In some cases, it was small things, little things. Other times, it was big things...but in every case, I tried to focus on "Here's the next major step." As always, you are welcome to use those comments to revise...

Gary then asks, "So, would it help to make a deadline [for these revisions]?" Gary goes over the class schedule for the next week, noting that they have one day set aside for reading as well as another day set aside for a publishing event: a writing celebration complete with public readings and refreshments. After students vote, the class decides that the following Tuesday will be enough time to make the revisions. With this consensus, Gary moves the class to a "sacred writing," defined by a local director of the

Writing Project as “a period of time set aside for writing, started by a writing invitation,” and invites his students to write about their most recent research for their multigenre research project. After a short presentation on plagiarism, the class is finished, and students leave with the assignment to revise their creative writings from the previous unit as well as continue with their research for their multigenre research projects.

Gary begins College Writing the next day with another sacred writing, saying, “My invitation is for you to...take a step back and think about your own research process... where am I writing, where am I finding stuff. If you think, ‘Gosh, I haven’t got a lot yet,’ then that might help you, too.”

Also saying that, as always, students can “write on something else if [they] feel like something else would be more useful,” Gary’s students write for several minutes in response to this invitation. After this sacred writing, Gary reviews the importance of the “notes page,” a way for students to document their research that will, according to Gary, bridge the students’ research with their writing. Moving on, Gary shows the students an actual Works Cited page, iterating his desire for students to simply learn *how* to use MLA format—not memorize its rules—for their research papers. Gary says, “I don’t require you to learn MLA [citation style], much as I would not require you to memorize a phone book. You can always look it up.” He then hands out a piece of paper titled “Different Ways to Cite Information,” which lists several examples of citations.

After this mini-lesson on documentation, Gary produces examples of multigenre research projects from previous semesters, saying, “What I’d like you to do is look at these samples...And what I’d like for you to do is with your group get a chance to see three...so you can get a feel for on average how many genres, what does the notes page



look like, how many pages...” Students form groups and page through the example projects. After several minutes, Gary moves the class to a discussion about their opinions of the examples, focusing especially on the different genres that students observed. After one student comments that one particular project used a variety of genres, Gary comments that “variety does help make [them] better.” Following a brief discussion about the range of page lengths for these multigenre research projects, class is over.

After spending an entire class period doing individual research in the library, Gary begins the next College Writing class with a sacred writing, saying,

...my invitation for you today is to write about your project in a genre that you wouldn't normally attempt—maybe one you've never tried writing in before. And maybe it's a miserable failure, and you say, “That's 10 wasted moments of my life.” Or maybe you think, “Oh, that's something I'd never tried before.” So see what you can do... You've got an invitation or, like always, you're welcome to try something else.

Gary walks about the room, conferencing with individual students as they write. Then Gary gives them a 30-second warning, and students complete their new genre attempts for that day. Gary then says,

You've spent the last few months looking at research. If today you want to hole yourself up and read, and read, and read, feel free to do that. If you feel that you've done a lot of that and you feel that you're ready to start writing, that's fine too. That's the thing about writing—that we're all at different points. One of the things that just needs to happen is that you need that quiet time to work.

With this direction, Gary speaks with individual students as they work, perusing their writings, articles and books. In this workshop atmosphere, some students read, some write on laptops or in notebooks, some highlight articles, and some get help from other students as well as from Gary. The class ends and students pack up their research, perhaps to continue at home.

### An Analysis of the Transfer of Teaching Approaches in Gary's Writing Instruction

Drawing on these vignettes from Gary's teaching, this chapter moves to an analysis of Gary's approach to teaching writing, focusing on the use of the writing process, student decision-making, low-risk writing, and metacognition. This section will not only determine the presence of these approaches, but also ascertain whether these approaches have reached at least a routine level of transfer in Gary's classroom.

Examining other areas of Gary's instruction—his literature methods, for example—will help to determine whether such approaches are used in more integrated ways.

### *Process-Based Approaches to the Teaching of Writing*

Process-based writing approaches are evident in many aspects of Gary's instruction. The use of portfolios described in Chapter Three indicates an emphasis on the process model in his writing classroom. In his first interview, Gary stated that he transitioned from giving objective exams to assigning portfolios as a way to “do [his] final assessment” after his Summer Institute experience. In fact, Gary said that when he grades his writing assignments, he recognizes process. More specifically, Gary stated,

when they turn in a writing sample to me, half of the grade is over [whether they] have met the requirements...have [they] done the things that I think good writers should do...like do more than one draft, like show it to somebody, make

changes...and I have a generic survey that they fill out every time so all of those things they get points of that, and it's half [of] their grade.

Gary's emphasis on process-based approaches to writing can be seen in the ways that he helps students prewrite, or generate ideas, in his classroom. For example, in College Writing, Gary provides his students with several class periods devoted entirely to generating ideas. For example, library research days help students brainstorm with Gary about research topics, see what research is available, refine research ideas, and even explore other research directions. Research days also help students choose writing topics as well as generate further ideas for writing.

Gary's "sacred writings" also help students generate ideas and engage in metacognition about their own writing process. The first sacred writing encourages students to take inventory of their research process—what they have done so far and what they might need as they continue to research. Such inventories will likely help students refine their ideas as they continue to write. The other sacred writing invites students to try a new genre as they explore their research. In fact, in his first interview, Gary demonstrated that such idea generation is intentional:

I...set up the class to help kids... here's invitations, here's ideas, here's suggestions, here's how you generate some of your own ideas, writing territories list, all of that kind of stuff...

Giving time in the library as well as initiating journal topics are indeed idea-generating, process-based practices—and practices that Gary uses routinely in his classroom.

Moving beyond idea generation, Gary's low-risk sacred writing invitation, one that asks students to "try something new," not only encourages students as they draft their

research projects, but also gives them something to revise as they continue with their multigenre projects. Also, Gary's willingness to set aside class time so that students can read through existing research as well as write about existing research demonstrates the importance he places on drafting. In addition, Gary's insistence on revision as students "make another draft" of their creative writings shows that Gary's students are encouraged to consider the "next major step" as they revise. Moreover, Gary's feedback to students—feedback that focuses on further revision instead of a final grade—also demonstrates awareness of the process approach. This process is distinct from, as Gary stated in his initial interview, "a formula that [he] can slip out." Finally, in College Writing, students have a say in what and how they revise, setting deadlines for themselves and knowing that Gary is available to talk to them about his feedback. Through all of these acts, from prewriting that emphasizes drafting to specific feedback on drafts, Gary demonstrates that revision is routinely encouraged in his writing classes.

Although it is often difficult for teachers to have students publish their writing in authentic ways, Gary nonetheless utilizes the idea of publishing with his writing instruction. For example, the writing celebration that will take place as students submit their revised drafts—where they will not only have refreshments but read creative writings to their peers—is one of several ways that "publishing" takes place in Gary's classroom. In his interviews, Gary indicated additional ways that his students have published. For example, Gary said, "one of the things that I require my junior and seniors in college writing to do is to submit a piece of writing outside of these four walls; it could be the school magazine, it could be...the [local] press, wherever..." Gary's expectation that students find an authentic audience for at least one piece of writing

demonstrates that publishing is a familiar act in his writing classroom. Thus, from sacred writing to modeling to feedback to celebration, Gary de-emphasizes “finished writing” in favor of process, and at the very least conveys a routine transfer of the process approach as he enacts prewriting, drafting, revising and publishing in a variety of writing contexts.

### *Student Decision-Making*

Several of Gary’s approaches reveal student decision-making in his writing classroom. In his interviews, it was apparent that one of the first changes Gary made to his teaching approaches was in the area of choice. After his initial graduate-level writing methods class, for example, Gary decided that his students would be able to choose “which [essays] to turn in for [their] ultimate grade.” Gary placed emphasis on student decision-making throughout his interviews, especially when he stated that “the more freedom [students] have to choose, the better they do” and that as a result of the National Writing Project, he is “listening to students and...willing to meet them where they are at.”

Gary’s vignette also demonstrates an emphasis on student decision-making. For example, at the onset of the vignette, Gary collaborates with his students to determine a due date for their creative writing revisions. The sacred writings in Gary’s class also highlight student decision-making. The fact that students can always “write on something else if [they] feel like something else would be more useful” shows that Gary values student decision-making especially while students are journaling. Student decision-making is also present in the multigenre research projects. Gary’s students may choose their research topics, and are also free to choose which genre to employ while communicating what they have learned from research. Also, how the students actually

do their research is left to their choice. Their ability to, as Gary describes, “hole [themselves up and read,” or “start writing,” or even collaborate with other students, demonstrates decision-making. Through Gary’s willingness to reach consensus about due dates, encourage choice in topic and genre, and allow students to choose their actual research process, his emphasis on student decision-making appears routinely in his writing classroom. This approach supports students as independent learners and fosters their ability to transfer what they learn about writing in Gary’s class to other contexts; this ability is especially important in college where students are typically expected to be more independent than in high school.

#### *Low-Risk Writing Environment*

Several aspects of Gary’s instruction highlight a low-risk writing environment. In his interview, Gary indicated that he has become “more flexible” with writing due dates, allowing students to revise their writings further without penalty and perhaps even take risks without worrying as much about deadlines. For example, sacred writings are used for idea generation and are not graded for grammar or mechanics. In addition, Gary’s low-risk citation expectations—the fact that students aren’t expected to memorize the MLA citation style—also convey a low-risk writing environment. Gary’s statement that with writing, “we’re all at different points,” also puts writers at ease where they are in their process. Finally, reassuring words like “welcome” (which Gary used when talking about revisions for the creative writing assignment) and “invitation” (which Gary uses often with sacred writings) also point to a low-risk, low-stress writing environment as students revise and generate ideas. Overall, through sacred writings, flexible due dates,

low-stress citations, and even his diction, Gary seems to routinely emphasize a low-risk writing environment in his writing instruction.

### Gary's Literature Instruction

The following vignette illustrates a different angle of Gary's practice: his teaching of literature. This vignette illustrates several days of instruction of Gary's College Literature class in which he is guiding his students through Chapters One through Five of *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley.

Considering the vignette and analysis of Gary's writing instruction, this chapter moves to an analysis of the ways that Gary transfers his knowledge of teaching approaches to other areas of his classroom and whether he uses such approaches towards the more imitative, or (on the more advanced side) integrated end. It may be difficult to make "exact exchanges" between writing and reading process as Gary's writing instruction approaches are examined for transfer. Prewriting, drafting, revising and publishing don't translate, or transfer, seamlessly to the reading process, though there are important connections. However, it is possible to consider ways that Gary *utilizes the idea of* process as he reads with his students. For example, just as Gary emphasizes idea-generating pre-writing activities to help students prepare their thoughts as they write, Gary may also try pre-reading activities to help students prepare their thoughts for the concepts they will encounter in literature. Rosenblatt's reader response approach suggests a process, a fluid and on-going "transaction" between reader and text, between reader and reader, to develop, over time, increasingly sophisticated understandings of meaning. The previous analysis of Gary's writing instruction, coupled with a careful analysis of Gary's literature instruction, will help to determine whether Gary has

employed, and perhaps integrated, similar approaches to process, student decision-making, low-risk writing, and metacognition in his teaching of literature.

### *College Literature*

It is Monday in Gary's College Literature class. Students shuffle papers and zip backpacks, and Gary reminds the class of an upcoming comprehension quiz on last night's reading of Chapters One and Two of *Brave New World*. Desiring to clarify their reading of the text, Gary states, "Let's start with things that you were wondering about. It means a lot more when you say, 'I was wondering about this' rather than me saying 'Let's talk about this.'" Gary assures the students that they needn't worry about failing the quiz, saying, "We can talk about [Chapters One and Two] as long as you'd like before we take the quiz."

In response, students ask questions related to comprehension of the text. One student asks for an explanation of the Bokanovski Process; another asks about Podsnap's technique. Drawing on the white board behind him while explaining the concepts, Gary answers questions matter-of-factly and patiently. As this question-and-answer session moves to other comprehension-driven questions, Gary expertly answers students' questions throughout the class period. The class doesn't take the quiz that day; at the end of the class period, Gary reminds the class to review for tomorrow's quiz and to keep reading this evening. He also directs students to write in their reading logs, which means that they should write at least a half-page response to the text in their spiral-bound notebooks.

Gary begins the next day's class by giving the students three minutes to ask any questions that they have before they take the quiz originally planned for yesterday. With



students seemingly ready to proceed, Gary administers a short, multiple choice comprehension quiz. The students quietly complete their quizzes at their own pace.

Collecting the quizzes when everyone is finished, Gary immediately moves on to the next activity, a lecture on *Brave New World*. He explains *conditioning* with a personal story about getting sick on green Kool-Aid, also using a humorous video clip from the popular sitcom *The Office*. Defining *hypnopoedia*, Gary asks the students what they can learn about sleep learning, and the class briefly discusses advertising tactics and how society is manipulated by commercials—especially late-night fast food advertisements. Ending the lecture, Gary says, “This is what you will want to be looking for in Chapter Three.” Then, Gary writes the following on the board:

What happened in Chapter Three?

1. The tour/lecture is taken over by Mustapha Mond
2. Henry Foster and Lenina prepare for a date
3. Bernard Marx is jealous
4. Hypnopoedia slogans

The lecture ends, class is over, and students leave the classroom, expected to read Chapter Three at home.

Saying “There won’t be a quiz today because I would rather discuss the text with you,” Gary begins the next day’s class by saying, “I have lots to cover, but want to start with your questions.” A few students ask Gary questions about the book’s description of sexual acts and contraceptive use, and Gary leads the class in a short dialogue about society’s views of sexuality in the 1930’s as opposed to today. Gary finishes the discussion by asking if there are any other questions and then affirms the students’ reading of the text thus far, saying, “Good stuff, very nice stuff — you’re very sharp!”

Moving from this question-and-answer session, Gary states, “Well, if there aren’t any other questions, I’ll go over some of the things that have happened in Chapter Three.” Placing a transparency titled “Brave New World: Chapter Three” on the overhead projector, Gary shares various quotes and plot events from the chapter, emphasizing sexual and religious themes. Noting that he is almost out of time, Gary assigns the reading of Chapters Four and Five, as well as another reading log, for homework.

When Gary starts the next day’s class, he gives the students a chance to ask questions about Chapters Four and Five before giving a reading quiz. There is a whole-class question-and-answer session that addresses the sexual content of the chapters, and students giggle a bit as Gary answers these sex-related questions. Once students stop asking questions, Gary hands out a true/false, multiple-choice quiz.

Beyond the questions, discussion, and quiz, Gary has another activity planned. Giving the students a sheet of paper that describes an assignment for their reading logs, Gary says, “Look at all of these references to the date that Henry and Lenina go on. What are these quotes meant to remind us about their society?” Imagining that they are listening to Henry and Lenina’s conversation, the students spend 20 minutes discussing “fragments of conversation” from the text [Figure 2].

**A Night Out with Henry and Lenina**

**Directions:** To find out what the people of the World State do in their spare time, imagine that you and a companion spend an evening with Lenina and Henry Foster. You learn a great deal about the attitudes and beliefs of these people from listening to their conversation as well as from the various amusements they engage in.

Explain what each of the following fragments of conversation or occurrence tells you about these people:

1. "Everybody's happy now."  
(75)
2. "I'm glad I'm not Gamma."  
(63)
3. Soma was served with the coffee.  
(75)
4. Electric sky signs effectively shut off the outer darkness.  
(76)
5. London's Finest Scent and Colour Organ. All the Latest Synthetic Music.  
(76)
6. "There ain't no Bottle in all the world/like that dear little Bottle of mine."  
(77)
7. Lenina did not forget to take all the contraceptive precautions prescribed by the regulations.  
(78)

**Extending the Lesson**

**Directions:** Describe any aspects of American social life which bear similarities to what you observed here. Include attitudes, customs, and any objects of culture that you can describe such as technological innovations, song lyrics, etc.

Figure 2: A Night Out with Henry and Lenina

When students run out of time with this activity, Gary assigns the rest as homework.

When a student asks, "Are we working on this tomorrow?" Gary seems noncommittal as he replies, "We can talk about it tomorrow if you have trouble with it [tonight]." With this brief exchange, students exit the classroom with another reading log activity to complete.

#### An Analysis of the Transfer of Teaching Approaches in Gary's Literature Instruction

The following section will not only determine whether Gary uses process-based, choice-based, and low-risk approaches with his teaching of literature, but will also ascertain whether these approaches have reached at least an integrated level of transfer.

*Process-Based Approaches to the Teaching of Literature*

Gary's idea-generating practices in his teaching of writing include ways for students to prepare their thoughts before drafting, and in one interview, Gary alluded to similar attempts to prepare his students' minds for reading *Brave New World*. For example, Gary said that before reading the text, he has students

...participate in a discussion identifying the biggest problems our world faces.

Then they discuss in small groups how difficult it would be to prioritize those problems and develop a plan of action to address them...[His students also] talk about what happens when people try to address those problems. After that, the students do some brief research on some of the ideas and allusions in the book...and present their findings so that when they come up on the book, they've heard about these things before.

Having students discuss world problems, make a plan of action, and research concepts in the book will most likely prepare students' to be better able to analyze Huxley's intentions for the novel and the work's plot and themes. Gary's intentionality with pre-reading activities demonstrates his integration of activities that help to prepare students thoughts before literate acts.

Beyond inviting process through idea generation, Gary also draws on a process model with some of the practices he employs while students are reading the text. The "Night Out With Henry and Lenina" activity, for example, encourages students to consider their own questions and interpretations as they eavesdrop on the characters' conversations. This activity could be considered workshop-based, as it asks students to work together to examine and revise their understandings of the text as they discuss each

quotation's meaning, similar to how students may work with peers and review a piece of writing.

Gary's use of reading logs is also a process-based activity utilized as students read the text. Gary hopes these logs will help his students "begin making meaning out of their writing," since "writing and thinking are so closely related." Further, Gary hopes that these reading logs will help students move beyond summarizing, towards making personal connections with the text, journaling about how they identify with characters, questioning textual events, or struggling with content. Gary notes that he assigns these reading logs because he believes "that writing and thinking are so closely related," and that if students are reading, and then writing about their reading, they are also thinking.

While Gary does integrate some process-based methods in his teaching of literature, there are also some areas that do not square with the principles and practices of a process-based learning approach, where a reader might form and refine a response to the text in the same way one would draft and revise a piece of writing in order to clarify its meaning. Sheridan Blau observes that "reading, like writing, is a process of making meaning or text construction that is frequently accompanied by false starts and faulty visions, requiring frequent and messy reconstruction and revision" (31). However, at times in his instruction, Gary employs what Blau terms "finished readings," acting as the knowledge base, the "expert," instead of a fellow reader who not only works to read the literature, but makes original observations and asks intriguing questions about the text. Therefore, instead of "drafting and revising" their responses to literature, Gary's students are subjected to pre-formed textual interpretations, unable to construct and revise their own textual response. At these times, Gary's methods do not utilize the workshop model,

which recognizes students as “valued experts” on the texts they individually and collectively work to understand (13).

One way that Gary employs a more finished approach, or approach associated with an objectivist view of knowledge, is through his use of lecture. For example, such finished, “expert” reading emerges when Gary posts overheads of prepared information about the chapters students are reading, saying things like “This is what you will want to be looking for in Chapter Three” and “I have lots to cover.” With these acts, Gary employs finished reading, before students have a chance to construct any textual meaning with daily pre-writing activities, small-group discussions, or even reading and re-reading text.

The pre-quiz discussions in Gary’s College Literature class also suggests an emphasis on objectivism in Gary’s classroom. While Gary gives students an entire hour to ask questions and intends for students to succeed, Gary is still leading these activities as the “finished reader,” and he utilizes more reading product than process with his discussions. While other students may have the answers to these questions, or could have participated in an interactive and evolving discussion, instead Gary rarely turns questions to the class, and as the reader with all of the answers, Gary simply provides answers. As the finished reader, Gary does not model the struggles with the novel that an actual literature workshop might enable.

Finally, instead of encouraging students to struggle with texts along with him, Gary relies on objectivism in the comprehension quizzes in his College Literature class. With their set answers, these quizzes do little to encourage the process of revising, clarifying and establishing meaning. Out of a week of observed instruction, Gary spent at

least one-and-a-half hours of class time reviewing for, taking, and discussing comprehension quizzes.

Gary's use of finished readings through lecture, discussion, and quizzes has more serious implications; Blau asserts that

readers who have never seen anything but finished readings from their teachers and whose teachers either avoid or stigmatize textual difficulties are likely to conceive of reading much the way inexperienced writers think of writing: as something that competent students or adults do in a single pass, in one effortless draft, without struggle and without frustration... (31)

Thus, considering Gary's use of pre-reading activities, reading logs, as well as finished reading acts such as lecture and comprehension quizzes, Gary has used process in his teaching in many ways but still struggles to fully integrate the best practice approach of process-based instruction into his literature methods.

#### *Student Decision-Making*

Gary seems to value student decision-making in his literature instruction in several ways. For example, Gary's open-ended, flexible reading log assignments, which allow students to respond to literature in any way that they choose, employs student decision-making. Soliciting questions from students and saying, "Let's start with things you were wondering about" also demonstrates that Gary values his students' feedback about their responses to the text. In addition, Gary allows students to dictate how class time is spent when he says, "We can talk about [Chapters One and Two] as long as you'd like before we take the quiz." Gary honors this statement by postponing the quiz to the next day so that he can answer any questions students may have. The statement "...[I]

want to start with your questions...” also acknowledges questions as an important role in the allocation of class time.

While beginning with, and giving as much time as is needed, for students’ questions is likely motivated by a desire to foster student decision-making, this practice may actually run counter to this intention. Sheridan Blau states,

The less competent the students, the more likely they are to have no questions, as if, paradoxically, only the strongest readers don’t understand what they have read, while the weakest readers have the fewest problems... (57)

In other words, while Gary may think that he is empowering all of his students to ask questions, the students who struggle most—the ones that need the most help understanding the text—may never ask Gary for clarification because they may not even know where to start. It is paradoxical indeed that Gary may be trying to foster student decision-making by giving ample time for his students to ask questions about the text, yet unaware that such a strategy may not actually foster comprehension of, or engagement with, literature.

Even as Gary employs student decision-making in a variety of ways in his classroom, there is yet another way that student decision-making has not been fully integrated in Gary’s literature instruction. While Gary may collaborate with his students about due dates for his creative writing revisions, he does not indicate a similar collaboration with his literature students, instead giving nightly reading assignments without consulting students about whether they are falling behind or getting ahead.

While observations of Gary’s teaching approaches did not yield consistently integrated approaches to student decision-making, Gary’s student survey data [Table 1],



which considered students' points of view, indicated otherwise. Answering question number two, which asked students to indicate whether they could "learn in their own way" in Gary's classroom, 93 percent agreed or strongly agreed, with some students sharing comments such as "We get to write about what we want" and "We read, and we try to understand ourselves, rather than having someone define everything." With the comments section, however, came some opposition to the statement, with one student writing, "[The class is] primarily a lecture on how the curriculum wants us to perceive subject matters." Other categories that addressed Gary's class structure also indicated that students felt their needs and preferences were considered, with at least 80 percent of students agreeing on some level with the statements.

Optional student comments for questions four and nine provided an interesting perspective on what students may expect from Gary as a teacher. Responding to question four, which asked about Gary "structur[ing] the class to meet students' needs," one student wrote, "The teacher *can't* structure the entire class to suit the individual needs of the student," while another student wrote, "The class isn't structured around one student, and it shouldn't be." Considering whether Gary considers his students' "learning situations" when teaching them, one student wrote that Gary "understands where we are in life, and uses his teaching style to go with that," while another student seemed indignant in saying that Gary "teaches to everyone, not just one person—who does that?!" These comments, whether supportive, explanatory, or incensed, may indicate a lack of familiarity with a steadfast approach to student decision-making (or student-centeredness) and moreover, that Gary's students may not feel that they have experienced

a class in which their attitudes, opinions, abilities, and preferences have been consistently considered.

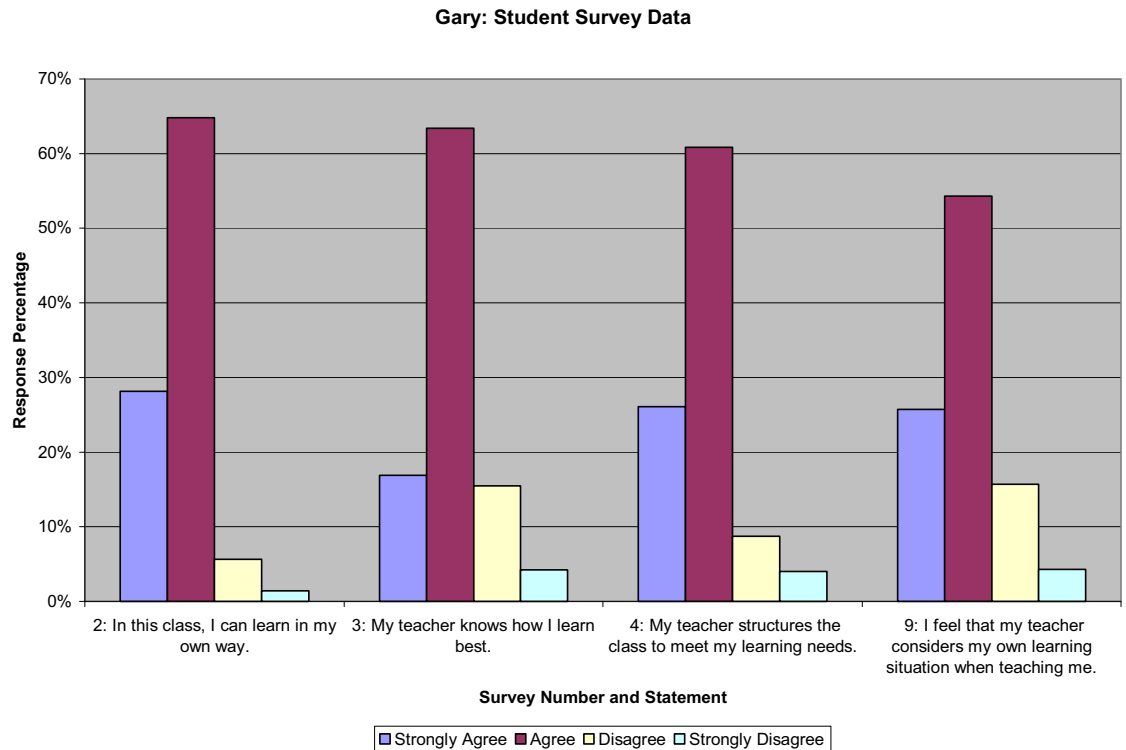


Figure 3: Gary’s Student Survey Data

Table 1: Gary’s Student Survey Questions

Question #	Survey Statement	Percentage of Students Who:			
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2	In this class, I can learn in my own way.	28%	65%	6%	1%
3	My teacher knows how I learn best.	17%	63%	15%	4%
4	My teacher structures the class to meet my learning needs.	26%	61%	9%	4%
9	I feel that my teacher considers my own learning situation when teaching me.	26%	54%	16%	4%

### *Low-Risk Reading Environment*

Just as Gary’s writing instruction relies on the low-risk nature of words like “invitation” and “welcome,” Gary’s literature instruction also reassures students with

phrases like “Good stuff...you’re very sharp!” and “We can talk about [your questions about the book] as long as you’d like.” Also, open-ended assignments like reading logs, which allow students to choose topics and respond in a way that won’t be evaluated for grammar and mechanics, also lowers risk for his literature students. The “Henry and Lenina” activity is also low-risk and free of pressure for initial draft perfection of grammar and mechanics, as he simply asks students to write down what they observe about the society described in the conversations from the chapter.

While Gary seems to have established a low-risk writing environment, encouraging freedom and experimentation, Gary’s use of comprehension quizzes adds a measure of risk to his literature instruction. Even if these quizzes do not greatly affect his students’ grades, consistent, objective evaluation—evaluation that has only one right answer—could hinder, rather than encourage, students as they structure unique responses to the text. These comprehension quizzes do contribute to a more high-risk reading environment for Gary’s literature instruction, indicating a lack of integrated use in this instance. More importantly, these quizzes fail to reflect a process approach to reading, completely negating students’ ability to ask their own questions, arrive at their own answers, and overall, collaboratively seek interpretation of the text.

#### Factors that May Influence Gary’s Presence/Absence of Integrated Instruction

Overall, Gary’s writing instruction has undergone significant revisions since his involvement with the National Writing Project, and his ideas of process-based instruction, student decision-making, and low-risk reading are well-established approaches in his writing classroom. Gary’s literature instruction, which in many ways draws on similar approaches, nonetheless employs more traditional knowledge transfer

and has thus struggled to fully integrate these best practice methods into literature instruction. The following section will suggest several factors that may have influenced Gary's integration of such approaches: undergraduate/preservice training, self-reflection, collegial and professional support, existing professional materials, professional literature, modeling, identity, metacognition, and knowledge-based world view.

#### *Undergraduate/Preservice Experiences*

Gary's undergraduate training did not encourage him to adopt his best practice-based ideas; in fact, his classes and student teaching likely trained Gary using traditional ideas, at the same time modeling them for Gary. It is likely that in his literature instruction, Gary is enacting some of the more traditional approaches modeled for him in his own secondary experiences and undergraduate training and infusing his more traditional literature instruction with writing experiences borne out of his more transformative National Writing Project experience. While Gary's exposure to the modeling, metacognition and identity from the National Writing Project transformed his writing instruction, he has likely held on to some of the more traditional approaches from his undergraduate literature methods training.

#### *Self-Reflection*

As stated in the previous chapter, Gary's reflection was an important part in his development as a writing teacher, but ultimately provided awareness—not change—for his methods. This has also been true for his literature instruction. To illustrate, Gary is not completely content with his use of comprehension quizzes. In one interview, he stated,

...the quizzes...[are] something I've thought about giving up...completely, feeling like it's not really that important to me...but also having that feeling like it's still that one more prompt, that handful of kids that are like, "There might be a quiz tomorrow...maybe I'd better read the book."

Following up with the statement, "If I could come up with a better way, I probably would," Gary indicates that he has considered the shortfalls of the quiz aspect of his instruction and that he is open to change. Ironically, however, there *are* better ways to teach literature than one and a half hours of objective quizzes every week; it's just that in the past, reflection alone has not been sufficient for Gary to revise his methods.

#### *Administrative/Collegial Support*

While Gary's collegial and professional support did not lead him to change his methods before his involvement with the National Writing Project, Gary's own department has undergone many changes in the last few years. Gary has developed company in his beliefs. Since Gary first went to the Summer Institute, five of the people in Gary's department have attended the Summer Institute, and, as a result of their participation, these colleagues have enacted change—change that has come from their participation in the National Writing Project—such as portfolio instruction and writing out of personal experience—within the department curriculum. Gary and his colleagues have also started a professional learning community. They are in their third year of the community, selecting *After the End* by Barry Lane and *Writing on Demand* by Anne Ruggles Gere, Leila Christenbury, and Kelly Sassi to read as group. It is important to note that the changes enacted are writing-related and not literature-related; perhaps some

of the disconnect between writing and literature instruction is not isolated to Gary's experience.

Gary would now likely cite his colleagues' support as a strong influence on his methods, and a supportive work environment is helpful for most teachers' development. However, it is unclear how Gary's colleagues have contributed to his wider integration of best practice-based methods. While one colleague in Gary's professional learning community did introduce him to the idea of reading logs, Gary ultimately adopted this strategy due to his own metacognition (which will be explored in the section below). Perhaps Gary's work with this professional learning community—work that involves metacognition, group discussion of the readings, and an identity that involves researchers collaborative, professional research—will help Gary integrate his best practices more fluidly in the future.

#### *Existing Professional Materials*

Just as the existing John Collins Writing Program did not encourage Gary to adopt best practice methods, it also has not encouraged Gary to integrate the process model, student decision-making, and low-risk instruction into his literature methods.

#### *Professional Literature*

Gary mentioned several texts that he and his professional learning community are reading. In the past, professional texts did not help Gary to adopt and integrate his methods, especially when such texts were separate from the modeling and metacognition provided by the Writing Project. For this reason, it may be difficult for such literature, absent from modeling and metacognition, to help Gary integrate best practice methods into his literature instruction.

### *Modeling*

Modeling plays an intriguing part in the transfer of Gary's approaches. Having established that the modeling from his first graduate class and the National Writing Project did foster Gary's awareness that alternative approaches were possible, it is possible that Gary has not necessarily witnessed or participated in process-oriented literature or reading pedagogy. His statement that "if [he] could come up with [an alternative to quizzes], he probably would," suggests that he has not witnessed, nor is he developing, alternatives to more traditional modes of instruction.

### *Identity*

Most of the methods Gary has adopted—from a workshop writing environment to flexible deadlines—have resulted from his own realization of himself as a writer and "what real writers do." Conversely, many of Gary's more traditional literature practices—from quizzes to lecture to starting with student questions—have *not* been motivated by any realization of himself as a *reader* and "what real *readers* do." At this point in Gary's teaching he has not integrated his writing identity with a reading identity, which likely contributes to his metacognitive habits and subsequent methods choices.

### *Metacognition*

One important way that Gary utilizes process-based ideas in his literature instruction is his use of reading logs. Gary states that this approach "filtered through the Writing Project" and was mentioned by a colleague who had read Sheridan Blau. He hinted at his own metacognition as a reader in an interview:

[reading logs are] one of those practices like where I'm trying to get students to begin making meaning out of their reading...it's kind of like me going back to my

high school experience where as often as not I would get done with the reading and close the book and never think about it again until the next day in class when I'm like... "What happened in those chapters, while I was falling asleep while reading?"

With these words, Gary doesn't identify himself as a reader, but nevertheless identifies his own reading processes, and then applies them to his teaching to the same degree that he approaches his writing instruction. Gary's ability to use metacognition to adopt and revise certain best practice approaches for the teaching of literature demonstrates that given more opportunities for metacognition and identity development, Gary could integrate his approaches to writing as well as literature more consistently.

#### *Knowledge-Based World View*

Several aspects of Gary's instruction demonstrate his constructivist leanings, especially in the teaching of writing. Phrases like "here are some things to consider," "you're welcome to use these comments," as well as his revision-based writing instruction, activities which encourage students to examine their own research process, writing invitations, and open research environment (where students are free to write, or read, or collaborate as needed), point to a constructivist view of knowledge creation in Gary's writing instruction. Gary's literature instruction, on the other hand, leans toward objectivism. Gary's use of comprehension quizzes and other "finished" reading activities, as well as his "expert" role during class discussions speak to such objectivism. In fact, the question-and-answer sessions showcase Gary as the knowledge-bearer, as his use of lecture and chapter outline impart knowledge on his students rather than create it collectively. Even Gary's reading logs reflect some measure of objectivism, as they are



not shared collectively with the class with the goal of creating knowledge, but rather, simply shared with Gary, who gives students credit for completing them. And finally, Gary articulates some frustration with his use of comprehension quizzes, stating, “If I could come up with a better way, I would.” Such a statement reflects objectivist sentiments, neglecting the collective wealth of knowledge that student data, collegial advice, and professional texts could share. Given the inability for Gary’s best practice approaches to be fully integrated in the areas of writing and literature, it is likely that his objectivist view of knowledge, especially in his teaching of literature, correlates with such disconnect.

#### Moving to Other Research Subjects

Having established the ways that Gary’s approaches to the teaching of writing have transferred to his teaching of literature, and the factors that influence such transfer, the following chapter will examine another exemplary teacher’s adoption of best practice-based methods and move to a similar examination of the factors that influence such transfer.

## CHAPTER V

### NEW TEACHER, NEW PRACTICE

While previous chapters explored the factors that influenced how Gary arrived at and integrated best practice teaching approaches, this chapter, drawing on Rebecca's perspective, details the factors that influenced her adoption of best practice methods. As with Chapters Three and Four, establishing these factors will provide a basis for Chapter Six's discussion of the integration of these practices in her teaching.

#### Rebecca's Teaching Journey

Given that Rebecca has taught for only two years, it is not surprising that her narrative draws on her experiences as a secondary and undergraduate student as well as her experiences in her teaching position. After the narrative, Rebecca's undergraduate and preservice experiences, self-reflection, administrative and collegial support, existing professional materials, professional literature, modeling, identity, metacognition, and knowledge-based world view will be discussed.

#### *Context and Preservice Training*

Rebecca teaches at a middle school in a quiet, rural neighborhood with 325 students, 96 percent of which are Caucasian, with 19 percent of all students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Rebecca's seventh and eighth grade English classes average 19 students each.

Rebecca reports that her experiences as a student of English changed from high school to college. Rebecca says that as a secondary student, she "hated English," especially when "there were...very strict stages" for writing, including prewriting, drafting, and editing. She says she was "bored" because "her teacher didn't encourage

her to write about issues that mattered” to her. Rebecca recalls one situation that particularly frustrated her, when she had been required to write about someone who had influenced her. She says, “My 10<sup>th</sup> grade teacher told me I shouldn’t write about my brother being a *bad* influence... I should be writing about someone who made a *positive* influence.” Rebecca considers that this feedback was “discouraging good writing,” emphasizing that the original topic would have produced “such a reflective piece.”

Despite hating English, Rebecca graduated at the top of her high school class and received a full scholarship to a state university. She carried her disdain for reading and writing into a college literature class, where the professor gave her “controversial” books to read—“the things they can’t give you in high school.” From that experience, Rebecca regained her interest in reading. Although Rebecca’s high school experience was unpleasant, her college class encouraged her to see that she “could read... for pleasure *and*... for school.” She also developed more confidence in her writing abilities, and perceived herself as a “pretty good writer.”

While Rebecca’s transition to college reading and writing was positive, she was nonetheless reluctant to think ahead to her career path. She says, “I... knew in the back of my mind I wanted to be a teacher... but [when people asked about it, [I]... never really wanted to commit.” Delaying her decision, Rebecca enrolled in “every single general education class [she] could possibly take.” When she reached the end of her general education requirements, she formally decided to teach, choosing secondary math and language arts.

Rebecca reports that her content area methods courses were helpful to her. One class, a writing methods course, was especially relevant in her preservice training. In this

class, Rebecca explains that she gained familiarity with the writing workshop approach, which was “much more similar to how ‘real’ writers write.” Rebecca attributes her learning to the course instructor, who set up the class as an actual writing workshop. With Rebecca “engaged in that approach,” the class helped her to see “what [instruction] would feel like on the student end of things,” since the professor “discussed what each project and lesson may look like if we were secondary students.” As a result of Rebecca’s performance in the writing methods course, she was given an opportunity to teach before she left the university setting: the university hired her to teach remedial writing to incoming undergraduates as well as work with other writing instructors at weekly meetings. From this experience, Rebecca not only learned new teaching approaches, but also the value of a “community of teachers.”

After teaching for the university, Rebecca was chosen to student teach by a “near retirement” teacher who valued Rebecca’s previous teaching experience. When Rebecca began, the teacher told her, “I’m just going to give you my classroom. You can do whatever you want.” Thus, Rebecca had a great deal of responsibility in her internship, and drew on her undergraduate methods courses and experience teaching college freshman to create lesson plans, assessments, and classroom policies.

### *The Existing Curriculum*

Rebecca landed a teaching job quickly, and she says she immediately learned what would be expected of her as a teacher: to continue the status quo. Her district trained her to use Spelling Sourcebook program, a commercial grammar and spelling curriculum adopted by the district. According to Rebecca, the program

takes the 1200 most commonly misspelled words in our language and... practices with those, and the rules to add the prefixes and suffixes onto those words... because if you take those 1200 words, and you add the prefixes and suffixes, you have almost every word in our language.

Rebecca was also approached by a current teacher, who gave her the existing curriculum saying, “These are our binders. You don’t have to do anything, because I have all the materials... so don’t do any extra work, it’s all right here, here’s everything I use.”

Another teacher told Rebecca, “Don’t reinvent the wheel. I have all of my old quizzes, tests, and comprehension questions.” Rebecca spent the summer before her first school year working on curriculum and teaching approaches with another “new” teacher, forming a strong working relationship with this colleague. But despite her preservice training, preservice teaching experiences, and time to prepare for teaching, Rebecca reports that she used “someone else’s curriculum” for her first year of teaching, drawing from existing comprehension questions and grammar activities because she was convinced it was important for “all the kids [to get] the same instruction” and also because she “wanted to try their ways before assuming that [she] knew something better.”

#### *A Summer of Reflection and Summer Institute Opportunities*

The summer between Rebecca’s first and second year of teaching provided time for further professional education and reflection. Rebecca enrolled in the National Writing Project’s Summer Institute for Teachers, and observed and participated in teaching demonstrations addressing a variety of topics, from memoir assignments to multigenre units. As part of a Summer Institute small group, Rebecca read and discussed articles about grammar instruction, and also had time to learn from “brilliant teachers

form various schools,” who helped her examine her use of comprehension questions and reflect on what experienced readers do. She realized that “with novels, you shouldn’t be reading to find the answers to questions that someone else gave you.” Rather, Rebecca now came to believe that “with a novel, or a short story, [readers should] take in whatever they can, and... be able to summarize it, be able to tell me what happened in their own words, pick out words [they] don’t know.” Rebecca’s Summer Institute experience led her to conclude that “there is much more out there for our students than right/wrong answers to someone else’s questions.”

### *Present Practices*

This study takes place during the year directly following Rebecca’s Summer Institute training and reflection on reading. Rebecca describes her teaching methods as based on “the workshop model,” and explains that she wants to affirm her students’ reading and writing through the “process approach.” She states, “because of my own experiences as a student, I, from the start, want to celebrate that my students are already writers. And they’re already readers. I’m not trying to make them into a writer, or make them into a reader, because they already are.”

Rebecca credits the Summer Institute for helping her to clarify her role in the classroom, becoming a “writing coach” rather than a writing instructor. Rebecca believes that this coach role should entail pointing out positive aspects of her students’ writing, creating opportunities for students to write frequently, encouraging student choice, and remaining open to students’ decisions about their own writing, especially when they deviate from Rebecca’s “pre-determined expectations” such as structure or topic selection. Rebecca also desires that her students enjoy writing, as well as succeed at it.

She states her belief that it is “essential” that students “have little glimpses of success in their writing or to realize why they’re writing. Like [they’re] not writing because I want to put a grade on a boring essay...[but because] you write for your whole life.”

Practically speaking, Rebecca believes that her revised model, role, and instructional goals have translated into a variety of meaningful assignments for students, such as writing real complaint letters and “publishing” children’s books in readings at a nearby elementary school. In addition, after realizing that she needed to incorporate memoir into her seventh-grade curriculum as per State of Michigan Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCE) guidelines, Rebecca has created a five-week memoir unit based on Summer Institute teacher demonstrations that addressed reading and writing a memoir. Rebecca has also adopted an *Outsiders* multigenre project after watching a series of demonstrations about multigenre writings. With all of these changes, Rebecca has still carried over some approaches from her first year, including the district-wide Spelling Sourcebook curriculum.

Rebecca’s consideration of “real” reading process—or the reading processes of capable readers— has been brought on by her participation in the Summer Institute. It has resulted in changes in her second year of teaching. For example, Rebecca has decided to minimize the use of comprehension questions, since she now believes that summarizing and identifying trouble spots—not answer pre-formed questions—is

what you have to do when you’re on your own... pick out words you don’t know and look them up, and then ask questions, your own questions, instead of someone else asking you a question.

Rebecca's present practice also includes the expressed goal that students enjoy reading. She states that in the beginning of the year, she

shut the door and [said], "I have a secret to tell you...I hated to read. I got away with Spark Notes and getting around it because no teacher was handing me good books. And it's going to be my mission to find good books for you. And if you don't like it, you need to tell me, and we'll find something better."

Rebecca states that it is her "mission" for students to "find something they'll like."

Presently, this "mission" is most apparent with the flexible approach Rebecca takes to the school's Accelerated Reader program. She allows students to choose—and write reflective pieces on—books that don't appear in the Accelerated Reader quiz bank.

Rebecca stresses that in all the pedagogical changes she has undertaken, she continues to value the collaborative nature of her small department, believing that "unless we teach each other...how are we going to get better?" This "community," consisting of herself and two other "new," like-minded seventh- and eighth grade teachers, brainstorms response activities for various works of literature, asking "Ok, we're going to read Chapter 1, but how are we going to do it? What's worked? What hasn't worked?" Rebecca also states that she and her colleagues meet regularly during school hours to create assessments together, "keeping [the students] accountable to the same things, because they're all going to end up as 8<sup>th</sup> graders and they need to have the same knowledge..."

An outcome of Rebecca's participation in the Summer Institute is her graduate-level research group, a group of other National Writing Project participants engaged in their own classroom research projects. This group fosters Rebecca's continued interest in



grammar instruction and she believes it will likely inform future practice. As a result of her involvement with this group, Rebecca is initiating a “grammar changeover” in her department since they aren’t completely sure “what to do with it.” Rebecca says

I’ve been looking at the missing steps. What’s missing in the middle. How am I going to get them to use grammar and retain it and still cover what I’m supposed to cover... and... as a district we’ve gone over what should be covered at each grade level... and so... you know, how can I [use these standards and still improve] my students’ writing? Because I don’t really care whether they can fill out a worksheet; it’s how [they can] use those words correctly in their writing.

Rebecca has used “a collaboration of articles edited by Weaver” as a “reference point,” and she says that she is also reading—and revising and adopting practices from—“Killgallon, who works more with middle school grammar.”

Rebecca says that her administration has seemed to resist workshop innovations. Recently, the acting superintendent provided strong advice that went against Rebecca’s process-based beliefs during a department meeting. Rebecca recounted his words:

I gotta tell you guys, I told the rest of the school this already, we’re improving all of this writing... we want to write in every classroom, they’re all supposed to be writing, in math, in all of these [subjects], but I told them... this is how you’re doing grammar. You’re going to read until you’ve hit five errors. And then you’re going to *not* read any more. So you just need to tell this [whole] English department that’s how you’re going to treat writing from now on. When you have hit those five errors, you don’t need to read any more. You hand that right back to them until they can correct those errors...

Reeling from this school-wide writing improvement tactic, Rebecca “didn’t even know what to do...” She “looked around and thought, ‘what am I doing here? How could you possibly write anything... anything [with those approaches]?’”

### Adoption of Best Practice-Related Teaching Approaches

The following sections explore factors that helped and hindered Rebecca as she adopted and revised her methods. They also provide a background for considering the transfer of these methods to other areas of instruction in Chapter Six.

#### *Undergraduate/Preservice Experiences*

During Rebecca’s secondary experience, she “hated English,” and the formulaic writing and meaningless assignments she experienced. Rebecca herself acknowledges that it is her “own [poor] experiences as a student” that have pushed her to nurture her students’ reading and writing identities with various workshop-based approaches.

Rebecca’s undergraduate education, especially an introductory literature class that used books that interested her, helped Rebecca recognize herself as a reader and writer. A writing methods course fostered Rebecca’s initial familiarity with—and apparent implementation of—a workshop atmosphere.

Rebecca’s prior teaching experiences, including her job as a university-level writing instructor and her student teaching placement, provided her with opportunities to experiment with recently-learned philosophies and approaches, design and revise lesson plans, and collaborate with other teachers.

While Rebecca’s undergraduate training did help her to consider using some best practice approaches, such as the process model, she did not implement this method during her first year of teaching. During her first year, Rebecca used some of the same

comprehension questions, grammar dittoes, and traditional methods that she despised as a secondary student. Rebecca's lack of implementation of best practice approaches was not due to a weak preservice education, for the variety and breadth of Rebecca's preservice opportunities did provide an alternative model and practice using it. Rather, her failure to implement these practices speaks to the strength of other factors that novice teachers such as Rebecca face, including administrative and collegial pressure, pre-existing curricula, and lack of support networks such as the National Writing Project.

### *Self-Reflection*

Some of Rebecca's reflection takes place at the departmental level, when she and her colleagues ask, "What's worked? What hasn't worked?" while creating class activities. But much of Rebecca's other reflection appears to be more meta-level as she considers what experienced readers do and then structures her methods accordingly. Reflection on her own experiences has also factored into her methods selection. Given that this reflection is more meta-reflective, it will be detailed later in the appropriate section.

### *Administrative and Collegial Support*

Rebecca's administration's expectation that she use "hard line" writing approaches have not helped her to adopt best practice approaches such as the workshop model. She considers the shortfalls of such instruction, and she continues to aim for student-driven workshop-based methods.

Much of the "support" from Rebecca's current colleagues takes place as conversations addressing whether or not specific classroom activities worked earlier in the day (in the other teacher's classroom). The teachers also work together to create

common assessments. The interview data does not indicate whether Rebecca's colleagues share her affinity for best practice methods; however, Rebecca has not said that this immediate group of colleagues *hasn't* supported her ideas. In fact, Rebecca indicated that she and her colleagues were "all ready" for her research-induced "grammar changeover." At present, it is likely that the collegiality, dialogue, and willingness to change exhibited by this "community of teachers" has been supportive of Rebecca's experimentation with best practice approaches.

#### *Existing Professional Materials*

The professional materials provided for Rebecca at the start of her job included reading comprehension questions, grammar activities, and other miscellaneous assignments provided by other teachers. A significant resource provided at the beginning was the Spelling Sourcebook Series—a program created by Rebecca Sitton, a language arts consultant and former teacher. The Spelling Sourcebook program makes connections to some professionally-acknowledged best practices. Utilizing "core words" (lists that are designated for grade levels), "individual words" (chosen by each student), and "priority words" (words for which students are held accountable), the program draws on the idea that students should familiarize themselves with high-frequency words (Murdoch 3-4). But Sandra Wilde, an established elementary-level spelling expert and author of *Spelling Strategies and Patterns*, asserts that the series has taken "the perfectly good idea of high-frequency words and gone nuts with it, [spending] too much time on spelling, [filling] up pages and pages with exercises with no research support...[suggesting] even choosing the literature you share with kids based on the spelling words it contains" (Wilde, email correspondence).

The credibility of Sitton's program has also been called into question. Considering the longevity of the program, it would stand to reason that Spelling Sourcebook would by now be supported by peer-reviewed research. Despite a wealth of anecdotal information on the web—mostly from school districts that have adopted the Spelling Sourcebook program—ERIC failed to provide one peer-reviewed study that examined the educational value and claims of the Spelling Sourcebook program. Given the popularity of the program, it is puzzling why no research on it exists, and it is concerning that so many districts have invested money on the program's materials and inservices, as well as committed instructional time to it. Wilde explains that the Spelling Sourcebook is “popular with school districts because it's simple and very inexpensive,” but it is not discussed in the field of language arts education because “it's not a credible program... [Sitton] publishes it herself, has no particular background in spelling, hasn't written in professional journals... [and is not] taken seriously by any scholars in the field” (Wilde, email correspondence).

The lack of peer-reviewed articles in support of the Spelling Sourcebook program, as well as the program's widespread use, demonstrates the influence of pre-packaged, untested curricula, Wilde agrees, saying that districts are often “sucked in” to the Spelling Sourcebook program “by a commercial pitch with nothing to back it up” (email correspondence). This failure of districts to subject curriculum and programs to rigorous examination emphasizes the importance of the professional preparation, judgment, and on-going education of teachers.

Rebecca's use of Accelerated Reader is another example of using adopted professional materials. A product of the School Renaissance Institute, Accelerated

Reader is “a literature-based reading program” that assesses students’ supposed reading levels and allows students to choose texts from a list of approved books, after which they are “assessed based on computerized multiple-choice tests.” With Accelerated Reader, there is often a reward system, or in Rebecca’s case, an objective met, when “students receive points for completion of books and success on tests” (Groce and Groce 19; Thompson, Madhuri and Taylor 550).

The Accelerated Reader program does draw on some aspects of professionally-acknowledged best practice. For example, students’ freedom to choose books demonstrates an emphasis on student decision-making. The range of student decision-making is constrained by “reading level” consideration that may not take into account other important dimensions of a student’s ability to understand reading, such as interest, motivation, endurance, or personal engagement. And while students may appreciate the opportunity to choose a book, in many cases (but not Rebecca’s), they must still choose from an approved list, and may not choose *how* they respond to the text; the quiz is their only option.

Peer-reviewed research on Accelerated Reader also brings concerns, one of which addresses the baseline data collected from students before they even begin reading. The STAR assessment (which stands for Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading) has been acknowledged as using “invalid assessment instruments” to establish a student’s initial placement in the program, utilizing what Bigger calls a “cloze procedure” instead of a “placement test.” (Groce and Groce 19). Additionally, the STAR assessment has been questioned because it only measures one aspect of comprehension—silent reading—as opposed to “any other methods whereby a teacher can observe the reading behavior

of...students” such as oral fluency, higher-order questioning or even engagement (19). Such “invalid assessment instruments” could inhibit a teacher’s ability to help a student choose beneficial texts, or encourage comprehension of these texts, for that matter.

Further concerns with Accelerated Reader address not only the limited text selections for students, but the lack of engaging activities as students actually read their texts (Groce and Groce 22; Thompson, Madhuri and Taylor 553-557). Groce and Groce point out that students’ AR-driven reading contrasts with the “aesthetics and self-reflection [that invokes] higher-order thinking skills.” Also, the end result of Accelerated Reader, the objective post-test, is also problematic, as the questions have not been found to “promote application, analysis, synthesis, or evaluation of the material presented in the text,” with readers “missing out on the myriad of opportunities to engage in aesthetic response and creative endeavors related to reading experiences” (22). Such engagement-related critiques highlight the program’s inability to encourage students’ unique reading processes.

It is no surprise that the professional assessment of Accelerated Reader is at best “contradictory” (Thompson, Madhuri and Taylor 552). Despite studies that indicate gains in reading achievement as demonstrated in higher standardized test scores, some researchers have “questioned whether Accelerated Reader creates lifelong lovers of reading or students who are merely addicted to learning points and prizes” (Accelerated Reader, Wikipedia; Thompson, Madhuri and Taylor 551).

It is unlikely that the Spelling Sourcebook Program and Accelerated Reader have played a significant part in Rebecca’s adoption of best practice methods. In fact, one could argue that the existence of these materials, as well as the administration and other

teachers' expectations that she use them, has impeded, and may continue to impede, Rebecca's adoption of such approaches.

### *Professional Literature*

During the Summer Institute for Teachers, Rebecca read professional literature related to the teaching of grammar. This reading, as well as her continued research, has encouraged Rebecca to closely examine her school's grammar instruction. While Rebecca has talked about revising her school's approaches to grammar, she has not yet developed specific assignments or activities that will result from this research.

### *Modeling*

The initial modeling and engagement provided in Rebecca's preservice writing methods course, in which the instructor modeled and implemented a writing workshop, led Rebecca to want to adopt the approach. Although this modeling helped Rebecca to understand and commit to using a best practice, competing pressures from administrators and other teachers kept Rebecca from implementing this approach during her first year of teaching. While the National Writing Project's Summer Institute modeled similar approaches to writing, Rebecca did not mention adopting approaches as a result of her involvement in the Project. Given the changes that Rebecca has made in her second year of teaching (the year *after* the Summer Institute), it is likely, however, that the Summer Institute modeling provided Rebecca with professional support that justified her use of the workshop model.

### *Identity*

Throughout her preservice training, Rebecca was reluctant to embrace an identity as a teacher, but she did come to see herself as a successful reader and writer. Her



writing methods course reinforced her identity as a writer, and it's likely that the NWP also strengthened this identity. Even now, Rebecca minimizes her didactic role and identifies with "the student end of things," saying "I hope I don't lose [the ability to draw on the experience of the student]. I hope that when I'm teaching in 16 years, that I can still remember that." It is likely that her identity as a student, reader and writer has encouraged Rebecca's desire to encourage reading choices, minimize comprehension questions, and give meaningful workshop-based writing assignments.

### *Metacognition*

Rebecca's consideration of her own experiences as a student also represents metacognition, with her statement, "When I was a child I loved to read. Why did I hate reading for six years? In college, I kept thinking, 'Why did I hate it? Why was it so bad?'" Rebecca's analysis of her secondary school experiences has fostered her desire to help students enjoy reading and make writing meaningful through "real world" assignments, such as elementary school readings and complaint letters.

Rebecca says she considers how skilled writers write and how capable readers read, especially in her rationale for discontinuing her use of comprehension questions as well as her negative reaction to her superintendent's writing mandate. It is through the metacognitive acts of examining how reading and writing take place that Rebecca has examined and revised her own approaches.

### *Knowledge-Based World View*

Rebecca's present practice has been informed not only by her secondary education, preservice training, metacognition, and a multitude of other influences, but also by the many tensions that pull her instruction in other, more standardized directions:

her more traditionally-minded colleagues, the existing curriculum, the pressure from administration that moves her toward more traditional product rather than process instruction.

A factor that consistently emerged in Rebecca's interview was her desire for all the students at the same grade level to "have the same knowledge." This goal is tied to a number of choices Rebecca makes in curriculum and methods during her first year, and speaks to her own view of schooling.

A constructivist world view would indicate that knowledge is created in a community, is flexible, and some of Rebecca's views on literature instruction are consistent with a constructivist approach. Her instruction for students to "put [the text] in their own words," and "pick out words they don't know" demonstrates awareness of the student's active creation of meaning. Rebecca's decision to steer away from "pre-determined expectations" and let students develop their *own* questions while reading also fits with a constructivist philosophy. Other aspects of Rebecca's teaching demonstrate a different and conflicting view of learning, such as her continued utilization of the Spelling Sourcebook Program. Further, throughout Rebecca's teaching, the need to ensure that all kids "get the same instruction," "keep [students] accountable to the same things," and "cover what [she's] supposed to cover" appears more objectivist than constructivist, and are not compatible with best practice-based approaches such as the workshop model, which brings with it the assumption that students write at different paces and need different kinds of feedback at different parts in the process.

Rebecca's approach to researching grammar instruction also demonstrates an objectivist world view, as she looks to the fixed knowledge of practitioner texts but does

not refer to her own student research or collegial dialogue as a collaborative resource for new teaching knowledge. It is possible that the effects of Rebecca's objectivist views on knowledge have kept her from implementing more best practice-based grammar approaches—a phenomenon discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

#### Further Discussion

While Rebecca's preservice preparation supported process-based, "best practice" teaching, her reluctance to implement the approaches with which she'd been trained illustrates two factors. First, many preservice teachers may succumb to pressures *beyond* their training, such as administrative or collegial expectations, as they begin teaching, and these pressures can sometimes trump even the best of preservice experiences, as Rebecca's own identity as a student and her preservice study of writing pedagogy are not able to withstand the forces in the context where she works. On the other side, the ongoing professional support provided by Rebecca's participation in the Writing Project and ongoing teacher research group has renewed Rebecca's confidence in best practice approaches such as the workshop model, even in the face of continued administrative pressure.

The next chapter will use Joyce and Showers' ideas in order to consider how Rebecca's adopted methods have been integrated into other areas of classroom practice and explore the presence and absence of integrated use.

## CHAPTER VI

### INTEGRATING REBECCA'S PRACTICE

Chapter Five explored the factors that helped and hindered Rebecca's initial adoption of certain best practice approaches; this chapter examines Rebecca's integration of writing and literature approaches through vignettes of her classroom practice. The chapter will consider the presence or absence of best practice writing approaches such as process-based methods, student decision-making, low-risk writing, as well as factors that influence integrated use of such approaches. The following vignette emerges from a week of classroom observation in Rebecca's eighth grade literature classroom. During some of this instructional time, Rebecca provided guidance on district-mandated grammar and spelling lessons.

#### Rebecca's Writing Instruction

The walls of Rebecca's room are lined with posters from a variety of sources. On one wall, Rebecca are posters that students created during their last unit, a unit about careers ranging from cosmetologist to chemical engineer. Nearby, Rebecca has displayed student writing: multigenre works such as plays and poems students have written about these careers. Commercial grammar posters line another wall of the classroom; one poster includes a "formula for making words," complete with suffix options.

In this room, Rebecca guides her eighth grade literature students through a "fix it" activity [FIGURE 4], directing students to "circle what is wrong." After Rebecca gives students time to read and correct the paragraph, students volunteer the writing errors that they notice, including issues such as indenting the next paragraph, the use of *a* vs. *an*,

capitalizing proper nouns, proper punctuation (using a period at the end of a sentence as well as the correct use of commas), and spelling.

Fix it #10

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_

*Please rewrite the following paragraph so that all grammatical corrections have been made:*

I am a employee of our local news paper. My custom is to deliver papers to customers on Elm avenue every morning at five o'clock. I rember one instance in which I delivered the appers late, but it wasn't my fault. The reason was because a snowstorm made it imposible to open my front door.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Figure 4: Fix-it Activity

Another day, Rebecca reviews the concept of compound sentences. On the board, she writes: “Spelling Unit 10 Notes: Compound Sentences.” She asks the class, “Who can tell me something about compound sentences?” After one student volunteers that a compound sentence is made up of two separate sentences separated by a conjunction, Rebecca states, “Yes...so we have a...” and then writes the following on the board:

Sentence                      [and or but—conjunction or semicolon]                      Sentence.

Then Rebecca says, “Who can give me...a sample compound sentence? Let’s see how creative you can be today.” A student volunteers, “The teacher asked him to read a journal, but Colin said, ‘No.’” Rebecca writes the sentence on the board, labeling the first sentence, conjunction, and second sentence, saying, “Yes, we have a successful compound sentence.” Then Rebecca hands out a worksheet [FIGURE 5].

Directing students to work in groups of three, Rebecca assigns three sentences to each group, saying that students can either complete the exercises on the actual sheet of paper or on their own lined sheet of paper.

When her students complete the activity, Rebecca directs them to write the answers to various sentences on the board. Most students who write their answers on the board are correct; however, one student writes:

Don’t burn bridges behind you, or in front of you.

Noting aloud that this sentence is not made up of two independent clauses, Rebecca tells the class that this sentence is not a compound sentence. Then, working to correct the sentence, Rebecca changes the sentence to:

Don’t burn bridges behind you, or burn them in front of you.

Rebecca hesitates as she writes the sentence, and at this point, several students engage in off-task behavior, discussing unrelated topics with classmates.



## Compound Sentences

A compound word is made by joining two complete words.

*news + paper = newspaper*

A compound sentence is made by joining two complete sentences.

*We get the newspaper at home. + I like reading the Sports section.*

*We get the newspaper at home, and I like reading the Sports section.*

Here are three ways to make compound sentences:

1. Complete sentence, \_\_\_\_\_ complete sentence.  
(~~and~~—~~for~~—~~but~~—~~or~~—~~yet~~—~~so~~—~~because~~)
2. \_\_\_\_\_ complete sentence, \_\_\_\_\_ complete sentence.  
(~~either...or~~—~~neither...nor~~—~~not only...but also~~—~~both...and~~)
3. Complete sentence; \_\_\_\_\_, complete sentence.  
(~~furthermore~~—~~therefore~~—~~for example~~—~~however~~)

**On another sheet of paper, write compound sentences using these proverbs as the first complete sentence.**

When the door shuts, another one opens.

Birds of a feather flock together.

Don't burn bridges behind you.

Don't judge a book by its cover.

The early bird catches the worm.

Every cloud has a silver lining.

Experience is the best teacher.

Great minds think alike.

Hitch your wagon to a star.

Honesty is the best policy.

Keep your chin up.

Life is just a bowl of cherries.

Misery loves company.

No one is above the law.

One lie leads to another.

Pride goes before a fall.

Rome was not built in a day.

Slow and steady wins the race.

Two heads are better than one.

A watched pot never boils.

You can't unscramble eggs.



Figure 5: Compound Sentences Activity

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## An Analysis of Levels of Transfer in Rebecca's Writing Instruction

Having described several aspects of Rebecca's teaching of writing, this chapter moves to an analysis of her methods, determining the presence of process-based approaches, student decision-making, and low-risk writing.

### *Process-Based Approaches to the Teaching of Writing*

Rebecca has been forthcoming about the importance she places on the writing process in her teaching, describing her classroom as a "Writing Workshop" and "celebrat[ing] that [her] students are already writers." Stressing prewriting, drafting, revising and actually publishing a piece of writing, Rebecca has shared examples of how has found real audiences for her students' writings, explaining that her students have invested themselves in writing and sending complaint letters as well as creating—and reading—children's books for a neighboring elementary school. From what Rebecca reports in her interview, it seems that Rebecca utilizes some process-based approaches in her writing instruction; however, a closer examination of her teaching of grammar does not convey that such approaches were used consistently.

Rebecca has articulated her desire for students to "use words correctly in their writing" when she describes what is driving her current, graduate-level research on grammar. She has also said that she doesn't really care "whether [her students] can fill out a worksheet." These sentiments, which indicate that Rebecca wishes for her students to find grammar instruction and their own writing processes to be meaningful and productive, conflict with instruction observed. For example, aside from the "Fix it" worksheet's mislabeling of errors—grammatical, usage and spelling—as "grammatical," the worksheet stresses error hunting, and Rebecca's students are not encouraged to revise



their own writing for similar errors during this activity. The prescriptive compound sentence worksheet from the Rebecca Sitton Spelling Sourcebook program also conflicts with a process model for the teaching of writing, as it requires that students simply identify compound sentences and make existing sentences into compound sentences. Similar to the fix-it activity, there is no discussion of the value of a compound sentence, or how students' own writing could improve with sentence combining. Apart from students' actual writing processes, Rebecca's grammar instruction does not appear to utilize a process model for the teaching of writing, although Rebecca has described in interviews, and displayed on her classroom walls, other writing activities that do, such as multigenre career research projects. The next section, which details and analyzes Rebecca's literature instruction, illustrates more process-based methods.

#### *Student Decision-Making*

The artifacts on Rebecca's wall—multi-genre projects in which students chose a career to research and write about—indicate an emphasis on student choice. Other than the artifacts observed, however, there are few indications of routine use of choice in Rebecca's grammar instruction described in the vignette, other than that students can choose to write their answers on the paper itself or lined paper during the compound sentence activity.

#### *Low-Risk Writing*

In Rebecca's grammar instruction described by the vignette, students volunteer their answers readily, but are also able to decline participation if they desire. In addition, Rebecca does not give high-risk, anxiety-producing quizzes on newly-presented material.

The grammar activities are beginning-of-class, collaborative lessons that involve little student risk.

One of Rebecca's higher-risk activities is having students write an answer on the board. While this could be classified as a high-risk, open forum activity because other students will be scrutinizing their answers, students still have a chance to clarify their answers with a group before committing to them. And Rebecca's gentle correction of a student's compound sentence error, even with her own unclear compound sentence, also indicates a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere. Through all of these efforts—taking volunteers, avoiding quizzes, giving time for students to collaborate, and gentle correction of students, Rebecca seems to routinely enact low-risk writing in her grammar instruction.

#### Introduction to Literature Vignette

The following vignette illustrates a different angle of Rebecca's practice: her teaching of literature. When considering how Rebecca's approaches to the teaching of writing apply to her teaching of literature, it is difficult to exchange literature process and writing process in the analysis of levels of transfer. However, it is possible to consider how Rebecca employs a process model—utilizing prereading activities just as one might utilize prewriting activities, for example—as she reads *The Giver* with her students or how she works to foster a low-risk atmosphere not only in her teaching of writing but also her teaching of literature.

Similar to the previous vignette, it may be helpful to provide some background information as well as some direction for reading. First of all, the vignette represents instruction observed during a week of classroom observation during which Rebecca's

seventh grade literature classroom was reading *The Giver*. Rebecca shared that she introduced the text with an opinionnaire and finished the unit by giving students an essay test. While this vignette covers several teaching approaches, the analysis following the vignette will focus on specific aspects of Rebecca's teaching of writing, such as process-based approaches, student decision-making, and low-risk reading in order to consider how Rebecca has invited, and possibly integrated, similar practices.

### *The Giver*

Today, the desks in Rebecca's room have been arranged in a circle so that everyone can see each other. Rebecca begins class, directing students to write in class journals in response to the following prompt:

What makes a family in our society? What makes a family in Jonas' community?

How do these compare?

After giving students five minutes to write, Rebecca invites each student to speak sequentially, giving the option to share or pass. After one student shares her idea of family—which is traditional—another student pipes up, saying, “I have a question about what you wrote. Do the mom and dad have to be married?” The other student thinks for a moment, looks at Rebecca, who is noncommittal, and says, “No.” The other student shrugs as well, perhaps satisfied with the fact that she answered his question, but not necessarily happy with her actual answer. Moving from this journal activity, Rebecca tells the students that they will have a quiz. Students mumble a bit, appearing surprised and nervous, but then Rebecca posts the quiz on the overhead [FIGURE 6]:

At this point in the story, you have learned how the families are created and what routines they have; how children are educated and prepared for the future; and what kinds of rules people must follow. Sometimes, however, what an author does not say can be as powerful as what she or he does say.

A. What hasn't the author mentioned? What objects, routines, and activities in our lives are noticeably missing from Jonas'? Please describe 5 things that are missing.

B. Why, in your opinion, did Lois Lowry leave them out? What is she saying about this society by leaving out each item?

Figure 6: The Giver Quiz

After collecting the quizzes and discussing several of the quiz questions, Rebecca moves to the Reading Strategy: Summary sheets [FIGURE 7]—sheets which ask students to summarize the chapter, identify and define different vocabulary words, and ask two questions about the text.

Three students read their summaries of the previous chapter. Then Rebecca moves to work on vocabulary from the last chapter, asking students to share “a word that you looked up that you can share with us.” Many students—some students who declined participation in the previous activity—have their hands in the air, ready to share their words, and several volunteer: *bewilderment*, *remorse*, *recreation*, *chastise*, and *rehabilitation*.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Reading Strategy: Summary**

Title of Book \_\_\_\_\_ Author(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Chapter(s) \_\_\_\_\_

**Summary:** Please summarize what you have read today using complete sentences and paragraphs.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Vocabulary:** Please identify two words from today's reading that were unfamiliar to you or that you'd like explained further. Then include the page number from the book and a dictionary definition of the word.

1. Word: \_\_\_\_\_ Page Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Definition: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Word: \_\_\_\_\_ Page Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Definition: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Questions:** What are two questions you have about this section of reading?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 7: Reading Strategy: Summary Sheets

Moving on, Rebecca asks students to share the questions that they have prepared for the class. Rebecca says, “Who have we not heard from today?” and then asks several students to share their questions with the class. One student asks, “What will happen to Gabriel?” Another student asks, “Who is Roberto?” As students volunteer their

questions, Rebecca sits quietly in the midst of the discussion, observing as her students ask—and answer—student-created questions. Then Rebecca reads Chapter 5 from *The Giver* aloud. Students read and listen intently, stealing glances at each other as Rebecca reads the description of Jonas’ first stirrings. After she finishes the chapter, Rebecca directs students to look over their previously written descriptions of “Utopia” [Figure 8].

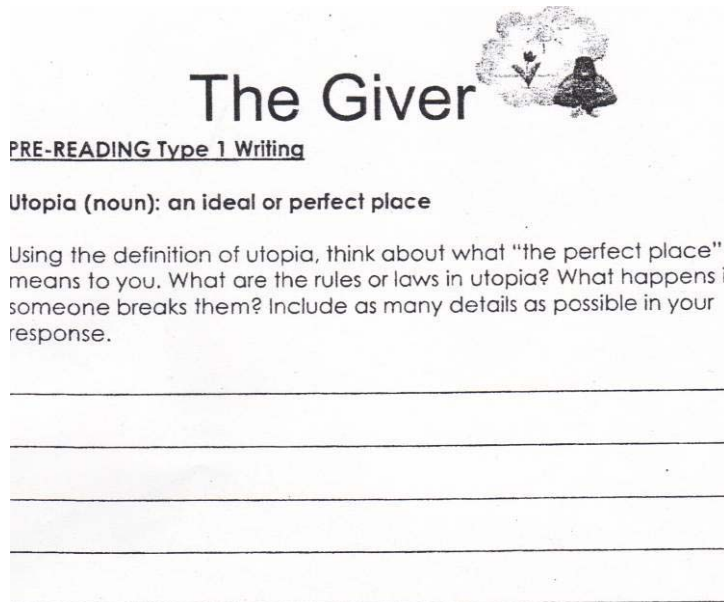


Figure 8: “Utopia” Writing Activity

Rebecca says, “I’m going to have you write a second draft about your utopia. You may decide to keep everything the same, but perhaps add a few details. You may want to change things... feel free to do that. I’m looking for at least a half page of writing... and you have about five minutes to get started.” After five minutes, class is over, and students leave with Rebecca’s expectation that they will continue to write at home. The next day, Rebecca directs the students to complete a Venn diagram on “Our Society’s Rules vs. Jonas’ Community’s Rules” as their journal activity. After discussing how a rule such as Lily’s inability to get a bike until she is nine differs from *our* rules, Rebecca encourages students to share the questions that they have about the previous

chapter, again sitting down as part of the circle and listening as her students volunteer their answers. After this question and answer session, Rebecca transitions the class to a drama-based reading of *The Giver*, assigning parts to volunteers. Rebecca reads the narrative section parts aloud, moving the text along, but students read the dialogue sections as if part of a play. Students read this way for the remainder of the hour. When the chapter is done, Rebecca asks for the students' attention and then concludes class by telling them that since tomorrow is the day that the class will read about Jonas' assigned "role" in society, each student in the class will similarly be assigned a role.

#### *Accelerated Reader Instruction*

Throughout Rebecca's literature instruction, she expects that students read books outside of class as part of the Accelerated Reader (AR) program [FIGURE 9]. In fact, students read three Accelerated Reader books per trimester. After reading each AR book, students take a 10-question, computer-generated test in the library—a test that is based on their comprehension of the text.

In the school library, each "approved" book has an orange sticker, with the AR "score" on the inside. This score is determined by a combination of how many pages are in the book as well as the reading level. A basic book, such as a Christopher Pike horror novel, has a score of 10. In Rebecca's classroom, students are required to read a book that has a score of at least 9, regardless of their AR pretest scores. If students want to read a longer book, perhaps from the Harry Potter series (which has a score of 40 due to its length), Rebecca says that she is flexible; for example, students can read half or even show her where they are in the book.

name: \_\_\_\_\_

**8<sup>th</sup> Grade Accelerated Reader Contract**

**Third Trimester**

In English 8, you will read one book per month. That's three books a trimester. You will need to keep this log ALL trimester. At the end of the trimester, you will turn it in for a grade.

**Accelerated Reader Procedure:**

1. Choose a book from school or public library (or your library). HINT: Make sure it is the correct genre for the trimester, and make sure you have not already taken an A.R. test on it!
2. Fill in the boxes below with the book's information.
3. Bring the book and this paper to your English teacher for approval. Your teacher will initial the box below.  
 \*\*In order for the book to be approved, the book level and points must add up to nine. If the book is not an AR book, then you will be writing a book report instead of an AR quiz.
4. Read your book. If you change books, you MUST get your new book approved.
5. When you finish the book, take the Accelerated Reader Reading Quiz on/before the book's due date.
6. Write your score below.
7. After all three have been completed (as well as any extra credit books), have your parent sign the bottom and turn in the contract.

\*\*Extra books mean extra credit - one point for each question right on the Accelerated Reader quiz.

Genre	Title	Author	BL/Point total	Initial	A.R. Score

Third Trimester:   Mystery  
                           Memoir or Autobiography or Biography  
                           Free Choice

Due Dates: March 28, April 25, May 23

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 9: Accelerated Reader Contract

During the lunch hour before class begins, a student arrives to ask Rebecca a specific question about his AR book. He tells her that his book is not on the list at the library, but he was really hoping to read it anyway. Rebecca thinks for a minute and then says, "Ask me later." The student leaves, and then ten minutes later, when the student



returns for class, they discuss their options. Rebecca gives the student the option of writing not just a summary, but a reaction to the book, and the student, appearing to agree with Rebecca, goes to his seat to begin working on the journal for that day.

#### An Analysis of the Transfer of Teaching Approaches in Rebecca's Literature Instruction

Having described aspects of Rebecca's literature instruction through the vignette, the chapter now analyzes Rebecca's transfer of process-based approaches, student decision-making, and low-risk reading in her literature instruction.

#### *Process-Based Approaches to the Teaching of Literature*

In Rebecca's literature instruction for *The Giver*, she employs an opinionnaire as well as beginning-of-class journals in order for students to generate ideas about the text, utilizing pre-reading activities similar to how one might pre-write during the writing process. Journals that generate ideas about family life, rules, and utopia all serve to help students connect with the text during their initial readings of the book. Pairing pre-reading with pre-writing, Rebecca also has students form—and revisit—reactions to the text through the “Utopia” writing, and this writing can serve as a basis for other, more advanced writing as well as further, more complete responses to the text.

Aside from prereading activities, Rebecca also works to help her students revise their responses to the text—as well as their own writing—when she suggests that they “add details” or “change things around” in the “Utopia” activity (Figure 8). Rebecca's use of summary sheets, with their combination of comprehension questions, vocabulary, and personal response (and the opportunity to discuss these summary sheets with classmates) also encourages students to form responses; as described in the vignette, some of students' questions go beyond comprehension, such as having fellow students

predict plot events (“What will happen to Gabriel?”). In addition, Rebecca’s tactic of assigning roles as students read about Jonah’s naming ceremony also fosters students’ responses to the text as they work to understand Jonah’s role in his society (as well as their own role in this imagined society).

Another factor points to Rebecca’s employment of a constructivist, process model for literature, especially in the area of collaborative response. Rebecca’s use of readers’ theatre will likely help students to improve comprehension through performance as they take on roles in the text during the reading of dialogue.

An additional process-driven approach to the teaching of literature involves Rebecca’s quiz, which does not require “finished” answers, but is open-ended, drawing on the students’ perceptions of Lowry’s intentions. Also, the class’ discussion of quiz answers encourage Rebecca’s students to generate textual responses beyond those initiated by the quiz.

There is one exception to Rebecca’s use of process in her teaching of literature: the use of Accelerated Reader (AR). While most of Rebecca’s assignments and activities honor students’ individual textual responses, moving from prereading to sharing, AR assesses students’ reading through an objective test rather than an open-ended quiz, student discussion or journal. However, Rebecca seems to concede that there are faulty aspects of AR when she works out an alternative for students interested in reading a non-AR book. The AR program has been critiqued in Chapter Five, and will also be examined in this chapter’s section titled “Professional Materials.”

Aside from the AR program, Rebecca’s use of pre-reading activities, summary sheets, open-ended quizzes, and other response-based methods demonstrates her

emphasis on constructivist rather than objectivist approaches to the teaching of literature, and conveys that her methods are based on a reading-as-process model. However, given her lack of process in the teaching of grammar, it is unlikely that Rebecca's use of the process model has yet been integrated into all areas of her teaching.

### *Student Decision-Making*

There is one area where lack of choice seems evident in Rebecca's literature instruction. In the vignette that describes Rebecca's instruction of *The Giver*, students are given only one journal prompt at the beginning of class. Despite this critique, however, the vignette conveys other aspects of choice: students can choose to participate or pass, they can choose how to respond to open-ended quiz questions, they can choose which words in the text they would like to further research, and they can choose Accelerated Reader books. Given that Rebecca's writing instruction indicates very little choice beyond students' multigenre projects, it is hard to ascertain whether student decision-making has been integrated into all areas of Rebecca's classroom; however, given Rebecca's use of choice in her literature instruction, it seems that her emphasis on student decision-making has reached at least a routine level of use.

Another element of Rebecca's use of student decision-making involves student questionnaire data [Table 2]. Despite the many choices that Rebecca gives her students during literature instruction, 35 percent of students indicated disagreement with question number two, which said, "In this class, I can learn in my own way." Also, 30 percent indicated disagreement with the statement that Rebecca "considered [their] own learning situation when teaching [them]." And more than half of Rebecca's students disagreed that she knew how they learned best.

Student comments also reflected some lack of student decision-making. On one survey, a student wrote, “Sometimes the whole class is forced to do homework in a certain way. For example, I learn best when I summarize a book in a paragraph, but every once in a while, we are made to draw pictures about a chapter.” Another student articulated that “sometimes the class moves too slow for me,” while another said that Rebecca “doesn’t let me read by myself sometimes.” There were some positive comments as well; for example, one student said, “[Rebecca] always helps me how I learn best when she works with me individually,” while another student said that Rebecca makes the class “workable for different kinds of people.”

Considering student data that involves student decision-making, it seems that Rebecca’s emphasis on student decision-making, especially as seen in the literature instruction vignette, does not coincide with a student-perceived emphasis on student decision-making. There are a few explanations for this lack of triangulation. First of all, Rebecca’s school relies on a trimester system, and Rebecca was at the beginning of a trimester with some of her students, establishing relationships with them that were only weeks old. It is possible that Rebecca’s lack of familiarity with her students—and her students’ lack of familiarity with Rebecca—resulted in lower survey numbers, especially for question number three, which yielded the least percentage of agreement. In addition, Rebecca is in her second year of teaching, which may mean that she is still learning how to consider students’ individual situations as she plans and executes her methods.

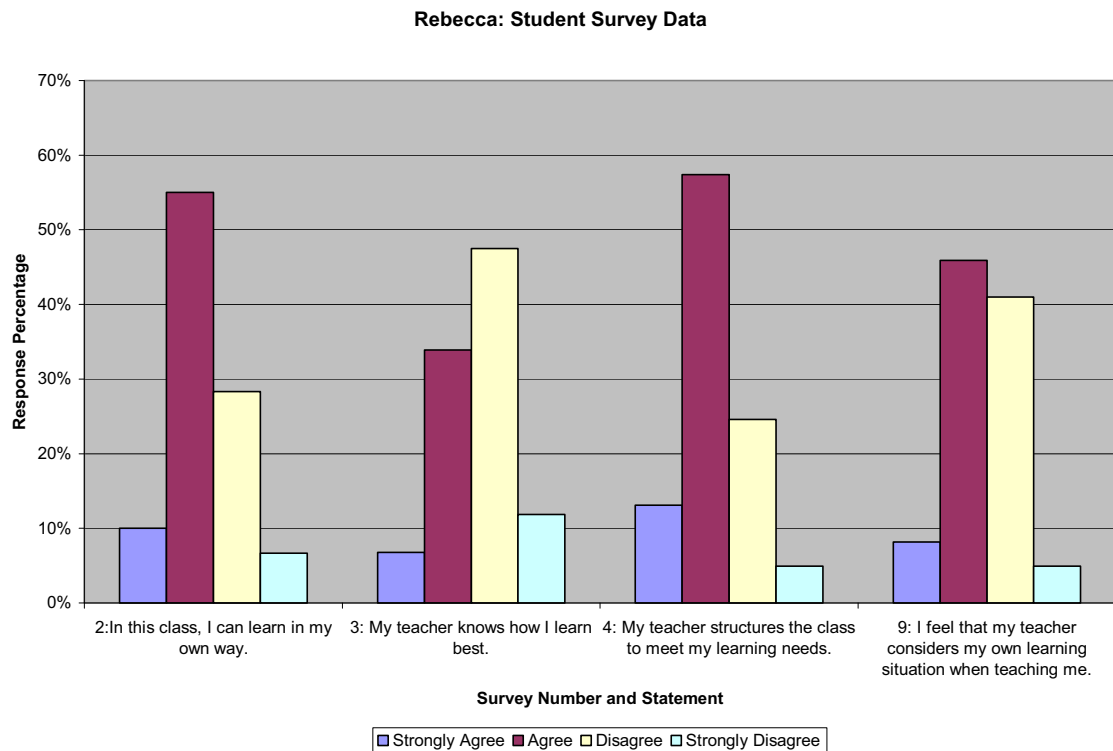


Figure 10: Rebecca's Student Survey Data

Table 2: Rebecca's Student Survey Questions

Question #	Survey Statement	Percentage of Students Who:			
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2	In this class, I can learn in my own way.	10%	55%	28%	7%
3	My teacher knows how I learn best.	7%	34%	47%	12%
4	My teacher structures the class to meet my learning needs.	13%	57%	25%	5%
9	I feel that my teacher considers my own learning situation when teaching me.	8%	46%	41%	5%

Overall, the lack of agreement between Rebecca's survey data, writing instruction and literature instruction reinforce the notion that while Rebecca does utilize student decision-making in some areas of her classroom, it is not likely that these approaches have reached an integrated level of use.

### *Low-Risk Reading Environment*

When examining the vignette, several aspects of Rebecca's literature instruction demonstrate a low-risk reading environment. First of all, much of *The Giver* is read aloud during class; this in-class reading helps students to make sense of the book within a community of other readers, as opposed to unguided, and possibly confused reading at home. Second, while Rebecca's quiz might appear to rely on a more "finished" teaching model, its low-risk nature, such as asking students why, in their opinion, Lowry left out objects, routines and activities, can actually help students to form and clarify higher-level responses to the novel (and, in this case, intentions of the author).

The reading writing assignments in Rebecca's classroom also demonstrate low-risk instruction. For example, the journal assignment, where students are asked to compare families in Jonas' society and their own society, is not graded, encouraging students to brainstorm about the topic. In addition, the "Utopia" writing assignment, which students start and later revise, is low-risk as students add material from the text or re-work their organization. The class participation related to these assignments is also low-risk. Throughout class discussions, Rebecca solicits participation sequentially, offering students the option to share or pass. Some students who pass after writing their journals volunteer vocabulary words during a different activity.

The Accelerated Reader program seems to be a mix of low-risk and higher-risk instruction. On one hand, the use of computerized, objective quizzes after reading a book seems to conflict with other, more low-risk approaches described above. On the other hand, Rebecca does allow students to choose—and write responses for—texts that don't

appear in the AR roster. Rebecca did not indicate, however, that she was willing to offer a similar option (to write a response rather than take a test) for students who *do* choose a book that appears on the roster but prefer not to take an objective quiz. Beyond AR's assessment measures, a further high-risk implication of AR is its emphasis on independent reading. It is possible that the independent reading required of AR, which occurs without the support of classmates, discussion, writing and the teacher, could mean that students have difficulties with texts; such difficulties highlight more high-risk sentiments.

Considering Rebecca's quizzes, writing activities, student participation tactics, and Accelerated Reader approaches, her use of low-risk instruction is well-established in her literature instruction. Paired with a consideration for her low-risk writing that includes soliciting volunteers, avoiding high-stakes quizzes, and giving time for students to collaborate, Rebecca's use of low-risk instruction is likely at the integrated level.

#### Factors That May Influence Rebecca's Presence/Absence of Integrated Instruction

Rebecca reported that her first year of teaching involved using aspects of other teachers' curricula. This year, she reports that she has revised her approaches for the teaching of writing as well as literature from her first year to her second. However, she still struggles to consistently integrate best practice approaches such as the process model and student decision-making, especially in the teaching of grammar. The following section will suggest several factors that may have influenced Rebecca's integration of approaches such as undergraduate and preservice experiences, reflection, collegial and administrative support, professional literature, modeling, identity, metacognition, and her knowledge-based world view.

### *Undergraduate/Preservice Experiences*

Because Rebecca's secondary experiences were so poor, she places an emphasis on the "student end" of things, especially when it comes to reading. Her words as well as actions communicate that she wants students to enjoy reading and see writing as a meaningful activity. However, Rebecca's unsatisfactory secondary experiences, which have resulted in her desire to make reading and writing meaningful, have not yet transferred to her teaching of grammar.

Rebecca's writing methods course stressed reading and writing workshop methods. Rebecca did not indicate that the teaching of grammar was addressed in her preservice courses, or that she was able to observe—and enact—process-based approaches to the teaching of grammar during her student teaching experience. It is possible that this lack of course content, observation and experience could be contributing to Rebecca's lack of integration of methods such as process and student decision-making; however, it is also likely that other factors, such as her knowledge-based world view, contribute to this lack of integration in more significant ways.

### *Self-Reflection*

In the past, reflection on what capable readers do has helped Rebecca to break out of more traditional roles; for example, Rebecca specifically articulated why skilled readers don't use comprehension questions. But Rebecca has not articulated similar sentiments for grammar instruction, reflecting on how capable writers learn grammar. Given the power of her previous reflection, it is possible that with time to learn about and reflect on more organic grammar methods via collaboration with National Writing



Project colleagues, Rebecca will become more aware of—and develop—alternative methods.

#### *Administrative/Collegial Support*

Rebecca's former colleagues, who pressured her to use the existing curriculum, did not encourage her to employ process-based, low-risk, or choice-based approaches; however, Rebecca's current, "new" colleagues offer significant support for her literature methods, dropping by her classroom often to see how the activities that the "team" planned actually played out. This support seems to be focused mostly on the execution of specific methods, not overarching philosophies about the teaching of reading or writing. In addition, Rebecca's colleagues seem to be willing to "go along" with Rebecca's new grammar plan, but don't appear to be offering help or feedback. Nevertheless, it is likely that this environment—one that at the very least seems amiable—has helped Rebecca as she integrates her best practice methods.

Rebecca's administration, and its desire for more traditional, "tough love" writing instruction, has threatened Rebecca's adoption and integration of best practice methods. However, one area in which Rebecca's administration is silent is Rebecca's teaching of literature. Aside from Accelerated Reader, Rebecca has been free to experiment with workshop-based approaches, especially after she discontinued the pre-existing curriculum of comprehension questions after reflecting on what proficient readers do. Even within Accelerated Reader, she has found ways to implement some aspects of student decision-making and reader response. It is likely that Rebecca's lack of administrative pressures regarding her teaching of literature has helped her to discontinue more traditional literature approaches in favor of more workshop-based approaches.

### *Existing Professional Materials*

Existing professional materials such as the Rebecca Sitton program have kept Rebecca from implementing best practice methods, especially in her teaching of grammar. Perhaps it is the money the administration has spent, or the time her district has spent training her, or the pressure she feels from administrators or other colleagues, but existing professional materials have impeded Rebecca's implementation of best practice methods, especially in her teaching of grammar. It is also likely that the district's use of the Accelerated Reader program, with its more product-based, objectivist sentiments, has kept Rebecca from using student-chosen texts in more meaningful, response-based ways. Since Rebecca's fellow Summer Institute participants helped her to change her comprehension question-based literature instruction after reflecting on students' actual reading processes, it is possible that given time to reflect on students' actual grammar learning processes, and continued reflection on authentic reading processes, Rebecca will overcome the expectations of existing professional materials and integrate best practices more consistently in her classroom.

### *Professional Literature*

Rebecca is involved in graduate-level studies on the teaching of grammar, and is reading several professional texts. Such texts have yet to inform her integration of a process model for the teaching of grammar; with time, however, such integration is possible, especially if these texts can encourage Rebecca to reflect on how practiced writers improve their writing through grammar.

### *Modeling*

During initial and follow-up interviews, Rebecca never mentioned any grammar modeling from the National Writing Project Summer Institute. Some of her methods, such as journals and the low-risk, speak-or-pass sharing have been modeled in National Writing Project professional development opportunities, and Rebecca has implemented such tactics in her classroom. It is likely that, given opportunities to experience modeling on the teaching of grammar, that Rebecca will at least adopt—and hopefully integrate—more process-based approaches in this area.

### *Identity*

Rebecca's identity as a reader has helped her to consider what skillful readers do; however, Rebecca has not articulated any particular identity in terms of her grammar instruction, other than researcher. Perhaps when Rebecca sees herself not as a grammar "expert," but as a person who uses grammar to write effectively, or as an active co-creator of knowledge *with* her students in her study of grammar, her process-based instruction, use of student choice, and low-risk literacy methods will be more fully integrated in her classroom.

### *Metacognition*

Rebecca has, in specific ways, thought about why comprehension questions are not an authentic act for capable readers, and why more workshop-based models yield more complex textual response. Such consideration has at the very least helped her to teach literature in a more meaningful and student-centered and meaningful way; this research has, at the very most, helped her to go beyond the existing, comprehension question-based curriculum. Given the power of such metacognition, it is possible that

with time, contact with professional literature, like-minded colleagues, and continued participation in professional development opportunities such as the National Writing Project, Rebecca will be encouraged to consider how she has learned grammar, reflect on how adept writers use grammar to improve their craft, and gain the strength to employ more process, student decision-making, and low-risk instruction in her teaching of grammar, despite curricular tradition, available materials, and administrative pressures.

#### *Knowledge-Based World View*

Rebecca's views on knowledge creation may be impeding integration of her teaching methods. Rebecca is often focused on students "getting the same knowledge" instead of co-creating knowledge as a class, and this perspective is evident in her grammar instruction, where she is the expert. Rebecca's literature instruction, on the other hand, relies on a more constructivist model. If Rebecca's research on grammar begins to utilize other perspectives to co-create meaning with her students and colleagues, it may be possible for her to integrate best practice approaches more fully into her grammar instruction.

#### Moving to the Final Research Subject

Having established areas in which Rebecca's teaching integrate with others, as well as the factors that influence such integration, the following chapter examines the final exemplary teacher's adoption of best practice-based methods as well as a similar examination of transfer—and factors that influence such transfer.

## CHAPTER VII

### BEST PRACTICE ADOPTION IN ALTERNATIVE SETTINGS

This chapter begins with a description of Cheryl's teaching context and then details Cheryl's teaching experiences, moving from her own secondary experiences to her present practice. After addressing Cheryl's best practice methods, which include the use of episodic fiction, the choice to use engaging literature lessons, an emphasis on low-intimidation instruction, the employment of various reading strategies, and a flexible approach to the process approach for writing, the chapter then considers factors that led to Cheryl's adoption of current best practice methods.

#### Cheryl's Teaching Journey

##### *Context*

Cheryl is in her fourth year of teaching at an urban, alternative high school housed next to discount grocery stores, pawn shops and prepaid cellular storefronts. Her students do not attend class consistently; of the 30 students enrolled in each of her English 9, English 10 and Spanish classes, Cheryl is fortunate to have 10 present each day, often a different 10 students than the day before. The school is ethnically diverse, 30% African American, 30% Latino, 40% Caucasian, and less than one percent Asian.

Cheryl's students engage in daunting struggles. One has a history of illicit drug abuse. Another abused her baby, had it removed by Child Protective Services, lives at the Salvation Army homeless shelter, and is again pregnant. A former student is serving a life sentence for a murder. Students also confront economic hardship. Cheryl points out that some wear their coats all day because they only have one outfit. Although the district reports that 78% of Cheryl's students qualify for free or reduced lunch, a higher

figure is likely more accurate, since some students have not returned the free lunch forms. And there are logistical challenges as well; few students have their own transportation, spending hours on city buses traveling to and from school (the district's busing plan does not include alternative education).

The transient situation of Cheryl's students' families creates a variety of negative outcomes, one being that learning or emotionally impaired students fail to obtain, or maintain, Individualized Educational Plans. Although these students may have been recognized at some point to have disabilities, the district is not accommodating their needs and these students are, in this sense, on their own.

The truancy, transience, poverty and emotional or learning disabilities of Cheryl's students present her with multiple challenges. As a new teacher she is not alone. Linda Darling-Hammond states that "most U.S. teachers start their careers in disadvantaged schools where turnover is highest," and "are assigned the most educationally needy students whom no one else wants to teach..." (5).

#### *Life Before Alternative Language Arts Teaching*

Cheryl describes her secondary education at a private religious school as "sheltered" and based in "traditional" approaches as well as limited aspects of best practice instruction, such as a use of the process model for writing. After graduating from high school, Cheryl chose teaching as her a career path. When taking a writing methods class, Cheryl made an influential personal connection with the instructor. This instructor not only taught Cheryl about the process model, helped her to name and differentiate this approach, and familiarized her with the concept of best practice.

With her university experience fresh in mind, Cheryl was placed in a two-day-a-week pre-internship that she says gave her very little practical experience as she lacked formal teaching time (that is, regular time with students, executing lesson plans). However, Cheryl says that the experience taught her that “in order to have a relationship with students, an educator...must be in front of kids on a regular basis.” After her pre-internship, Cheryl was placed for her full-time internship with a seventh and eighth grade teacher that Cheryl describes not only as “phenomenal,” but a person who also became a “good friend.” Cheryl says that this teacher provided “nitty-gritty” instruction in lesson planning,” “rigorous curriculum mentoring,” and ways to use collaboration in the classroom. Also, during this internship, Cheryl found herself drawn to

the kids who were forgotten, to the kids with problems. The kids you were having meetings with after school with the parents and teachers because they were failing. I loved those kids, and they were big-time mentors for me...

Even at this early stage in her teaching, Cheryl was drawn to relationships with—and learned from—the “forgotten...with problems,” which, as it turned out, primed her for the alternative school setting.

### *An Unlikely Match*

After graduation, Cheryl found a long-term substitute teaching job across the hall from her mentor teacher and continued to learn from her, now as a colleague. Several weeks into this temporary position, the school vice principal knocked on Cheryl’s classroom door and asked if she would be interested in working full-time in the district’s alternative school. Although Cheryl never intended to teach in an alternative setting, she reports that she laughed, and responded, “Well, it would be nice to have health insurance

and a salary!” Unaware of the challenges ahead, Cheryl accepted the position. As a white, middle-class, college graduate, Cheryl saw the alternative school as a “whole different world.” She says,

January 26 was my first day... and...I’ll never forget... a kid called me a “bleep ass mother bleeper” and...my kids were 20 and I was 22 and I was in charge and it was unreal.

With such “unreal” beginnings, Cheryl continued teaching through the rest of the semester. Since she was still learning about her student population and was not given a curriculum, there were weeks where she thought, “What am I supposed to do? What am I supposed to teach?” Cheryl utilized what knowledge she had—knowledge from her methods courses and internship—and chose texts, class activities and assessments on her own, teaching with little direction from the administration.

Cheryl says that during this initial teaching experience, she kept in touch with her undergraduate writing methods instructor, who suggested that Cheryl participate in the local National Writing Project’s Summer Institute for teachers. However, feeling exhausted in the midst of such intensity, Cheryl declined, and instead, spent her summer preparing for the coming school year. She says her district bought at her request “young adult books, really engaging pieces of literature,” and that she “spent an entire summer” reading, “going through chapter by chapter, working [herself] to the bone, trying to find ways to make [the books] engaging and somehow beneficial [to the students].” Cheryl created her literature-based lessons with her alternative population in mind, and says that each lesson she created “had to be engaging, high interest, and low-intimidation,” as she



felt it was essential to “create a learning environment that left very little room for failure.”

Cheryl returned to the alternative school for her second year of teaching with readings as well as methods that she hoped would help her students “engage” with literature and writing. She also continued to learn more about her student population and context. After her second year of alternative school teaching, she chose to enroll in the National Writing Project’s Summer Institute for Teachers, finding the experience “incredibly rewarding.”

Cheryl continued involvement with the National Writing Project at varying levels the following years, carefully considering methods that other Project teachers recommended. Aware that her students presented different challenges than students from traditional schools, Cheryl often asked herself, “Will this [particular approach] work for my kids?” She adopted the Author's Chair activity she learned about during her involvement with the Project , and also incorporated episodic fiction into her curriculum after attending a National Writing Project inservice led by a local teacher also working with struggling students. However, Cheryl reports that some methods, especially those involving technology, were difficult to adopt due to the limited resources in her building.

As she taught, Cheryl made an effort to educate herself about students of poverty, eventually reading a book popular with teachers and districts titled *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* by Ruby Payne. Cheryl believes the book informed her about the unique challenges faced by her poverty-stricken students, and gave her an “understanding [of] why kids reject authority and how to better communicate with parents of kids with poverty.” Payne's book also helped Cheryl to justify some of her teaching methods. For

example, Payne's idea about methods of discourse among the poor—the notion that students of poverty's stories “start at the end... proceed with short vignettes... and [finish] with a comment about the character”—resonated with Cheryl's own perception of her students' “circular” way of telling stories and, in turn, encouraged Cheryl as she incorporated episodic genres into her literature curriculum (Payne 3). Cheryl also read “a lot” of Lisa Delpit's work and refined her thoughts on her role in the classroom, concluding that “there needs to be an authoritative figure in the room... the trusted someone to go to.”

#### *Present Situation and Practice*

Presently, Cheryl continues to use her mantra of “Will this work for my kids?” as she employs several best practice methods in her classroom, including “engaging,” “high interest,” and “low intimidation” literature methods and reading strategies such as choral reading, buddy reading, simple re-reading, and prediction tactics to foster reading comprehension. In addition, Cheryl “finds ways to make [the writing process] work” with her student population, which struggles with attendance. She reports that she flexibly uses prewriting, drafting, revising, collaborative peer response, and publishing as she has implemented process-based approaches to writing in her classroom.

Cheryl has “communicated with colleagues about students and their needs on a regular basis,” using this information to forge relationships with students as well as change her approaches to meet these needs. Relaying that her staff of ten teachers was, and continues to be, “very close,” Cheryl says,

...to have other teachers in the building who are open and eager to have conversations about what reaches kids, what works, what bombed is huge and

helpful and really wonderful... It's immensely helpful to have [my colleague] next door, because he is a fantastic teacher and we bounce ideas off of each other.

Another factor that continues to influence Cheryl's current practice is her involvement with the National Writing Project. Although Cheryl says she has few relationships with National Writing Project participants teaching in urban or alternative schools, the Project has still been useful. She has participated continually in the Institute on some level—be it summer workshops, graduate research groups, or teacher inservice opportunities—since her initial involvement. Contextualizing ideas from inservices, texts, and colleagues, Cheryl says that her teaching style has developed to become “open to...rolling with the punches,” and this underlies her “flexible” use of the process approach to writing.

Cheryl says that her practice is also guided by her administration's recent decision to require her to give common assessments in each of her classes. Describing these common-text assessments as “poorly written” by “someone else in the district” who teaches in a traditional high school, Cheryl says that her students have “failed almost every assessment,” yet she still administers them. While analyzing her students' failure could provide Cheryl with direction for her curriculum and practice, Cheryl reports that she has been given “few resources and almost zero professional development time” for such analysis.

Ultimately, Cheryl uses her own word, “awareness,” to describe her teaching philosophy. She emphasizes the importance of knowing her students' lives, especially their home situations. She states that her students are living in “parent survival homes, homes where their parents are just surviving.” She also articulates the need to

be aware of what's going on with the kids, you have to be aware of what's going on in the city... if there was a big shooting last night... between Bemis Boys and East Avenue Boys, you need to know that going into the classroom. If you don't know that first, then you can't teach.

### Adoption of Best Practice-Related Teaching Approaches

Utilizing Cheryl's interview data, this chapter will explore factors that have helped or hindered her adoption of various best practice approaches.

#### *Undergraduate/Preservice Experiences*

Cheryl's secondary English classes familiarized her with the process approach to writing; her undergraduate writing methods course encouraged a deeper familiarity with the actual concept of best practice. Nevertheless, Cheryl's interviews did not indicate that such classes convinced her to go beyond her familiarity and actually adopt best practice methods. This could be because after her methods course, Cheryl's pre-internship lacked practical experience, illustrating a gap between theory and practice. However, Cheryl's description of her full-time internship as "nitty-gritty" and "rigorous," paired with a reference to collaborative activities and curriculum and lesson planning, indicate that the intense, practical experience of her internship likely helped her to adopt an appreciation for collaboration and careful attention to the construction and execution of curricula and lesson plans.

In interviews, Cheryl defined each of her undergraduate experiences in terms of her relationship with those individuals. For example, Cheryl "connected" with her undergraduate writing methods professor, disliked her pre-internship in part because she was unable to forge relationships with her students, and found a "close friend" in her

supervising teacher. Such descriptors convey the importance that Cheryl places on relationships, and the potential of these relationships to further familiarize her with—and encourage her toward—best practice approaches.

### *Self-Reflection*

Throughout Cheryl's first year, she reflected on her teaching, asking "What am I supposed to do?" Cheryl says that her reflection during her first year focused on classroom management issues, but she also asked herself "What am I supposed to teach?", perhaps as a result of the "nitty-gritty" curriculum mentoring received at her internship. Such reflective questioning likely encouraged Cheryl to read young adult novels (and create best practice-related, engaging, high-interest, low-intimidation lessons to make such reading "beneficial") during her summer break in preparation for the following academic year.

Cheryl also alluded to self-reflection with her question, "Will this work for my kids?" While this is a reflective question, it requires more complex, well-informed reflection on her students' backgrounds, learning abilities, and interests and relies on metacognition (and will be explored in the section titled "Metacognition").

### *Administrative/Collegial Support*

Cheryl's administrators do not appear to have encouraged much of Cheryl's best practice adoption. They provided very little direction when she initially began teaching; this lack of direction did not encourage her to adopt a flexible approach to the process method for writing or adopt low-intimidation literature strategies. Also, Cheryl's administration's failure to provide professional development time for gathering and assessing worthwhile student data has likely impeded Cheryl's ability to consider

adopting other best practices as well as contextualize and revise her existing practices in well-informed ways. Cheryl's administration was, however, willing to buy summer reading material for Cheryl; these young adult novels helped Cheryl to create best practice-based lessons as she desired to re-work her curriculum and approaches over the summer.

Cheryl indicates that her relationships with colleagues provide an outlet for idea sharing. At the least, her colleagues' "openness," "conversations about what works," and communication about students' needs have not hindered Cheryl in her exploration and revision of best practice approaches.

Cheryl's initial adoption of episodic fiction is partly due to a National Writing Project inservice from a colleague who teaches in similar circumstances. It was likely the credibility of Cheryl's National Writing Project colleague, coupled with Cheryl's metacognitive question of "Will this work for my kids?" that brought about her adoption of the approach.

#### *Existing Professional Materials*

When Cheryl began teaching, very few professional materials existed in her context. Cheryl did not indicate a "standing curriculum," such as the John Collins approach, in place at her school. Presently, the only existing professional materials are district-mandated common assessments. While the idea of assessing student learning and building on that assessment for further instructional direction could be seen as a student-centered, best practice idea, Cheryl has communicated several reasons why she questions the value of these assessments. First of all, the assessments have been created by a teacher with a different student population who is completely unfamiliar with Cheryl's

students and teaching approaches, which may bring concerns as to whether the test can reliably measure student learning. In addition, Cheryl's students' failure on the tests does not foster the best practice-based "low-intimidation," "little-room-for-failure" classroom environment that she strives for. Finally, Cheryl has not been given the time and resources to analyze these assessments and their results (beyond the students' failure). Thus, the district's common assessments have not encouraged Cheryl's adoption or revision of best practice approaches.

### *Professional Literature*

Cheryl points to Lisa Delpit's work as having influenced her "authority" relationship with her students, saying that students need an "authoritative figure...the trusted someone to go to" and this distinction further demonstrates Cheryl's emphasis on relationships in her teaching. Delpit asserts that in many Black communities, people expect authority to be "earned by personal efforts and exhibited by personal characteristics." Clarifying this thought, Delpit states that in classrooms, "the authoritative person gets to be the teacher because she is authoritative." Thus, Delpit emphasizes the teacher's actions as an essential part of a teacher's authority, clarifying that the teacher should act like a teacher in order to earn students' respect. Contrasting this thought with the thoughts on "middle class" authority structures, Delpit points out that "middle-class cultures...expect one to achieve authority by the acquisition of an authoritative role. That is, 'the teacher is the authority because she is the teacher'" (35). In middle-class contexts, Delpit asserts, the teacher role, not the teacher's actions, provide authority. With this contrast, Delpit specifies that many people of color expect authority to be earned, and that such authority figures must "consistently prove the

characteristics that give [them] authority” (35). These authority-giving characteristics might include “establish[ing] a standard of achievement and push[ing] the students to achieve that standard...” (35-36). However, while Delpit may espouse a pedagogy that is authority-driven, Cheryl’s actual, not perceived, role in the classroom seems to conflict with such authority, given her emphasis on “what students need first,” not an “established standard of achievement.”

Cheryl recognizes another text, Ruby Payne’s *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, to have been “most beneficial to her teaching,” especially during the current teaching year. Payne’s *Framework* is a text that attempts to help educators better understand the culture of poverty. This text, while encouraging teachers to “build relationships of mutual respect with students...even where middle-class resources are lacking” (Keller 31), has appeared to help Cheryl justify her use of episodic fiction; Cheryl also implies that the text has improved her knowledge of, and communication with, students.

Payne’s work has been fiercely critiqued in various educational circles, and for good reason. A wealthy White woman, Payne has made a decent living for herself, having sold at least 800,000 copies of her text as well as having booked hundreds of lucrative inservices with school districts and organizations. Known to be “wildly in demand for keynote speeches and seminars at annual conferences like...one hosted by the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement,” Payne intends to “[help] teachers and administrators become aware and appreciate the circumstances of people who seem unfamiliar to them,” and many feel that such intentions are honorable. The problem surfaces, however, when Payne’s work is



examined more closely: in short, it utilizes “deficit thinking” in order to arrive at “simplistic and judgmental” stereotypes of the poor as violent, uneducated criminals (Bomer, Dworin, May and Semingson 2522; Keller 30).

The reliability of Payne’s work has also been questioned. Anita Bohn aptly points out that because Payne’s work is self-published, “her research does not have to be verifiable, reproducible, valid or reliable” (2). And such unreliability can be demonstrated with Cheryl’s justification for the use of episodic fiction in her classroom. While she may perceive her students to use “circular” storytelling methods as per Payne’s assertion that “children from poverty ‘need to beat around the bush’ before getting to the point,” there is actually “no research-based reason to state that people in poverty, as a class, talk around the topic more than do people in the middle class” (Bomer, Dworin, May and Semingson 2515).

Interestingly, Cheryl does not appear to be wholly reliant on Payne’s text, especially when considering her commitment to alternative modes of professional development, such as reading young adult novels, attending National Writing Project workshops, and simply learning from the students themselves. In fact, it is possible that Cheryl, who has already demonstrated herself as a teacher committed to “engaging” with students, who insists that her students are her “mentors,” may become aware that

...existing answers are not secrets we need to pay big bucks to learn. Their answers are free: It takes hard work and unwavering dedication. It takes committed teachers and administrators willing to set high expectations and offer engaging curricula that make strong personal connections for their students.  
(Bohn 4)

Cheryl's intentions seem sincere; she has said that she recognizes the many challenges her students face. She knows that many of these challenges are due to oppression, and says that “she [feels] compelled to change it.” But in her interviews, Cheryl did not articulate any concerns with Payne, instead extolling the texts’ positive influence on her teaching as well as her communication skills. This could be because, as Anita Bohn points out, “Ruby Payne’s popularity attests to the urgent need for answers to the questions and concerns of teachers and administrators who sincerely want to help children from lower socioeconomic status achieve educational equity” (Bohn 3) or that Payne’s insights “make sense out of their own experience and stick with them long after other pedagogical advice has faded” (30). Cheryl’s faith in Ruby Payne and subsequent justification of certain methods could also be due to equity-minded teachers such as Cheryl who use Payne’s ideas “while failing to examine critically the theories and frameworks upon which they build their work” (Gorski 12). Cheryl’s desire to learn more about her students, coupled with the problematic implications of Payne, does not illustrate a failure of logic on Cheryl’s part as much as the power that some professional texts, whether strongly researched or laced with weak, anecdotal data, can have with teachers. This dilemma also demonstrates the need for teachers—especially those teaching populations different than their own—to be provided with (and encouraged to critically read) more reliable sources of information.

Regardless of Bohn’s critique of Payne, there are certain strategies for which Payne advocates, such as the “graphic organizers and multiple approaches to learning about a concept” as demonstrated in the next chapter, that have actually been proven through “well established research” to help “all children benefit,” regardless of

socioeconomic status (Bohn 3-4). In other words, Cheryl's careful use of strategies such as the episodic fiction genre could help all students, alternative and traditional, learn to read and write more productively, and she need not credit Payne for such success.

### *Modeling*

Examining Cheryl's interview data, very few aspects of modeling surface. Instead, Cheryl uses the word "mentoring," a word that connotes modeling, but is defined more by relationship. For example, the "mentoring" of Cheryl's supervising teacher likely helped Cheryl understand and adopt the importance of careful attention to curricula, lesson planning, and collaborative strategies. Cheryl's interviews did not indicate modeling beyond that provided by her supervising teacher.

### *Identity*

Cheryl's commitment to reading—and her students—likely encouraged her to spend an entire summer reading and contextualizing texts for her classroom; however, in her interviews, Cheryl never identified herself as a reader. Also, despite the fact that Cheryl shares her writing with her students, ultimately identifying herself as a writer, she never formally articulated a writer identity in her interviews. Instead of identifying herself in terms of the acts of reading or writing, Cheryl has defined herself in terms of relationships with others. Using words like "connected," "engagement," and "very close," Cheryl's interview data indicates that she identifies most strongly with relationships. In fact, Cheryl has defined her experience with the National Writing Project in terms of her relationships, saying that she goes to Project workshops because there are "so many more people." Further clarifying her focus on relationships, Cheryl said, "I've never found that my strength is curriculum, but my strength is people." She

has also said that she considers “building relationships and trust as [one of her] greatest strengths as an educator.”

Cheryl’s identity in relationships rather than labels like “reader” or “writer” conveys that her identity is fluid, not fixed. Her identity is based on other people—people who may vary from day to day and in a multitude of ways. And this relationship-focused identity brings with it constructivist connotations, which will be discussed further in the section titled *Knowledge-Based world view*.

### *Metacognition*

An essential element of metacognition involves using knowledge of a student to construct a role (like Rebecca’s “student” and Gary’s “writer”) and then put oneself in that constructed role while selecting and revising teaching approaches. The metacognitive act of constructing and then taking on a role of a student or writer or reader may be simpler in mainstream classrooms with White, middle-class teachers. A White and middle-class teacher herself, Cheryl may find constructing the role of a learning-disabled, poverty-challenged, used-to-failure, alternative school minority, and then actually *taking on* that role in order to choose, revise or contextualize practices accordingly, to be a daunting endeavor. Cheryl’s lack of peer-reviewed research about her student population further complicates such construction and consideration. Sonia Nieto recognizes the problem of incomplete knowledge, stating

All teachers, whether new or veteran...need to know more about the students they teach... Our public urban schools are increasingly filled by students whose lives and experiences are vastly different from those of their teachers, who are overwhelmingly White, middle class and monolingual English speakers. Most

know very little, either from direct experience or training, about the diversity of their students....(125)

Another aspect of Cheryl's knowledge and resulting metacognition is lacking due to the institutional construction of her school environment: time and resources for gathering academic research on her students. Because of the lack of valid assessment strategies, as well as professional development time for analysis, Cheryl has not been provided with complete knowledge of her students and is thus unable to use reading levels or writing abilities as motivators for methods adoption.

Despite the challenges of cultural differences and assessment, Cheryl still desires knowledge about her students and uses her relational strengths to gather what knowledge she can, from conversations with colleagues, observations of—and conversations with—students during their infrequent class attendance, and even her awareness of students' lives outside of school in order to construct and consider the role of the alternative student. Her description of “forgotten kids” as her mentors further illustrates her reliance on the students themselves for information. Such reliance is not new; in fact, in her 2004 Presidential Address, past NCTE President Patricia Lambert Stock stated that her own student teaching pupils “were the first of many groups of students across the years who have been my teachers—who figure among my teacher educators” (108). Peter Grimmert refers to a similar type of mentoring, saying that in teaching, “he found the answers he was looking for ‘not ...in university based research but... from the students themselves’” (123). Defining much of her teaching with the no-nonsense, metacognitive question “Will this work for my kids?”, Cheryl uses her existing knowledge and metacognition to develop best practices; her flexible use of the process model for writing (due to student

attendance issues) and low-intimidation instruction (given that her students are all-too-familiar with failure) are evidence of such metacognition. And given Cheryl's habit of gathering student information from a variety of places (for example, collegial conversations, student relationships, and albeit faulty practitioner texts), it is likely that, given time and proper resources, Cheryl's knowledge and resulting metacognition may be more fully developed.

#### *Knowledge-Based World View*

As demonstrated in the "identity" analysis section, Cheryl places her strengths in either/or categories, stating that she is not a lesson planner nor curriculum specialist, but a people person. Such entities need not exist in either/or categories; Cheryl could label herself as a lesson planner, curriculum specialist, *and* people person.

Cheryl's emphasis on relationships, and reliance on these relationships to construct and take on her students' roles, highlights her use of constructivist learning theory in her own teaching. Instead of relying completely on young adult novels, or practitioner texts, or National Writing Project opportunities, or colleagues' ideas, or student relationships, Cheryl "construct[s] [her] own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on these experiences," as an "active creator of her own knowledge," considering a collage of existing information as she selects and revises methods accordingly (Thirteen Ed Online).

#### Further Discussion

Cheryl's adoption and contextualization of various best practice approaches has resulted from a variety of factors, most notably being the importance she places on

relationships. A closer examination of Cheryl's teaching practices will be demonstrated and discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER VIII

### INTEGRATING CHERYL'S PRACTICE

Drawing on vignettes from her ninth and tenth grade English classes, this chapter describes Cheryl's teaching and then analyzes how Cheryl's process-based approaches, student decision-making, and low-risk writing are integrated throughout her literature and writing instruction.

#### English 10

Today, Cheryl begins her English 10 class with Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Woman." She reads the poem aloud as students read along silently. Then Cheryl presents the students with their next activity: a graphic organizer created by a colleague [FIGURE 11].

Saying "I don't care if you move around and work together; that's fine," Cheryl encourages students to collaborate as she states, "It's okay if you chat; just chat about what you're doing." As students complete their graphic organizers, Cheryl walks around the classroom, affirming their answers with "That is the perfect word right there," "Look at you!" and "That's a good one!" When most graphic organizers have been completed, Cheryl uses them as guides, initiating a class discussion about the poem. One student says, "In each of these paragraphs, she says 'I am a Woman,'" to which Cheryl says, "You're exactly right." Another student asks if Angelou has the same power with her body today, while another student asserts, "Someone can be ugly but have a beautiful personality." Agreeing with these responses, Cheryl steers the class back to a brief conversation about the tone of the poem. When one student says that the tone of the



poem is “preppy” and another says the tone is “conceited,” Cheryl says, “all of our responses are on track...all of you are different.”

Phenomenal Woman  
by  
Maya Angelo

List Imagery:

repeated phrase:

summarize the poem:

tone of the poem:

purpose (what is she trying to get across to the reader?)

Figure 11: “Phenomenal Woman” Graphic Organizer

Moving from Angelou’s poem, Cheryl begins a writing activity, directing students to write a poem in response to “Phenomenal Woman.” First, she reads aloud her own response poem, laughing as she stumbles over a few words [FIGURE 12].

### What They Said About Me

"You wear your heart on your sleeve," he said to me  
as if it was something deficient  
as if I was defective.

"You need to not take it personally," she said to me  
as if life wasn't about taking things personally.

"You need thicker skin," he said to me  
as if it's wrong to be expressive.

I am what I am  
And proud to be it

I'll take my beautiful imperfections  
And trade perfect looks for the  
potential

to think intelligently  
love powerfully  
and change the world drastically.

my ability to feel  
and my ability to transform my world.

So  
I'm "taking it personally"

Try taking my power  
And see how personally I take it.

My "skin is thin"  
So that I won't be too proud to be real.

My heart is "on my sleeve"

I do not wish to be remembered as pretty.  
I wish to be remembered as a  
extraordinary  
woman.

Figure 12: "What They Said About Me"

After reading, Cheryl asks, "Does everything in the poem rhyme? Does yours have to rhyme?" Establishing that students' poems can be rhyming or free-verse, Cheryl suggests, "maybe as you write you want to write about looking in the mirror. Maybe you want to write a love poem like "Bullethole Man." Or if you want to journal about what you think you might want to write about, that's fine, too. Any questions?" A student asks, "So we can write about whatever we want?" Cheryl replies, "Any poem—anything

you want—you can choose to repeat a phrase.” Following up, the student asks, “Does it have to rhyme?” Cheryl replies, “No, it doesn’t have to rhyme—anything you want, Juan.”

The room is quiet, and as the class writes, Cheryl conferences with individual students. When a student tells Cheryl that his poem is done, Cheryl says, “Do you mind if I look at your poem or is it yours to own right now?” The student asks Cheryl to read the poem; then Cheryl says, “This is great; you’re still getting your feet wet—but you could play with what word you want [to begin] each line. You have so much freedom...That’s a great start!”

Reading another student’s poem, Cheryl says, “Wow, yours is demanding! Who are you?!” The student laughs and continues writing as Cheryl moves on. Another student says, “I’m not finished with my poem; I want to keep working on it,” to which Cheryl replies, “Ok, you do that. Tomorrow we’re going to have Author’s Chair on it so if you want to share, that’s fine.” When another student says she’s finished, Cheryl asks, “Do you want to read it tomorrow [for Author’s Chair]?” The student replies, “Why don’t you read it first and see if it’s appropriate.” After reading the poem, Cheryl says, “I think it’s totally appropriate. I think you should read it tomorrow. Maybe you can keep it in your pocket and read it to yourself; sometimes that helps you catch things...” When another student hands her a poem, Cheryl says, “Can I read this and give you my honest opinion?” The student nods, and Cheryl arranges a mini-conference for later in the day. With this arrangement, class is over; students file their poems in class folders and move to their next class.

## English 9

In Cheryl's English 9 classes, she has begun what she describes as a district-mandated text, Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, with several pre-reading activities, including charts and journals, all described by Cheryl as "writing to connect." Beginning the day's lesson, Cheryl says, "Let's go to pagina veinte y tres," and then reviews various characters in the book. Asking students to read aloud, she says, "How about one paragraph, Aron, not even one paragraph? How about one paragraph, Stephon?" Cheryl seems pleased when a few students agree to help her out.

After a student reads the first paragraph of a chapter titled "Marin," Cheryl goes over what the class knows about Marin. Then another student reads the next paragraph, asking, "Can I keep reading aloud?" When the chapter is finished, Cheryl directs the class to the corresponding page in the reading packet that she and two other colleagues created [FIGURE 13].

Some students work on the section alone; others work collaboratively. When one student calls Cheryl over for clarification, Cheryl points to the brief chapter, saying, "You know what's cool about this book is that none of us have read this section. These are short stories, short vignettes and you can look right here for all the answers you need to fill out." After several minutes, Cheryl goes over the packet, which includes textual as well as autobiographical questions. In a short discussion, students share textual information about Marin from the packet questions, volunteering that Marin might get married, that she has a dream.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Hour \_\_\_\_\_

## House on Mango Street

### **Marin**

Pages 26-27

- List 5 things you discover about Marin from this section:
  - 
  - 
  - 
  - 
  -
- What kinds of things does Marin teach Esperanza?
- Who, in your life, taught you those kinds of things?
- Compare Marin's dreams for her future to Cinderella:

Unique to Marin	Similar	Unique to Cinderella

Figure 13: The House on Mango Street Reading Packet

Cheryl says, “My favorite chapter is next,” and when a student comments, “It’s so short,” Cheryl replies, “It’s so short, but it’s so powerful, [that] we need to do one thing with it...” Then she directs the students to close the book and look at the yellow backside of the comprehension packet. She says, “I want to get your brains ready for this awesome chapter because you’re right! It is so short [that] we don’t want to miss it.” Then Cheryl gives students a pre-reading journal topic, saying, “Describe one place that

makes you feel safe and secure, and one place that makes you feel awkward and insecure.”

After several minutes of quiet writing, Cheryl leads a short discussion about their responses, which include “in my crib” and “[with] ADT.” Cheryl reads the chapter aloud and then says, “I saw many of you nodding your heads...” Ron volunteers, “There are some neighborhoods...that don’t compare [to] East San Diego...” Another student agrees, sharing his experience in Los Angeles. Cheryl asks, “Who are ‘Those who don’t’?” Damon answers, “White people.” Then Cheryl says, “Complete this sentence: Those who don’t...” Students think for a moment, write their response, and share a few aloud. One student says, “Those who don’t know any better.” Another student says, “Those who don’t...live in the hood.” Yet another student, in reference to the Sharon Flake young adult novel, *Bang*, says, “Those who don’t... bang bang.” Cheryl exclaims, “You don’t even know how awesome that is.” After a few activities—a quiz bowl review as well as a brief vocabulary lesson that asks students to differentiate between words such as fast/swift and exorcise/exercise—class is over. When students finish *The House on Mango Street*, Cheryl will conclude the unit with a final quiz as well as a discussion about what the students have observed about the growth of the main character.

#### An Analysis of the Transfer of Teaching Approaches in Cheryl’s Classroom

The following analysis employs observation and interview data to examine ways that Cheryl uses process-based, choice-based, and low-risk writing approaches in her literature and writing approaches. The analysis also considers whether such approaches have reached an integrated level of transfer.

*Process-Based Approaches to the Teaching of Writing and Literature*

Cheryl's student population faces unique troubles, and one of the most pressing challenges to Cheryl's lesson planning and methods execution is her students' absences. In any situation, missing days of school can reduce the success of a pedagogical method, so teaching approaches that flex with attendance are essential, especially with Cheryl's students. The process model for writing, which allows writers to work at different speeds and stages, allows Cheryl flexibility that would not be possible with more traditional approaches.

Cheryl's vignette illustrates several ways that she utilizes the idea of process in her writing instruction. Mainly, Cheryl employs process with her use of idea generation, drafting, revising and publishing, and the following analysis acknowledges such utilization while also reflecting on further implications of Cheryl's methods.

One way that Cheryl helps students generate ideas before they write is by reading literature. For example, Cheryl uses the reading, graphic organizer, and brief discussion of "Phenomenal Woman" as a way for her students to summarize the poem, reflect on poetry concepts such as imagery, tone and repetend, and consider its purpose before employing similar elements in their own writings. Aside from this idea generation, Cheryl encourages her students to draft by providing a model (her own poem) before students begin writing. Cheryl's use of her own writing may help her students to see her as a fellow writer who is also drafting, and the students present do generate a draft with this guidance.

Cheryl uses the idea of process as she sets aside class time for students to work on their writing. While students are drafting during class, Cheryl's careful way of offering

feedback—asking permission first and then suggesting that the student “play” with words on each line—also points to her emphasis on the process-based drafting and revising embodied by mini-conferences. She also encourages drafting and revising when she affirms the student who would like more time to work on the poem. In one interview, Cheryl also indicated that she involves peer review in her drafting and revising process. She stated,

so you have a couple of kids who do really well, are really skilled writers... They get done and [then I say] “Will you read hers and see if you notice a few things... so it becomes a mini peer-revision that is beneficial for them while other kids are still drafting. Or some are still pre-writing... [and I’m] walking around and checking back with them... and I say, “Maria, what did you notice about LaShonda’s?” [And she says], “Well, she talks about such and such” [And I say], “Oh, do you think you could do that in your paper, too?”

The transient and truant nature of Cheryl’s student population makes it difficult for her to develop her students’ writing over continuous time, and this challenge is notable in areas toward the end of the process, such as publishing. If students attend four days in a row and generate ideas, draft, and revise, but are absent at the end of the assignment, they haven’t had the opportunity to bring closure to their writing. This lack of consistency also applies if students attend class having missed several idea-generating, drafting or revising days. Cheryl articulated frustration with this particular challenge, explaining how she tried to have students communicate their textual responses to *The House on Mango Street* with a writing assessment titled “My Neighborhood”:



We joke about [if] we... split up testing over five days... we would never get the same kids five days from now. So you have...four kids on Monday. And I teach the pre-writing...[which is] a graphic organizer for pre-writing. Tuesday, I have 5 [new] kids...well, the four kids that were there the day before, what a waste, they don't want to do it again. So...I had them do the five-part essay and...we'd been working on it like all these drafts...I had three NEW students on the last day—we'd been working on this for two weeks—show up for the first time in two weeks... And you have other kids with five—pre-writing, a rough draft, an edited version, peer revised version, final and...what are we supposed to do?

Despite inconsistent student attendance, Cheryl is still able to utilize the idea of publishing with her writing approaches by employing different levels of formal presentations that serve as “publishing” venues, such as Author’s Chair (where students read their recent writings), several times a week. Cheryl also models Author’s Chair-style “publishing” by sharing her own poem with the class. Cheryl’s employment of various aspects of the writing process in her teaching with idea generation, drafting, revising and even publishing suggests that the process approach is routinely utilized in her writing instruction.

### *Process-Based Approaches to the Teaching of Literature*

Reader Response theory draws from the idea that making meaning from text involves a “reciprocal” process, or “transaction,” that takes place between the reader and the text as well as the reader and other readers (Rosenblatt 27). This meaning-making “transaction” can involve individual or cooperative pre-reading activities as well as

activities such as re-reading and discussion that serve to initiate, clarify and expand a reader's understanding of the text. With its utilization of tactics such as pre-reading, re-reading and discussion in order to create, refine and deepen textual response, Reader Response theory is not unlike the process model for writing which also relies on a cooperative refining of ideas through prewriting, drafting and revising. In other words, an integration of the process model means that this process-based model would be represented in both literature and writing approaches. Keeping these similarities in mind, the following analysis will consider various ways that Cheryl succeeds at, and could further develop, her integration of process-based ideas into both her literature and writing instruction.

One aspect of a process model for the teaching of literature involves the preparation that takes place before students actually read, such as activities that help students anticipate themes, consider concepts, or even make personal connections for future texts. Similar to the way that pre-writing serves to generate ideas for future writing, pre-reading also serves to promote textual response. In some ways, Cheryl utilizes this pre-reading approach. For example, Cheryl has described journals that students write before reading chapters for *The House on Mango Street* which she hopes will help her students "connect" with the text. She "[gets] brains ready" for "Those Who Don't" by having students write about a place that makes them feel safe and secure. Cheryl does not employ any pre-reading activities before the class reads "Phenomenal Woman," which suggests inconsistency in the application of pre-reading approaches.

Another process-based aspect of Cheryl's literature instruction involve helping students refine their response to the text in the midst of reading, either individually or

collaboratively. Because Cheryl's handouts are given during the process of meaning-making, they warrant attention. The "Phenomenal Woman" graphic organizer focuses attention on the poem's imagery, repeated phrasing, summary, tone and purpose. The organizer addresses a wide range of interpretive information from content summary, to literary devices (imagery and repetition), to sophisticated judgment about use of language (tone) and intended meaning (purpose), some issues that might initiate student connection and analysis. It does not specifically foreground the work's social, cultural, gender or class implications. The question, "What is she trying to get across to the reader?" might, or might not, encourage students to think about the poem's application to their lives. This handout's initiation of connection, analysis and application seem to represent Reader Response-based methods.

Cheryl's handout for *The House on Mango Street* also employs some elements of a process-based, Reader Response approach. During this activity, Cheryl directs a student to re-read the text in order to comprehend it more fully and be able to interpret the text while answering the factual and autobiographical reading packet questions [Figure 13]; Sheridan Blau similarly recognizes the value of re-reading as a way to refine literature responses in his literature workshop. In addition, meaning-making can be observed in Figure 13, which draws on phrases such as "things you discover" and "in your life." The format of the worksheet offers very little physical space for in-depth response. Such lack of space conflicts with a process approach to the teaching of literature, which stresses multiple readings paired with ample time and space for response, either on paper or in discussions. The way in which the worksheet is used also raises concern; students are given the chance to share their worksheet responses with the

class, but this worksheet-based discussion in which one student shares detailed information about Marin could be classified more as a factual recall session rather than a collaborative meaning-making activity.

Beyond the class handouts utilized by Cheryl, there are other process-related ways that students respond to literature. For example, having students complete the phrase “Those Who Don’t” helps Cheryl’s students connect their reading of the text, their life experiences, and other texts. Cheryl’s student’s connection between *The House on Mango Street* and Flake’s *Bang* highlights this intertextuality.

During Cheryl’s class discussions of “Phenomenal Woman,” some student responses seem off-base. Students use the words “preppy” and “conceited” to describe the tone of the poem. While all opinions might be welcome in Cheryl’s classroom, their correctness, even in the wide realm of collaborative textual response, is questionable. A Reader Response-based or process approach, open to the multiple stages of a student’s textual response, still recognizes close textual examination as opposed to an “anything goes” response philosophy. It is indeed possible for a teacher to help “at risk” students develop their responses and think and read carefully; nevertheless, Cheryl’s acceptance of textually unsubstantiated responses as “on track” conveys her desire to praise and affirm her students, even when facing off-the-mark answers. Given her students’ hyper-familiarity with failure, such “over-praise,” can be understood in light of Cheryl’s desire to create a classroom atmosphere of success.

Although Cheryl doesn’t force her students to read aloud, the solicitation of student volunteers for reading has been brought into question by reading education researcher Frank Serafini, who points out that such round-robin approaches distract from

actual reading comprehension, make students anxious, and “[assume] everyone should read the same book, at the same time, at the same rate” (Serafini). However, Cheryl’s student’s request to *continue* reading aloud indicates some comfort on their part with this approach (though it doesn’t indicate reading comprehension). While Cheryl may intend for her use of round robin reading to build student confidence, foster an open classroom atmosphere, or even help along reading process and comprehension, it probably doesn’t encourage the reading comprehension that other process-based, best practice-related approaches, such as teacher read-alouds, could.

There are a few other aspects of Cheryl’s instruction that do not reflect a process approach. Cheryl’s utilization of a final quiz at the end of the *The House on Mango Street* unit does not employ process as much as a written reflection might. In addition, activities such as vocabulary comprehension and quiz bowl review mentioned at the end of the vignette, emphasize factual recall instead of learning based on flexible stages of response.

Considering the many ways that Cheryl uses—and struggles to use—process-oriented approaches in her instruction, it is likely that while she exhibits promise in her ability to instill student comfort and confidence, her integration of such process could be more consistent.

#### *Student Decision-Making*

Examining the vignette, there are several instances where Cheryl encourages students to make their own decisions. These examples will be analyzed in regard to how well they are integrated across Cheryl’s instruction. One way that Cheryl promotes student decision-making is in the area of class participation. During *The House on*

*Mango Street* activities, for example, students can decide whether to work on their reading questions alone or cooperatively; they can also decide whether or not to share their responses with the class. In addition, students have the option to share their “Phenomenal Woman” response with Cheryl as well as during Author’s Chair. Such decision-making can help students gain control and ownership over their writing.

Cheryl also encourages student choice when, after the “Phenomenal Woman” graphic organizer, she tells her students that they can write a poem or journal, leaving the genre open. Affirming that students can “write about whatever [they] want” and “choose to repeat a phrase” could potentially steer students toward an “anything goes” response devoid of standards. However, since Cheryl desires a low-failure environment, she may feel that such options increase her students’ chances of success. Cheryl’s desire for a low-intimidation classroom may also explain such openness, as she may feel that constrictions on writing will keep her students from even beginning to write. Given Cheryl’s desire to foster a low-failure, low-intimidation environment for her at-risk students, her choices seem justified.

There are some aspects of Cheryl’s instruction that appear to be teacher-directed. For example, students’ “Phenomenal Woman” graphic organizer [Figure 11] and reading packet questions from *The House on Mango Street* [Figure 13] require students to respond to the text in specific, teacher-determined ways. While the *House on Mango Street* questions are more autobiographical and open-ended, a more choice-based alternative could include students choosing three of the four questions to answer, or, similar to figure 7, creating some questions for others about the text.

Cheryl's student survey data [Figure 14] can be considered along with observation data and data from teacher interviews to examine the role of student decision-making in her approaches. Regarding whether students felt that they could "learn in their own way," all students strongly agreed or agreed. Other categories that addressed Cheryl's class structure demonstrated similar sentiments regarding student-centered instruction, with at least an 80 percent agreement level.

Optional student comments confirmed survey data; one student spoke to Cheryl's ability to change instruction to suit the needs of her students, saying, "She asks me if I understand [and] if I don't, she figures out how." Another student agreed, saying, "If she doesn't know how she can teach [something] to me, she'll try to find a way."

Cheryl's interview data also addressed the idea of student decision-making, especially when she used the word "choice." Cheryl stated that with "best practice" teaching, students were able to get their needs and interests fulfilled, rather than simply receiving what the teacher wanted to "feed to them," and said that "best practice" takes place when students

have choices, where they can choose whether they want to express an idea in a certain genre...anything that puts the focus on the kids instead of me...is anytime I see best practice...but that best practice happens 10 minutes at a time...in the front of the room. And sometimes in the middle of that me being in the front of the room, it turns into students having a conversation and take that conversation somewhere else, and maybe [I need to]...turn the overhead off and... talk about that and it's about the students and their needs and where their brains are going more than what I need to feed to them...

Given her student decision-making data, Cheryl's willingness to let students decide whether they will participate in class, her choice of genre and content for the written "Phenomenal Woman" responses, the absence of choice inherent in some textual response handouts, her student questionnaire data and interview data, it is likely that Cheryl's student decision-making may not be fully integrated but is still well-established, with the potential for further development.

#### *Low-Risk Literature and Writing*

Several of Cheryl's writing methods encourage a low-risk atmosphere. For example, Cheryl shares her own writing, even though it is still "in process," with her students; this models comfort with such sharing and may encourage students to share their own writing accordingly. In addition, when students write their responses to "Phenomenal Woman," Cheryl provides open-ended instructions, encouraging a student to "play with what word...to begin each line," the word "play" conveying a low-risk, experimental environment.

Cheryl's literature methods also foster a climate conducive to risk taking. Cheryl affirms her students' responses to literature, using phrases like "That is the perfect word right there," and "That's a good one," as well as words such as "awesome." These specific and supportive responses encourage quality work, reward student participation and build confidence. In addition, reading aloud *The House on Mango Street* ensures that everyone has read the chapter, placing all students on an equal footing that might not exist if the text were simply assigned as homework. In Cheryl's class, reading assignments encourage each student to be an expert who can share a response to the text.



For example, her insistence that “none of us have read this section” during the *House on Mango Street* activity helps to convey this equality.

While such low-risk instructional approaches may help students engage in their classroom community, participate as equals, and comprehend texts more completely, some may point out possible disadvantages of such instruction, one being that “low-risk” could mean “low expectations.” For example, since the chapters of *The House on Mango Street* are brief, Cheryl *could* challenge her students further by assigning a chapter of the text to be read as homework, and then re-read the text aloud before the lesson, possibly deepening reading comprehension and heightening expectations for textual response. It is difficult for Cheryl to expect her students to prepare for class when she isn’t certain if—or when—she’ll see them again. Given Cheryl’s context, her low-risk-based instructional decisions meet her ever-contextualizing question, “Will this work for my kids?” As students develop their skills, knowledge, and confidence, expectations can be raised.

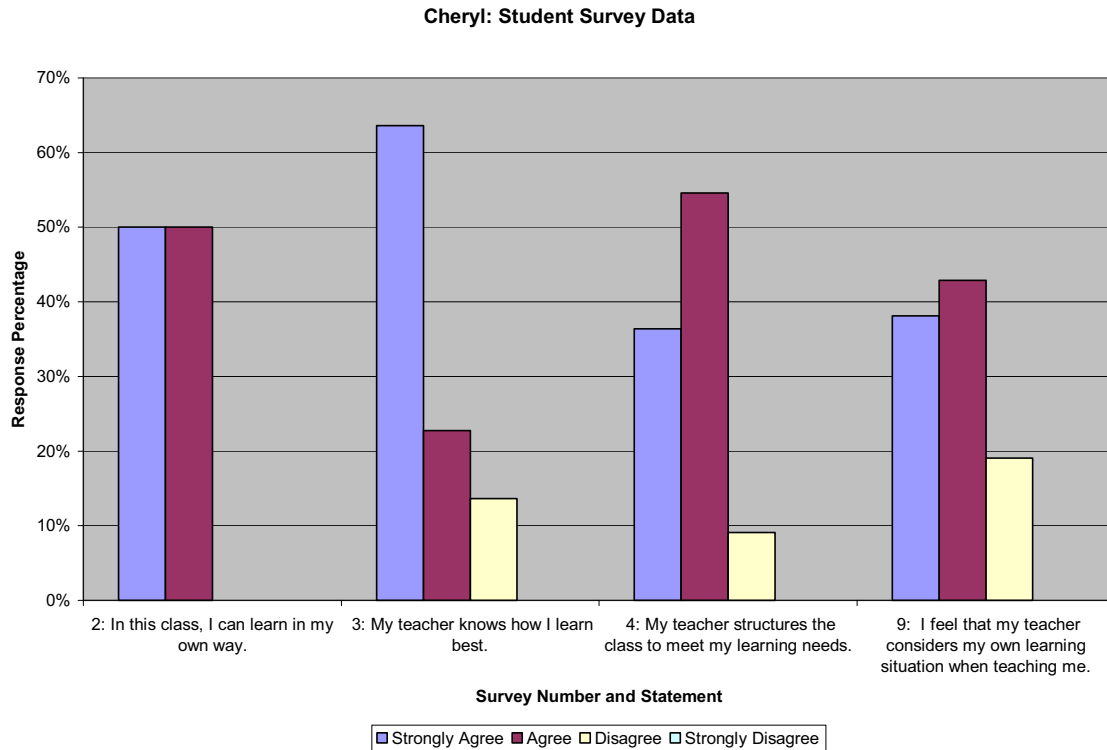


Figure 14: Cheryl's Student Survey Data

Table 3: Cheryl's Student Survey Questions

Question #	Survey Statement	Percentage of Students Who:			
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2	In this class, I can learn in my own way.	50%	50%	0%	0%
3	My teacher knows how I learn best.	64%	23%	14%	0%
4	My teacher structures the class to meet my learning needs.	36%	55%	9%	0%
9	I feel that my teacher considers my own learning situation when teaching me.	38%	43%	19%	0%

### Factors That May Influence Cheryl's Presence/Absence of Integrated Instruction

The following section will consider factors that have contributed to Cheryl's integration-related successes and shortfalls, including undergraduate/preservice experiences, self-reflection, administrative and collegial support, existing professional materials, professional materials, modeling, identity, metacognition, and Cheryl's knowledge-based world view.

### *Undergraduate/Preservice Experiences*

As demonstrated in Chapter Seven, Cheryl's pre-internship played a minimal role in her adoption of best practice approaches because she lacked practical experience. It is unlikely that this lack of experience has helped Cheryl integrate process-based approaches, student decision-making or low-risk instruction. However, Cheryl's internship emphasized "nitty-gritty" curriculum planning, and it is possible that this emphasis has helped Cheryl to take on a similar attitude of close examination and purposeful planning, especially with her question, "Will this work for my kids?"

### *Self-Reflection*

Cheryl shared in interviews that she asked herself, "What should I teach?" during her first year. This reflective question guided her to select classroom texts and response activities that were engaging, high-interest, and low-intimidation, including a flexible, condensed version of the process model for writing as well as literature, a low-intimidation writing workshop for the "Phenomenal Woman" activity and low-intimidation episodic fiction activities that involve *The House on Mango Street*.

Cheryl's low-risk approaches have also been encouraged by reflecting on her students' past failures. She considers her students' past failures and uses strategies such as open-ended instruction, encouraging words, and reading together in class in both her literature and writing instruction. In addition, Cheryl's integration of student decision-making in regard to participation and genre results from deliberation on teaching strategies that will encourage her students to participate in class and write poetry.

### *Administrative/Collegial Support*

The only expectation placed on Cheryl by her administration is that she teach certain common texts and use district-wide common assessments. These expectations suggest that her administration has not contributed significantly to the integration of her methods. It is possible that the administration's failure to provide Cheryl with release time to gather and analyze student data has hindered her ability to encourage her students beyond what she knows of them already. If Cheryl isn't fully aware of her students' capabilities, it may be difficult for her to challenge them, which could explain, for example, Cheryl's acceptance of textually unsubstantiated responses during the "Phenomenal Woman" discussion.

Cheryl cited her relationships with colleagues as helpful in finding out "what works." As long as these collegial conversations are based on verifiable student information (i.e. not based on ideas from Ruby Payne), Cheryl can be provided with more knowledge about her students—their interests, backgrounds, and academic abilities—which may help her to challenge them in more specific ways.

### *Existing Professional Materials*

The professional materials available to Cheryl are district-mandated common assessments created by a person who is unfamiliar with Cheryl's students; these materials do not encourage Cheryl to integrate her process-based instruction, low-risk methods and student decision-making into both her reading and writing practices. In addition, some areas of Cheryl's practice, such as "anything goes" approaches to writing and reading response, could be refined if Cheryl had more information about her students beyond

their failure on a district-mandated common assessment. Given that Cheryl has not been provided with release time or professional resources to assess her students' performance on the district's common assessments (let alone create, administer and analyze more acceptable or relevant assessments), these existing professional materials are not helping her integrate her methods further.

### *Professional Literature*

Cheryl has experience with professional literature, including her careful study of young adult novels as well as professional literature provided through National Writing Project inservices and conferences. Her guiding question, "Will this work for my kids?", has led her to research her population, and while this research is justified, some of the research's content may be misapplied or misinformed. As illustrated in Chapter Seven, Cheryl has read Lisa Delpit, and cites Delpit's work as a positive influence on her teaching. But Cheryl's "anything goes" directions during the "Phenomenal Woman" writing activity as well as her willingness to welcome textually unsubstantiated responses could point to a misapplication of Delpit's ideas. Perhaps Cheryl doesn't fully understand Delpit's assertions regarding authority, or is unable to recognize that her own actions do not necessarily clarify expectations, formalize teacher-student relations or establish the authority that Delpit argues is appropriate for working with African-American students.

Cheryl's understanding of professional literature also suggests some degree of misinformation, which may contribute to a lack of integration of best practice approaches. For instance, Cheryl draws on Payne to justify episodic storytelling without verifying that her population actually uses these communication strategies. However,

with Cheryl's strong desire to research her population—her willingness to spend an entire summer reading Young Adult literature and find books that at least report to help her with her students—illustrates a commitment to knowledge. It is hoped that as Cheryl learns more about each of her students, she will become suspicious of less verifiable research and seek research that provides deeper, more certifiable knowledge and, in turn, integrate her approaches more completely.

### *Modeling*

The role of the National Writing Project's modeling surfaces in the teacher-as-writer method of Cheryl sharing her own writing as a way to help students write their own poem. Coupled with the positive influence of Cheryl's cooperating teacher on her aspects of teaching such as lesson planning and curriculum, it is possible that Cheryl will continue to experience the modeling of the National Writing Project, perhaps experience modeling that explores the benefits of teacher read-alouds instead of round-robin reading, witness the importance of choice in textual response handouts, and continue to grow in her integration of her approaches.

### *Identity*

As stated in the previous chapter, Cheryl did not, in her interviews, identify herself as a reader or writer, though she utilizes reading and writing processes throughout her teaching. Instead, Cheryl clarifies that "building relationships" is one of her "biggest strengths." Cheryl has used this strength to inform her use of process pedagogy. For example, Cheryl tailors her assignments as she considers that students' home lives will not lend themselves to lengthy reading assignments and thus capitalizes on the time she does have with students to read in class. Cheryl's identity in relationships has influenced

other areas of classroom teaching. Recognizing through relationships that her students may be used to failure, Cheryl offers students open choices—“anything you want”—in order to get them to start writing. Cognizant of the many failures her students have faced, Cheryl integrates low-risk instruction in order to create an atmosphere of safety in risk-taking as she consistently encourages students in their own reading and writing processes. Cheryl’s identity—or extreme emphasis on—relationships will continue to help her integrate her approaches as well as provide her with the knowledge to use metacognition effectively.

### *Metacognition*

Cheryl’s poem, “What They Said About Me” [Figure 12], conveys metacognition. Phrases like “Taking it personally,” “my skin is thin,” and “proud to be real” point to Cheryl’s self-understanding. It is unclear how this metacognition helps or hinders Cheryl’s integration of methods; however, Cheryl’s awareness indicates that she recognizes relationships as an importance force in her teaching.

As stated in the previous chapter, Cheryl’s socioeconomic background and lack of professional, peer-reviewed literature could be impeding her ability to use metacognition, or using knowledge of a student to construct a role (in this case an at-risk alternative student), consider the student’s thinking processes, and then select and revise appropriate approaches. It has also been established that while Cheryl lacks “book” knowledge of her students, she uses other strategies, such as relationships and conversations with colleagues, to metacognitively consider her students’ roles, put herself in these roles, and revise her approaches accordingly. Her guiding question (“Will this work for my kids?”) has helped Cheryl to adopt her process-based approaches in order to employ engaging,

high-interest, low-intimidation lessons. For example, Cheryl's short pre-reading activity for *The House on Mango Street* asks students to describe a secure and unsecure place, and this assignment "works" because Cheryl is not only aware of the subject's relevance to her students' lives, but of her students' ability to write about and discuss the subject. The question also serves to inform how Cheryl reads texts together with her students; she likely knows that this in-class approach (as opposed to sending students home to read) will improve her students' chances of actually reading the text in a low-intimidation environment, and increase the likelihood that they will engage with the text. Her students' responses to "Those Who Don't," which include an intertextual reference, show that this engagement has taken place. In time, students may develop reading skills that will allow them to work independently.

Cheryl's writing methods also show evidence of metacognition. Her prewriting strategies, which include reading models (including "What They Said About Me"), seem to be similarly motivated by her guiding question as such strategies provide some initial ideas for writing (and help students to engage). Cheryl's drafting strategies, which include giving students time to write in class, also indicate a metacognitive consideration of her students; she knows enough about her students' lives to place herself in those roles (and think about their thinking), and knows that her students' lives outside of school are likely not conducive to drafting. Cheryl's impromptu peer review sessions also indicate metacognitive thought, given that Cheryl recognizes that pairing students informally will ensure that this peer review takes place. The casual tone that Cheryl takes with peer review ("Maria, what did you notice about LaShonda's?") also helps to convey the low-



intimidation environment that Cheryl recognizes as an essential element of her used-to-failure students' writing success.

### *Knowledge-Based World View*

As she teaches, Cheryl utilizes a constructivist view of knowledge that draws on her sensitivity to relationships. As a teacher she is “active” in the “facilitator” role, not “[dispensing] knowledge but [providing] students with opportunities and incentives to build it up” ([www.thirteen.org/edonline](http://www.thirteen.org/edonline); vonGlasersfeld ix, 7). Cheryl's facilitator role facilitates pedagogy where the students are active and engaged with each other and the content they are learning, for instance in the impromptu peer review exercises, Author's Chair opportunities, and textual responses to “Those Who Don't.” Her constructivist paradigm facilitates student choice, encouraging them to select genres, revision strategies, and ways to participate in class. Cheryl's low-risk instruction puts students at ease by encouraging and inviting them to read, for example, “just one paragraph.” In this class knowledge is a collective undertaking. Cheryl's constructivist approach fosters integration of process approaches, student decision-making, and low-risk instruction.

### *Toward Findings and Implications*

With the previous chapters exploring various influences on three subjects' adoption and integration of the process model, student decision-making, and low-risk instruction, the following chapter will summarize the theory and research proposed throughout the dissertation, review the purpose of the study, and summarize its main findings. The chapter will then consider how these findings might be applied in various educational contexts, acknowledge the study's shortcomings, and consider possibilities for future research.

## CHAPTER IX

### BEYOND METHODS: SUMMARY

Chapter nine details the findings of this study and discusses how they might be applied in the field. It also acknowledges the study's limitations and considers possibilities for future research. To begin, the study's findings are arranged below according to research question.

#### What Factors Encourage an Exemplary Teacher to Adopt Certain Approaches Deemed "Best Practices?"

##### *Preservice and Undergraduate Experiences*

Gary was given the least background in best practice approaches as his teacher training utilized "old school" methods with only a mention of best practices. He mimicked his training when he began teaching, utilizing traditional methods while also giving "lip service" to best practices such as attending to the student's writing process. While Cheryl's preservice writing methods course modeled the process approach for the teaching of writing, she did not indicate that this experience caused her to adopt actual best practice methods, instead citing that her internship, with its modeling of intentional lesson planning, helped her to take on a similar *attitude* toward her practices. It was this attitude and her guiding question of "Will this work for my kids?" that informed her methods when she began teaching. According to her report, Rebecca did not experience best practice teaching in secondary schools but her preservice experiences afforded several opportunities to learn about and experiment with best practice approaches, including a university-level instructorship; however, despite such awareness, she did not use these approaches during her first year of public school teaching due to pressures from administrators, colleagues, and pre-existing curricula.

For a variety of reasons—Gary’s traditional preservice training and his own utilization of traditional methods, Cheryl’s adoption of attitudes toward practice, not practice itself, and Rebecca’s experience with, yet struggle to use, best practice methods in the face of administrative, collegial and curricular pressures, these findings convey that preservice and undergraduate experiences sometimes serve as a template for a teacher’s initial methods. They also serve an important role in *introducing* best practice methods, yet do not directly result in the adoption of such methods. This difficulty could be due to the overwhelming nature of the early years of teaching—getting to know colleagues, juggling departmental politics, learning district standards, classroom management issues, etc.

### *Self-Reflection*

Gary’s statement, “I don’t think this is really good,” encouraged him to look for other approaches. He turned to practitioner research in this attempt at improvement, but it did not provide him with applicable alternatives. Cheryl’s reflective questioning (“What am I supposed to teach?”) drove her to read young adult novels and plan relevant lessons in her ongoing desire to “engage” her student population. And Rebecca’s reflection with colleagues on what had or hadn’t worked guided them as they created lesson plans together. In each of these cases, self reflection indicated that an approach needed improvement and moved the teachers toward resources (practitioner research, young adult novels, and colleagues) that could potentially help them. Such findings suggest that self-reflection is an important element in the adoption of methods, especially if it directs teachers toward high-quality, applicable professional literature, solid

curricula, modeled best practice approaches, identity formation, and metacognitive practices.

#### *Administrative and Collegial Support*

Before Gary's involvement with the NWP, his administration expected him to structure his approaches around the MEAP. His department expected him to use the existing product-driven writing curriculum and use similar assignments and approaches. Even after he reflected that his instruction wasn't particularly "good," he continued to use the approaches expected of him. It wasn't until his Summer Institute experience, where acceptable, research-based alternatives were modeled for him, that he felt he could ask his administrators for permission to revamp his methods. Fortunately, his administrators were willing to let him experiment, and Gary has been able to experiment for several years with his administrator's blessing, as well as adopt process-based approaches, low-risk instruction and student decision-making in his writing instruction.

When Rebecca began teaching, her colleagues expected her to teach with the existing curriculum and approaches such as comprehension questions for literature; it wasn't until other participants in the Summer Institute helped her to justify abandoning such approaches that she dared to change. Even now, a district administrator has articulated that the district as a whole should use approaches to the teaching of writing that sharply contrast with professionally-acknowledged best practices.

Cheryl's administration's non-involvement in her approaches to teaching contributed to a lack of direction during her first year. However, this administration's willingness to supply her with young adult novels meant that she could work to create "engaging" approaches for the following year.

Especially in Rebecca and Gary's situation, administrative and collegial pressures contributed to an initial difficulty in adopting best practices. This situation demonstrates the power of administrative and collegial expectations, especially in a novice teacher's methods adoption, as well as the power of the NWP's modeling and professional support to help a teacher overcome such pressures.

#### *Existing Professional Materials*

Cheryl's only existing professional materials were district-mandated common assessments. These documents played an important part in her curriculum, as they determined which texts her classes would read and which objectives lesson plans would address. They were not "professional" in the sense that they were not created out of professional knowledge. Cheryl felt that these assessments were not appropriate to her population of students, especially because the assessments were "intimidating." Cheryl was not given release time or resources to examine why her students were failing these district assessments and change her approaches in response (nor was there thought to re-examine and modify the district assessments, for that matter). For these reasons, Cheryl's situation illustrates how some existing professional materials may not align with the learning outcomes of different groups of students and that teachers may not be given the time or resources to analyze the results of such assessments.

Gary's department expected him to use the John Collins Writing Program, which applied a best practice (the process model) formulaically. It was not until he reflected that things weren't going well, and had a graduate-level writing methods course and Summer Institute experience where different approaches were modeled for him, that he took on a teacher-as-writer identity. Through this process, he was able to understand that

other approaches were possible, formally request to change his curriculum and instruction, and move beyond the John Collins Writing Program in order to experiment with more process-based options.

Rebecca also struggled with her existing curriculum. Her first year of teaching, she used another teacher's materials, which included product-based approaches such as comprehension questions for literature instruction. Her district also paid for her to be trained in the Spelling Sourcebook program, a curriculum that takes the best practice idea of word recognition to a product-based extreme, and she implemented this program in her classroom. She also implemented the district-espoused Accelerated Reader program, which is based on best practice ideas such student decision-making yet is contrary to best practice ideals due to its requirement that students choose from an "approved" list of books, its questionable assessment methods, and its utilization of silent (not collaborative) reading. Through the support offered to Rebecca from her Summer Institute experience, she came to understand that the use of comprehension questions for literature instruction may not be compatible with the normal processes of effective readers. She was able to abandon this practice in favor of process-driven instructional strategies such as pre-reading activities, discussion-oriented summary sheets, and having students act out dialogue during class readings. Rebecca continues to use the Spelling Sourcebook program and Accelerated Reader, perhaps because her district paid for her training (her sense of obligation), inexperience with other options, or lack of awareness of the problems with these methods and curricula. Rebecca could also be using these commercial approaches because she has not yet had the opportunity to examine these programs to the extent that she examined her use of comprehension questions.

Gary and Rebecca's situations demonstrate several notable points regarding existing professional materials. First, to many teachers, the pressure to use the existing curriculum is real, and plays a significant part in their adoption of teaching methods. Second, some existing materials, perhaps in part based on, or drawing on professionally sanctioned best practice ideas, become distorted as they are commercialized by for-profit corporations and institutionalized in the schools, for instance the John Collins Writing Program, Spelling Sourcebook program, and Accelerated Reader. Third, while Gary and Rebecca initially inherited—and used—prescribed curricula, the modeling and support provided by National Writing Project-related venues helped them consider how these curricula were misaligned with authentic literacy practices, and helped these teachers modify or discontinue their use. Finally, Rebecca's continued use of the Spelling Sourcebook and Accelerated Reader suggests that professional organizations, such as the National Writing Project, might benefit teachers by helping them assess commercial materials, and, when appropriate, discontinue use of questionable materials.

### *Professional Literature*

Gary turned to professional teacher literature when he determined that he wasn't teaching effectively. He found such literature to be unsuitable until these approaches were modeled for him in a graduate-level writing methods course and the Summer Institute. After such modeling, he was able to use the approaches, and now reads a variety of professional literature as part of his professional learning community.

Rebecca's use of professional literature was based on her research on her school's grammar instruction. She read literature that espoused best practice approaches to grammar (Weaver, for example), but at the time of the study had not yet employed

these approaches in her classroom. Perhaps continued consideration of grammar instruction, classroom research, and metacognitive reflection will lead to continued evolution in her approach.

Cheryl articulated that she used Lisa Delpit's ideas about authority to inform her classroom management, but Delpit's ideas, which focus on *acting* like the teacher, not garnering respect because of the teacher role, was not manifest in Cheryl's classroom. Cheryl's authority didn't seem based on what she demonstrated to students, or taking a leader role; instead, she figured out what her students needed, or were interested in, or were able to do, and structured her methods accordingly. Cheryl did not necessarily "act" like an authority in her classroom, and based her instruction on "what the students need first" as opposed to "what I need to feed them." Cheryl also used Ruby Payne's ideas to justify methods such as episodic fiction and enable better communication with students' parents; however, this text was troubling due to its generalizations and misinformation, and it is not clear that the progressive methods Cheryl is using are, in fact, a logical extension of Payne's ideas.

Gary, Rebecca, and Cheryl's use of professional literature illustrates several things about the adoption of best practices. For example, some teachers turn to professional literature, hoping that they can learn more about their students or possible approaches, but this literature may not actually help them adopt or change approaches for several possible reasons. It is possible, for example, that some teachers cannot differentiate between reliable and unreliable professional or commercial materials, especially when unreliable texts are espoused by various districts (as Ruby Payne has been). It is also possible that some teachers haven't been exposed to the kind of high-



quality professional literature that would allow them to understand the difference. Also, some teachers may not know what it means to use or apply professional literature, or they have not had a chance to see the approaches espoused in this professional literature actually modeled, or consider the literature in metacognitive ways. Finally, the findings from Gary illustrate the ability of the NWP in helping teachers establish—and read professional literature as part of—professional learning communities.

### *Modeling*

*Modeling as possibility.* When Gary began teaching, he was already familiar with the process approach for writing; however, he wasn't using it in his classroom. After he reflected on how his classroom instruction could be improved, after he considered turning to administrators and colleagues for help but realized that they were focused on MEAP assessments, and after he studied professional literature and found it inapplicable, it was a graduate-level writing methods course—one in which the instructor modeled the process approach for writing—that led Gary realize that he could, indeed, use other methods. Due to this modeling Gary observed, he was able to make some small changes in his classroom; however, the real transformation took place after he participated in the Summer Institute for teachers, as it not only modeled process-based approaches, low-risk instruction and student decision-making but also developed Gary's teacher-as-writer identity and metacognitive processes. For Gary, modeling represented the *possibility* of alternative methods, and it moved him towards the adoption of best practice methods.

*Modeling as support.* Rebecca's undergraduate methods course modeled best practices such as the process approach for writing. But as a first year teacher, competing pressures, especially those from other teachers, caused Rebecca to use a product-driven

curriculum. Her involvement with the NWP after her first year, and implementation of more process-based approaches for writing and literature during the following year, convey that the NWP's modeling likely provided Rebecca with the support that she needed in order to change her methods.

*Modeling as mentorship.* Cheryl cited her supervising teacher as a strong influence on her development as a teacher. She had the opportunity to not only observe her supervising teacher's "nitty gritty" lesson planning but to try this lesson planning on her own with the guidance of this mentor. In addition, she had a chance to continue this mentoring relationship when her internship concluded, as she took a long-term substitute job across the hall from this teacher. Overall, the mentoring of Cheryl's supervising teacher, especially in the area of intentional lesson planning, caused Cheryl to constantly wonder, "Will this work for my kids?" It is this question that has guided Cheryl's flexible adoption and revision of the process model as well as her use of episodic fiction. Cheryl's situation illustrates the power of modeling with supervised practice as a valuable force in the adoption of methods.

### *Identity*

Gary's involvement with the NWP developed his identity as a writer, a person with professional knowledge about process, craft, voice and publication. This teacher-as-writer identity provided a basis for metacognitive thought about writing, which brought about his adoption of the process model, low-risk approaches, and student decision-making in his approach to teaching writing.

Rebecca remembered her own student identity, an identity that resulted from her poor secondary experiences. This identity fueled her desire for students to like reading

and writing. In addition, Rebecca began to see herself as a “pretty good reader” during an undergraduate course. Her reader identity was refined by her NWP involvement, which engaged metacognitive processes that ultimately helped her discontinue her emphasis on comprehension questions in reading instruction. Finally, Rebecca’s identity as a writer, initiated by her undergraduate writing methods course, was dormant during her first year of teaching due to administrative and collegial pressures. Work with the NWP after her first year of teaching renewed and refined this writer identity, and writing workshop became a mode of instruction in her classroom.

Cheryl was reluctant to identify herself as a reader or writer, though she took on some mental processes of both identities. Cheryl insisted that her strength was “people” and she emphasized her relationships with students, and their relationships with each other. Cheryl looked to these relationships—especially relationships with students—to provide her with essential teaching information. She was concerned about the particular interests, experiences and challenges faced by her students and asked, “Will this work for my kids?” in order to choose and refine teaching approaches.

Identity and self-conception were highly influential in the adoption of teaching practices. Gary’s writer identity, Rebecca’s student, writer, and reader identities, and Cheryl’s interest in relationships indicate several things. For example, the NWP is a vital force in the establishment and renewal of a teacher professional identity, and in providing a professional community for this identity. It helps teachers see themselves as professionals, see themselves as writers, and examine their writing *and* their professional practice (teaching paired with research) in order to transform classroom practice. This

“professional” identity also means that teachers will approach their craft with an amount of intention and seriousness that allows for close examination of practice.

These findings also illustrate that a teacher’s identity is likely more important than his or her self-reflection, because with a teacher professional identity, it is likely that such reflection (taking on professional habits that include reflecting on one’s practice and reflecting on research) will be already encouraged. Finally, identities that help a teacher to gather information on students (in order to adopt and revise teaching approaches) can also be valuable.

### *Metacognition*

Through his work with the NWP, Gary was able to identify himself as a writer; this identity helped him to closely examine his own writing processes, consider his reading of professional literature, and reflect on the processes of effective writers. He reconsidered his existing product-based instruction and adopt process-based, choice-based and low-risk methods that more closely matched “real” writing processes. Similarly, Rebecca’s work with the NWP helped her use metacognition to consider how effective readers read, and she was able to justify her abandonment of comprehension questions as a result. Finally, Cheryl’s use of metacognition involved putting herself in her students’ place, thinking about *their* thinking, as she selected and revised low-intimidation, high-engagement lessons.

In all three cases, metacognition was the most important influence on these teachers’ adoption of “best practice” pedagogical methods. This is likely due to the fact that metacognition requires thinking carefully about certain acts (such as reading or writing), examining one’s processes—and professional knowledge—as related to that act,

and then structuring one's processes accordingly. In other words, metacognition means well-conceived, grounded teaching.

### *Knowledge-Based World View*

Having previously used writing methods that reflected an objectivist world view, Gary's involvement with the National Writing Project, and his realization that writing could be "personal" and "flexible," helped him to change to more flexible, collaborative, and ultimately constructivist approaches to writing, including the use of multigenre projects and portfolios. Rebecca's objectivist desire that "all students to get the same knowledge" as well as her use of the Spelling Sourcebook series contrasted with her more constructivist approaches to the teaching of literature, which included her discontinuation of comprehension questions in favor of collaborative literature workshop activities. Cheryl's emphasis on relationships and whether certain practices would "work for [her] kids" was also based on a flexible view of knowledge.

Overall, a constructivist perspective was a consistent factor in the adoption of best practice methods for all three participants. In other words, it is more likely for a teacher with constructivist teaching beliefs to adopt best practice methods such as the process approach, low-risk instruction and student decision-making. While this seems tautological (these practices are based on constructivist principals), it is still important: it is not enough to train teachers to use best practice methods, and then expect that they will use them in thoughtful ways; developing a constructivist world view will likely ensure that the adoption, and careful use of, best practices takes place.

### Once an Exemplary Teacher Adopts Best Practices, How Does the Teacher Integrate Knowledge of Such Methods into Other Areas of Classroom Teaching?

An important conclusion of the study is that the adoption of a best practice does not necessarily mean that teachers will integrate that practice's principles, assumptions, philosophy, or practical implications consistently into other areas of teaching. Gary implemented the process model, student decision-making, and low-risk instruction into his teaching of writing, yet struggled to transfer knowledge of these aspects of instruction to his teaching of literature. His use of process-based, choice-driven, low-risk writing activities contrasted with some of his more objectivist literature activities (such as comprehension questions, quizzes and lectures). Gary's struggle to integrate best practice methods into his literature instruction demonstrates that even with a "transformative" professional development experience such as the NWP Summer Institute, learning the values of, and then adopting, process-based writing approaches, low-risk instruction, and student decision-making does not necessarily translate into a broader application of these methods.

Although Rebecca used a variety of process-based, low-risk, and choice-driven activities in her writing assignments and literature lessons throughout her teaching, she struggled to integrate similar tactics into her grammar instruction, which still relied on a product-driven, district-mandated program. Rebecca's situation conveys that even with the support of the NWP Summer Institute, which helped Rebecca to renew her reading and writing identity and use metacognition to adopt more process-based approaches for both, administrative and collegial expectations may outweigh teachers' integration of best practices.

Cheryl's integration wasn't completely consistent; at times, her use of process, especially in the area of literature, did not encourage the depth of student response that might be expected from a Reader Response model. Also, some of her literature response activities seemed to be based more on teacher decision-making than student decision-making. However, Cheryl exhibited a fairly consistent integration of low-risk instruction between her literature and writing approaches. Cheryl's methods integration illustrates that consistent integration is possible, especially when accompanied by a careful metacognitive consideration of teaching context.

One more notable finding concerns awareness. None of the teachers expressed any recognition that the transfer and integration of certain fundamental principles across their teaching practices had taken place. This finding conveys that while teachers may be aware of their methods, or aware of some of the philosophies behind their methods, they may not be completely aware of the integration that takes place after they adopt a method. In other words, methods integration need not be (though it can be) intentional.

#### What Factors Affect the Integration of Best Practices Into Other Areas of Instruction?

This study arrived at three main factors that influenced the integration of best practice approaches: identity, metacognition, and knowledge-based world view.

##### *Identity*

For all three subjects, identity was a driving force in the integration, or lack of integration, of best practice methods. Not only did it enable metacognitive processes, but it provided teachers with a community of professionals. In this way, identity was not a solitary endeavor, but rather a collective one. Hammerness et al confirm the value of such identity, saying that

As teachers develop a vision for what teachers do, what good teaching is, and what they hope to accomplish as a teacher, they begin to forge an identity that will guide them in their work...Developing an identity as a teacher is an important part of securing teachers' commitment to their work and adherence to professional norms of practice. (383).

Gary's identity as a writer developed as a result of his work with the National Writing Project, which led him to adopt process-based methods, student decision-making, and low-risk approaches; however, although Gary identified himself as a writer multiple times over the course of interviews and observations, he did not represent a similar reading identity in his interviews or classroom observations, which explains a lack of comparable approaches in his literature instruction.

After her first year of teaching and her involvement in the Summer Institute, Rebecca's renewed identity as a reader and writer helped her adopt best practices in both the teaching of literature and writing. However, Rebecca did not convey a reader or writer identity when it came to her grammar instruction. When describing how she was changing some of her grammar instruction, she represented a "researcher" identity, and even identified herself as part of a graduate-level teacher research community. At the time of the study, she identified mostly with the research that she was conducting by her identity as an "expert," not as a person who was learning to use grammar effectively (which would more closely match her writer and reader identities).

Cheryl's identity as a relationship builder was also an important finding. She used her rapport with students to gather information that would help her learn from them



and structure her approaches. Such tactics aren't unlike Progressivism's belief that education begins with the child, not the teacher.

Gary, Rebecca and Cheryl's identities illustrate some further findings. For example, it was possible for the participants in this study to take on more than one identity. Also, none of the subjects found their identities in isolation--in fact, the NWP and its community of teacher-writers contributed to each of these subjects' identity formation and development. Such findings suggest that identity is tied to being part of a specific group—and in the case of the NWP, this group included people who possess a wealth of professional knowledge.

### *Metacognition*

For all three subjects, metacognition—the presence or absence of it—affected the integration of best practice methods, but this did not happen in a vacuum. Other factors, such as pedagogical content knowledge (professional literature) and modeling, contributed to such metacognition. Ideas from professional literature and modeled approaches helped teachers construct a teaching ideal that they considered in the midst of their metacognitive processes. In this way, professional literature served to ground metacognition.

Gary showed promise in his use of metacognitive processes for the teaching of literature as he considered his reading processes and need to stay engaged in his reading. He also considered the information on Blau's reading logs that he gleaned from a colleague. This metacognition informed his integration of this process-based approach to literature.

Rebecca was able to integrate process-based ideas into both literature and writing approaches due to metacognitive processes; however, one area was lacking in metacognition: she had not yet considered how she had learned, or was learning grammar. It is also possible that she hadn't thought about how her research on grammar confirmed or challenged her individual grammar learning process. Further, it is possible that, given her traditional secondary school experiences, she experienced very little modeling of effective grammar approaches and thus couldn't compare them to her current instruction or grammar processes.

While Cheryl did not examine her own reading and writing processes and then apply them to her students, she instead used the troubling work of Ruby Payne, the careful lesson planning that she learned from her supervising teacher, and her relational skills in order to consider her students' mental processes as related to their reading, writing, behavioral, academic, and economic situations and then choose methods that would work for them. In Cheryl's case, her knowledge of her students also came from her interactions with them. It was not necessary for Cheryl to examine her own reading or writing processes; meta-reflection on her *students'* mental processes was likely sufficient. The integration of each participant's methods cemented an important finding of this study: that metacognitive processes are sometimes based on unreliable professional knowledge, but that other factors, especially an emphasis on student relationships, can serve to balance such misinformation.

#### *Knowledge-Based World View*

This study established a strong relationship between each teacher's knowledge-based world view and integration of best practice methods. It is no surprise that for each

of the participants, a constructivist philosophy correlated with the use of best practice approaches, while an objectivist philosophy correlated with a lack of integration of similar approaches. For Gary, this meant that his writing instruction, which depended upon collaborative, flexible, low-risk, student-centered approaches, did not carry over to his literature methods, which utilized more objectivist methods such as lectures and comprehension quizzes. While Gary did not specifically articulate this knowledge-based world view, it was nonetheless implied through his “expert” role in his literature classes. Rebecca’s experience was similar to Gary’s; her stated goal for all students to “get the same knowledge” from a district-mandated grammar curriculum conveyed an objectivist learning philosophy and correlated with her struggle to integrate process-based, choice-based, and low-risk methods into her grammar instruction. Cheryl inadvertently referred to her constructivist philosophy with questions like “Will this work for my kids?” Such phrases demonstrated that Cheryl saw knowledge as flexible depending on each person; with a few exceptions, she employed a constructivist learning philosophy in her classroom, actively creating knowledge with her students as she integrated her literature and writing methods.

### Implications of the Study

This study’s findings on best practice methods adoption and integration come with many implications for paradigm shifts, teacher training, teacher-leaders, administrators, and the National Writing Project. These implications are described below in their respective categories.

### *Paradigm Shift*

This study affirmed the value of self-reflection in problem solving, in that the teachers' reflective questions led them toward more informed thinking and action. But identity and metacognition, with their utilization of learning communities and professional knowledge, were also essential elements of this problem solving. Given these findings, English educators, teachers, administrators and policymakers should recognize identity formation and metacognitive processes as valuable processes *beyond* self-reflection. Thus, while preservice and practicing teachers might be given the chance to reflect on their practice and identify problem areas, they should also be encouraged to *seek to solve* these problems. They can be presented with various opportunities—in graduate methods courses, school inservices, or department meetings—to take on appropriate identities in order to metacognitively address these issues of concern. Without the support of a professional community and a consideration of relevant research, however, it is likely that teachers will struggle to change.

### *Teacher Training*

This study found that preservice experiences served to familiarize teachers with writing, but did not ensure adoption of best practices because the preservice methods courses modeled traditional approaches and the pressures of administrators and colleagues overpowered the best of intentions. Keeping this pressure in mind, these findings cement the need for methods courses to model best practices to teachers. In addition, teachers must be given the opportunities to practice these approaches in a mentorship relationship similar to the one found in Cheryl's internship. Practical experiences such as classroom observations and job shadowing can also help with such

methods adoption. It is also possible for preservice methods courses to help teachers anticipate and address future teaching issues. For example, given that administrative and collegial pressures can hinder best practice adoption and integration, English educators can utilize relevant case studies, role plays, and discussions in their methods courses, helping preservice teachers adopt relevant identities, consider professional literature, and develop metacognitive processes in their problem solving. To anticipate preservice teachers' future curricula, English educators must give students the chance to critically examine and evaluate popular professional materials against current practitioner research. In addition, methods instructors ought to address future professional literature problems by employing high-quality literature such as NCTE publications in their classes, and heighten students' awareness of this quality by giving them the opportunity to scrutinize professional literature, especially literature relating to at-risk student populations. Such preparation is backed by Smagorinsky and Whiting, who articulate that methods courses that "connected knowledge from the course with application to professional life in meaningful and pragmatic ways were of potentially greater help to [preservice teachers] in adjusting to life in the classroom" (24).

English educators can model identity formation and metacognition by creating activities and assigning projects that invite students to adopt a teacher-as-writer and teacher-as-reader identity. In addition, English educators can cultivate a constructivist knowledge-based world view among preservice teachers by modeling class activities and project assignments that value collective knowledge. Richardson confirms this approach, saying that "programs that approach learning to teach in a constructivist manner are

successful in engaging their participants in examining and changing their beliefs and practices” (113).

Even at the preservice level, English educators should consider collaborating with organizations known for their utilization of modeling, identity formation and metacognition such as the National Writing Project (NWP). Such collaboration, especially when paired with the reading of professional literature, can benefit future teachers by providing them with a professional community and metacognitive practices, which are both essential aspects of identity formation and metacognition. This recommendation has also been articulated by Samuel Totten, who states that the National Writing Project “need[s] the assistance of colleges and universities to reach those teachers who have not yet entered the classroom” (National Writing Project). Such collaboration may not be realistic given the NWP’s funding and time constraints; however, such collaboration is rich with possibility in establishing and developing teacher support networks before preservice teachers face the many demands of school life.

#### *Administrators*

This study shows that administrative pressures play a significant part in the adoption and integration of best practice methods; administrators must be cognizant of this influence. They should be encouraged to become more deeply read in content areas. In addition, they should work to connect teachers with current materials in their respective fields, encourage self-reflective practices, direct teachers toward professional organizations and enable collaboration between colleagues, especially when welcoming novice teachers into their buildings.

Gary's story demonstrates the power of teacher-leadership in the face of administrative pressures. He developed a teacher-leader role after his participation in the Summer Institute and, at present, has steered the majority of his departmental colleagues toward involvement with the National Writing Project. Together, these colleagues read and discuss practitioner literature, revise their approaches, use many process-based, low-risk, and choice-based methods, and even question administrative policies. Administrators should recognize the value of—and support teachers' involvement with—organizations such as the NWP, which develop teacher-leaders. These teacher-leaders can foster the kind of individual and collective transformation needed for the adoption and integration of best practice approaches.

Considering the power of the existing curriculum over teachers' chosen methods, administrators should empower teachers to consider and articulate how such curricula align with current educational research and discontinue the use of questionable programs. Teachers need time and funding to access current, peer-reviewed practitioner research as well as adequate resources and professional community support to critically inspect and metacognitively evaluate existing curricula and professional literature against relevant research recommendations.

Administrators should also recognize and support metacognitive thinking and thoughtful professional identity formation among practicing teachers. They should enable teachers to create, gather and analyze surveys that solicit relevant student information such as reading and writing abilities, interests, and attitudes toward literate activities so that metacognitive habits can drive instruction in well-informed ways. Supporting ongoing teacher development, especially opportunities such as the NWP that

value identity formation and metacognitive processes, is also an option. Other groups, such as the National Council of Teachers of English, the International Reading Association, Rethinking schools, the Classroom Research movement and various online communities such as Co-Learn and the English Companion Ning can provide both the professional community and relevant research that is so essential to identity formation and cognition. Providing time and funds to support professional learning communities can also prove useful, as these groups have given teachers such as Gary, Rebecca and Cheryl the opportunity to pair classroom research, collegial support, and high-quality professional literature.

#### *National Writing Project*

Although this study's findings validate the NWP as a source of teacher renewal and ongoing development, there are implications for the organization. Many of these implications are also applicable to graduate-level methods courses.

A relevant finding of this study concerns the value of metacognition and identity formation. By providing a community of teacher professionals and professional materials to accompany these factors, the NWP can increase the likelihood that teachers adopt and integrate best practice approaches and withstand the administrative and collegial pressures that run counter to their Summer Institute experiences.

Given that the teachers in this study struggled to integrate writing and literature practices, the NWP could continue with their teacher-as-writer model, yet integrate it by helping teachers take on other professional, informed identities such as teacher-as-reader. This expansion of identity formation and metacognition may help future NWP



participants to transfer the valuable knowledge modeled—and learned—through the National Writing Project to other areas of classroom practice.

The NWP might also provide ongoing opportunities for teachers to discuss, examine and evaluate curricula and professional literature. Considering Cheryl's struggle with Ruby Payne, the organization might use the Summer Institute or its website to recommend professional literature—especially literature that addresses at-risk student populations.

The NWP can also encourage teachers to more fully examine a constructivist approach and consider its implications beyond writing instruction. It can continue to model constructivist approaches during the Summer Institute and related inservice opportunities. Recognizing that this modeling will likely encourage awareness of such constructivism and not actual adoption, the NWP can also foster metacognition by having teachers read professional literature about constructivist teaching strategies and reflect on their own learning experiences—especially times when collective knowledge was valued—and apply these past experiences to their current teaching situations.

#### Limitations and Further Questions

This study has yielded several worthwhile conclusions, but is not without limitations and further questions.

#### *Sample Size*

Recruiting more participants for the study could deepen emerging conclusions and provide more perspective. For instance, finding another participant with a relationship-based identity (similar to Cheryl) may further clarify the role of identity in methods adoption and integration.

### *Observation Time*

Additional observation and interview time with teachers could confirm this study's findings, especially in the area of methods integration. For example, it would be interesting to gather more information on Gary and Cheryl's teaching of grammar to triangulate with data from Rebecca's grammar instruction.

### *Participant Source*

While this study focused in National Writing Project participants, there are other networks that provide teacher development and support, such as the Michigan Council of Teachers of English. Exploring teachers recommended by other organizations could determine whether participants' methods adoption and integration were specific to the NWP or common to the profession. It would also be valuable to explore whether these other organizations provided similar opportunities for modeling, professional identity formation and metacognitive consideration.

### *Time Frame*

This study focused on a snapshot of teacher practice—mainly practice that was specific to one academic year of teaching. The participants' teaching knowledge and practices have likely diversified and deepened since the study ended; more longitudinal examination could yield further data that addresses ongoing sources of teacher development.

*Executive use.* I was unable to determine whether the teachers in this study had reached executive levels of use in their transfer of knowledge because I lacked sufficient data on mental processes. A follow-up study could rely more heavily on interview questions written with such mental processes in mind, or even utilize think-aloud

protocols in order to gather relevant information and determine which factors contribute to an executive use of best practice methods.

### *Applications*

While reflection is an important teaching tool, this study concluded that teacher identity, metacognition and knowledge-based world view were strong indicators of method adoption and integration. Thus, an essential question is how these conclusions can continue to encourage paradigm shifts within the field, especially in the area of preservice teacher preparation and ongoing teacher support.

Many remaining questions concern preservice teacher training. For example, it would be helpful to interview the participants' methods instructors in order to determine how they were actually taught (as opposed to what the participants remembered). A follow-up to this study could include a more specific exploration of teacher training and a teacher's chosen methods and integrations; further examination could yield more specific recommendations for English educators.

This study's examination of the integration of writing and literature approaches brings to light a final question: What are further ways that the National Writing Project can encourage teachers to adopt best practices as a result of their involvement in opportunities such as the Summer Institute—and, more importantly, how can best practice integration be encouraged after such involvement? Extended consideration of this question could help clarify the mission of the organization, as well as the methods that result from involvement in the organization's many teacher development opportunities.

## Concluding the Study

This study began with an exploration of the history and rhetorical implications of the phrase “best practice” and was critical of the association of this phrase with Taylorist ideas. At the same time, the study also affirmed the value of pedagogical knowledge and utilized Joyce and Showers’ idea of a continuum of levels of transfer to affirm that the integration of professional knowledge is possible, even necessary, for exemplary teaching. The study also found that certain factors, such as a teacher’s professional identity formation, metacognition and knowledge-based world view, influence the likelihood of the integration of professional knowledge.

The teachers in this study wrestled with, and sometimes overcame, Taylorist approaches to classroom teaching that were frequently encouraged in the schools they worked in—often including the common assessments, commercial teaching materials and programs, and curricular expectations that aimed for “one best way” and based themselves on objectivist understandings of knowledge. Gary eventually moved beyond the John Collins program, Rebecca continued to use the Spelling Sourcebook and Accelerated Reader programs, and Cheryl continued to question the applicability of her district’s common assessments. These teachers are on a professional journey in their adoption and integration of their practices that increasingly values their developing teacher knowledge.

This dissertation has continued the discussion set forth in its first chapter: the fact that best practice is not a simple set of infinitely repeatable and universally transferable methods. Best practice depends upon a deep knowledge of content, on specific information about students and context, on the identity and critical reflection of the

teacher. We have seen that “best practices” are not well adopted when teachers are “taught” them in Taylorist fashion in preservice courses or district inservices. Adoption depends on the administrative and collegial support, access to professional knowledge, ability to consider and apply ideas from professional literature, models, formation of a professional identity, development of metacognitive processes, and knowledge-based world view. In other words, best practice cannot be taught to teachers in objectivist or Taylorist ways; the fact that, in this study, best practices were not rotely transmitted and received but were adopted under more complex circumstances, demonstrates the power of constructivist pedagogy at the level of the teacher as well as the student.

We have seen that teachers can develop and transfer excellent teaching ideas to a host of circumstances. This dissertation affirms that opportunities for modeling, identity development, metacognition and establishing a knowledge-based world view—made possible by professional collaboration and professional knowledge—are essential conditions for exemplary instruction. These practices have a vital role in a teacher’s initial and ongoing professional development, and this finding has relevance to debates about school and educational reform. This dissertation indicates clearly that effective reform requires that teacher research, knowledge, and thinking are valued.

It is my hope that this study will work to develop and sustain this picture of professional development, and that it will provide teachers, administrators, professional organizations, and English educators with the knowledge to create or continue professionally-acknowledged approaches that work. It is also my hope that this study will help teachers resist the stagnation that comes with “one best way” rhetoric and utilize identity formation, metacognition and their knowledge-based world view to “remake”

education into a process, into something beyond a best practice. May these teachers know praxis, which

Affirms women and men as beings who transcend themselves, who move forward and look ahead, for whom immobility represents a fatal threat, for whom looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future. (Friere 84)

And at the secondary, preservice, practicing teacher, departmental, administrative, organizational and legislative levels, may this study ensure that teachers are given the preparation, ongoing support and empowerment for continued growth.

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## Appendix A

### Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Letter


# WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: February 6, 2007

To: Allen Webb, Principal Investigator  
Gretchen Rurnohr-Voskuil, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair 

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 07-01-15

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "Best Practices in Language Arts Teaching" has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: February 6, 2008

Walwood Hall, Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5456  
PHONE: (269) 387-8293 FAX: (269) 387-8276

## Appendix B

### Anonymous Student Questionnaire

**Anonymous Student Questionnaire for study entitled “Best Practices and Language Arts Teaching”  
Western Michigan University  
Department of English  
Principal Investigator: Allen Webb  
Student Investigator: Gretchen Rumohr-Voskuil**

**This questionnaire is anonymous. All of the information collected from this questionnaire is confidential. Any information provided by this questionnaire will be masked in the student investigator’s (Gretchen Rumohr-Voskuil’s) dissertation or further publications; it would be impossible for such writings to, in any way, reveal your identity. All completed anonymous questionnaires will be kept in a locked file belonging to the researcher. In addition, your teacher will never be informed about any results from your questionnaire. PLEASE ANSWER BOTH SIDES OF THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.**

Please circle the number that best describes your response to these statements. Please write a sentence or two explaining your response in the “comment” section after each statement.

1. In this class, I am valued.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	2	1	0

Comments:

2. In this class, I can learn in my own way.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	2	1	0

Comments:

3. My teacher knows how I learn best.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	2	1	0

Comments:

4. My teacher structures the class to meet my learning needs.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	2	1	0

Comments:

5. My teacher knows why s/he chooses to teach in a certain way.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	2	1	0

Comments:



6. In this class, I work with others often.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	2	1	0

Comments:

7. In this class, I find that working with others benefits me.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	2	1	0

Comments:

8. In this class, I help others with their writing and they help me with my writing.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	2	1	0

Comments:

9. I feel that my teacher considers my own learning situation when teaching me.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	2	1	0

Comments:

10. I feel that my teacher considers my own learning situation when grading me.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	2	1	0

Comments:

11. I feel that my teacher is flexible in the way that s/he teaches the class.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	2	1	0

Comments:

12. I feel that my teacher is flexible in the way that s/he grades me.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	2	1	0

Comments:

## Appendix C

Permission to Use Materials  
from *Spelling Sourcebook*

13 October 2009

Rachel Smith, Assistant Editor  
EPS School Specialty  
625 Mt. Auburn Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138

Dear Ms. Smith:

I would like to request your permission to include a short excerpt from *The Spelling Sourcebook* (Take Home Task, Level Eight, page 85 from the 2002 series) in my dissertation. The citation is the following:

Sitton, Rebecca. "Compound Sentences." From *The Spelling Sourcebook*, Egger Publishing Inc, 2002. 85.

The classroom teacher that I analyzed used this handout in the classroom, and I include it as part of my description and analysis of her teaching methods.

The source will receive full credit in the manuscript, with a copyright date and following credit line: Used by permission of Educators Publishing Service, 625 Mt. Auburn Street, Cambridge MA, (800) 225-5750, [www.epssbooks.com](http://www.epssbooks.com). I understand that if granted permission, the terms of permission extend for one year. After that time, I will need to reapply for permission.

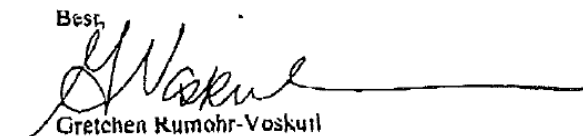
For your convenience, I am including a space for your signature below to indicate your permission for my use of the above-mentioned material. By signing below, you give ProQuest Information and Learning (formerly University Microfilms) the right to supply copies of this material on demand as part of my doctoral dissertation. Please indicate or attach any additional terms and conditions for the proposed use when you reply to this letter.

  
NAME

10/13/09  
DATE

Please fax the signed letter to (616)732-4487. Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this matter.

Best,

  
Gretchen Rumohr-Voskuil  
PhD Candidate, Western Michigan University  
2175 Lamont Avenue NW  
Walker, MI 49534  
(616)481-3312