The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same: A Survey of High School Students' Writing Experiences

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In this article, we present secondary students' perceptions of their writing and writing instruction. Using the NCTE/IRA Standards *as the foundation for a survey, we questioned nearly 2,000 public-school students concerning what they wrote, how they wrote, and the extent to which they wrote in their language arts classes. We chose Florida as our research site due to its nearly 30-year history of high stakes testing. Data analysis across high schools, grade levels, and tracks showed writing instruction to be differentiated and varied, but often at odds with research-based practices. Although these data provide only one snapshot of a complex phenomenon, our findings can be understood within a wider historical-political context in which state assessments and predetermined standards potentially impact the kinds of instruction students are receiving.*

It is May, 1985, at my south Florida high school, and I have just finished putting together my end-of-the-year junior writing folder. With my completed pieces in final drafts, everything is turned in to my English teacher. Three years later, I am a pre-service teacher, excitedly learning about "brainstorming," "freewriting," and "revising" from my English education professors at a Florida university. Eight years later, back in my south Florida hometown, I am a first-year English teacher. Gone are the "writing folders." In their place are a statewide writing assessment and professional-development workshops teaching us how to score students' essays. A few years down the line, I am a fifth-year teacher at a different Florida high school, and facing more than professional-development workshops. The new threat is a mandatory direct-instruction program designed to improve writing assessment scores. What happened to the writing instruction I knew over those fifteen years?

—Lisa

It is January, 1982, and I have just accepted my first university teaching position at a Florida university. Twenty-five pre-service teachers with little or no experience in writing instruction eagerly await what I have to say about the process approach. Ten years later, these same classes are filled with knowledgeable students, many of whom have previously participated in National Writing Project activities, attended professional conferences, and read journal articles about the writing process. Classes involve sharing and lively discussion. By the late 90s, student enthusiasm for the process has begun to wane. Students are preoccupied with how they can help children pass standardized tests, and want "practical" ways of addressing writing. Product concerns and direct instruction are all the rage. When I visit schools, only the remnants of the process approach are visible, largely in the form of brainstorming webs and editing. What happened to writing instruction as I knew it over those 20 years?

—Carolyn

Our personal reflections and experiences echo what many educators have recently observed: In the present political climate, writing instruction is becoming increasingly product-oriented, a trend that is often eclipsing process approaches and writing for a variety of purposes and functions (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Dudley, 1997; Graves, 2002; Shafer, 2000; Thomas, 2000, 2001; Wartchow & Gustavson, 1999, cited in Smith, 2000b; Wesley, 2000). This emphasis on product instruction, however, is not new. Prior to the 1970s, the teaching of writing was dominated by classical rhetoric, its focus on ideal structures supposedly capturing what was already neatly organized in a writer's mind (Hairston, 1982). Popular composition textbooks during this time emphasized prescriptions about correctness and rational structures such as the five-paragraph theme (Emig, 1971).

With the seminal work of Janet Emig (1971) and that of the many researchers who followed her lead throughout the eighties, a paradigm shift occurred, moving writing instruction from a product to a process orientation (Applebee, 1986; Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975; Gage, 1986; Hairston, 1982, cited in Smith, 2000a; Myers, 1996; Squire, 1987). With this direction came new possibilities for instruction. Educators Nancy Atwell (1987), Peter Elbow (1986), and Donald Murray (1982) were instrumental in translating process research into practical approaches for implementation in classrooms. Yet even while process approaches were favorably received around the country, the practical realities of schooling—diverse populations, time constraints, and increasing numbers of students and classes (Applebee, 1986, cited in Sperling & Freedman, 2001)—often led to process practices that were "misinterpreted and misapplied" (Sperling & Freedman, 2001, p. 373). As Sperling and Freedman (2001) so clearly state, "The difficulty in implementing writing process research seemed related to the realities of teachers' and students' lives inside schools, which forced compromises that researchers had not anticipated" (p. 373). For example, Arthur Applebee's research

confirmed suspicions that process-oriented activities in high schools were often limited to Britton et al.'s (1975) informative function, or replaced with fill-in-the-blank exercises. Time spent on writing was often marked by inadequate intervention and negligible feedback (Applebee, 1981, 1986, 1993; Applebee & Langer, 1987). Moreover, mistaken notions of writers' actual processes prompted some to conceptualize the process as a set of discrete strategies for particular genres and tasks (Hillocks, 1982; Petrosky & Bartholomae, 1986; Smith, 2000a). Emphasis shifted from a monolithic to a more differentiated view, in which process decisions were guided by purpose, task, and the kind of writing being produced (Hillocks, 1986).

If the decade of the 80s saw the expansion of writing-process research, the 90s extended the theoretical parameters of the process by accounting for multidisciplinary and interrelated sociocultural influences on writing (Bracewell & Witte, 1997; Flower, 1994). At the same time, schools were being affected by changing demographics and a growing demand to meet the needs of learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The sociopolitical context was again shaping what it meant to be literate and what constituted appropriate literacy acts (Street, 1993). At its best, process instruction embraced a view of writing as a cognitive and social practice, with an emphasis on integrated literacy modes and rich collaborative environments (Sperling & Freedman, 2001); and at its worst, writing instruction became defined solely by testing (Mabry, 1999). Given that 38 states measured students' writing skills with a direct assessment by 1999 (Ketter & Pool, 2001), varied process approaches began to give way to test-driven writing, a trend that often replaced instructional priorities with legislative accountability. Explicit instruction in the five-paragraph theme soon became synonymous with learning to write. Although teachers might encounter textbooks with terms such as prewriting, revising, and editing, in actual practice, many used prescriptive rules and formulaic writing, separated from the purposes writing was supposed to serve (Mabry, 1999).

Following the trend of the 90s into the 21st century, top-down reform efforts inadvertently continued to restrict writing curriculum and pedagogy. In the schools where the two of us observed and taught, we witnessed teachers struggling to reconcile process approaches with rigid product formulas designed to satisfy test requirements. As teachers endeavored to produce passing scores while also meeting student needs, the challenge of implementing research-based practices seemed more formidable than ever. We wondered if what was happening in our schools existed elsewhere in the state and, if so, how it was being resolved. To help explore this question, we selected high schools in four diverse regions in Florida to participate in a study of current trends in writing practice. Florida is an appropriate state to use as a case because of its controversial high stakes assessment—the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)—which measures reading, writing, and mathematics, and guides promotion, retention, and graduation decisions. As Siegel

(2004) points out, "There are well-known objections to high-stakes testing programs, most of which have been made regarding FCAT" (p. 58).

To explore the status of writing practices in Florida, we chose survey research as our methodology. Even though surveys cannot assess the quality of instruction, they can be a quick and inexpensive way to gather data regarding the principles, practices, and theories described as good teaching in language arts (Good & Brophy, 2000; Lindemann, 1987; Prawat, 1989; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998). Although most surveys focus on adult input, ours was designed for high school students. According to Sizer and Sizer (1999), "Schools exist for children, but children are often seen as the school's clients, as its powerless people" (p. 20). It is our strong belief that student opinions and perceptions can contribute relevant and necessary information concerning the status of writing in the English language arts classroom.

The purpose of this study was to survey selected Florida high school students across schools, grade levels, and tracks to ascertain what opportunities they believed were available to practice and learn writing, and what ramifications these perceptions might have for gaining a better understanding of writing instruction. Although the results provide insights only into the perspectives of students in a given region at a particular time, our understandings of the evolution of writing instruction in Florida over the past 25 years have allowed us to interpret survey results within a wider historical and political context.

Background and Framework

Florida's Historical-Political Context

As Ketter and Pool note, "writing is historically determined and situationally constrained . . . a writer is always positioned by the situational constraints of a discourse community" (2001, p. 345). Writing practices are particularly susceptible to these constraints, and can be interpreted within a larger social context of past and present trends. The events of Florida's history, its instruction, curriculum standards, and assessment, are integral to understanding the different and competing versions of writing pedagogy that exist today. Florida's involvement in writing instruction has been based on several influences that mirror national trends. The first involves access to a plethora of writing studies, both process- and product-oriented, which began to appear in the literature in the late 70s (see, for instance, compilations of research in Dahl & Farnan, 1998; and Perl, 1994). This body of research recommended that students write for a variety of purposes as they learn the systems and structures of language (e.g., persuasive essays, business letters, or journal entries) and the different techniques and styles (e.g., formal, conversational, poetic) for expressing themselves and preparing for work after high school (Myers, 1996; Squire, 1987). It also inspired process approaches to writing, suggesting that students practice brainstorming, revising, and publishing,

and value ownership and choice of topics, frequent occasions to write, and exposure to engrossing models of writing (McBride, 2000).

A second major influence in Florida's composition history was the impact of process research on university English language arts courses throughout the state. Pre-service and practicing teachers alike, exposed to popular educational text-books such as *In the Middle* (Atwell, 1987), *Writing With Power* (Elbow, 1986), and *A Community of Writers* (Zemelman & Daniels, 1988), recognized that writing instruction could no longer look as it had in the past—with preconceived assignments, restrictive parameters, and teacher-dominated assessments lacking accountability in the form of written criteria (Myers, 1996; Spandel & Stiggins, 1997). Rather, process writing replaced a hierarchical power structure with a horizontal one, with students interacting and participating more fully with instructors and peers through collaborative learning and discourse communities (Bizzell, 1982; Bloom, 1992; Bruffee, 1984; Ede & Lunsford, 1985; Freedman, 1992; Hill, 1990). This view of instruction further resonated in university-initiated professional-development opportunities modeled after the Bay Area Writing Project, a cooperative school/university program begun in 1974. As early as 1981, teachers in various Florida counties spent summers exchanging ideas, debating issues, and writing a great deal themselves. Following these summer institutes, they served as consultants to their own districts, providing in-service programs throughout the school year (Piazza, 1982; Rigby, 2004).

A third influence in Florida history was recognizing writers as active participants in the construction of meaning. Writing classrooms were marked by (a) a wide range of diverse and developmentally appropriate tasks, (b) independent work with process writing, (c) self-selected topics, and (d) instruction in self-assessment (Spandel & Stiggins, 1997). Many classrooms saw a shift from teacher-created to student-designed topics. Thomas (2001) adds that such classrooms were focused on authentic purposes that valued time spent on modeling, shared writing, conferences, and student self-assessment (Hillocks, 1995; Thomas, 2000, 2001; Tonjes, 1991). More class time was devoted to all stages of the writing process, including time for students to read and respond to each other's papers in writers' workshops. Teachers shared their own writing along with models written by professionals and other students, addressing multiple purposes and genres of writing, and teaching grammar and vocabulary not as isolated activities, but in the context of reading and writing (Olson, 2003; Squire, 1987; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998).

By the 1990s, Florida was influenced by yet another trend, this time a legislative one: the education reform wave initiated by the passage of the federal No Child Left Behind legislation. This was, in fact, a fifth reform to affect Florida, and closely related to a fourth—the governor's "A+ Plan" linking high stakes testing with graduation, school grading, and bonus monies (Herrington & MacDonald,

2000). Not unlike the rest of the country, Florida heightened the stakes for writing success by instituting tests such as the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and then grading schools for the success or failure of their students' performances. In the district where the two of us lived and taught during this time, teachers were required to set aside time every quarter for students to practice formulaic writing structures based directly on the state's test. In other regions of the state, similar accountability measures caused schools to spend thousands of dollars purchasing computer-based writing practice and assessment systems. Writing instruction shifted from the teacher to the computer. With educational reform efforts aimed at prescriptive standards of achievement and greater attention to accountability, opinions varied on how best to teach writing.

Meanwhile, the Florida legislature, holding strong to the prevailing belief that teaching to the test was not a bad thing if the test was a good one (Hewitt, 1993; Mitchell, 1992; Wiggins, 1992), backpedaled and established a set of writing standards to align with the FCAT assessment—this, by the way, two years after tenth grade students were assessed for the first time in February 1994. These standards, named the Sunshine State Standards (SSS), were "to provide expectations for student achievement in Florida" (Florida Department of Education, 2003a). Although the standards were broad and non-prescriptive, they nonetheless validated the FCAT, which, in turn, seriously influenced the direction that instruction would take. For students in grades 9-12, two broad standards were formulated to guide writing instruction (see Appendix B for full descriptions):

Standard 1: The student uses writing processes effectively.
Standard 2: The student writes to communicate ideas and information effectively.

According to the Florida Department of Education (2004), however, only Standard 1 was to be assessed by FCAT Writing, further suggesting the need to gather data concerning students' exposure to varied process practices.

NCTE/IRA Standards

The survey used in this study was based on the 1996 *Standards for the English Language Arts*, co-published by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA). The NCTE/IRA *Standards* "define, as clearly and specifically as possible, a consensus among literacy teachers and researchers about what students should learn in the English language arts . . . the ultimate purpose of these standards is to ensure that *all* students are offered the opportunities, the encouragement, and the vision to develop the language skills they need to pursue life's goals" (p. 1). From early in their histories, both NCTE and IRA were concerned with equality of educational

opportunity. NCTE, for example, came into existence in 1911 as a grassroots effort led by high school teachers opposed to college controls over their curricula, who called for "a new national effort to change the nation's definition of minimum literacy . . . that schools must recognize the needs of all students" (Myers, 1996, p. 84; see also Blau, 1995).

Begun in 1992, the Standards Project for the English Language Arts (SPELA) was a three-year collaboration among NCTE, IRA, and the Center for the Study of Reading. Explaining the thinking behind the *Standards*, NCTE Executive Director Miles Myers (1996) observed that "after eighty years of drills, slot filling, and the listing of parts, a new standard of literacy and a new model of English [were] beginning to emerge . . . expected to deal with a whole range of new social problems" (p. 103). Describing the twentieth century approaches to literacy instruction that he termed "decoding/analytic" (that is, teaching forms of language, enabling most citizens to achieve a basic reading level, and introducing the concept of "objectivity" in mass reading), Myers argued that more complex forms of literacy were necessitated by the postmodern world (p. 102-103). What was needed, he argued, was "critical/translation" literacy, a more supple, multiplistic set of tools and strategies that would allow students to meet the contemporary demands of life beyond school (p. 115). Without mandating prescriptive pedagogies or specific performance outcomes measured by tests, the NCTE/IRA *Standards* explicated a diverse set of literate behaviors that framed an essential and fundamental question: "Literacy for what?"

When financial support was pulled in 1994 due to philosophical differences between SPELA and the federal government, NCTE and IRA continued the task without federal help (Blau, 1995; MCREL, n.d.). Despite the number of eminent literacy leaders and researchers involved in developing the *Standards*, some criticized the lack of specificity in the final document. As Blau explains, "Some high ranking officials in the U.S. Office of Education . . . decided that they didn't like the kind of standards we were talking about. They wanted to see only lists of canonical texts, spelling lists, and a body of declarative knowledge about kinds of sentences and parts of speech and so on" (1995). Criticism also came from those who favored performance over content standards. While NCTE and IRA had provided content standards that outlined what students should know and be able to do, some critics favored more specific performance standards that would make comparative judgments and necessitate "standardized assessment instruments to ensure fairness in judging who's up to par and who's not" (Faust & Kieffer, 1998, p. 542).

Meanwhile, a few literacy educators resented the very notion of standards, regarding the NCTE/IRA's efforts as a challenge to teachers' autonomy. Neuman (1997), for instance, writes that

As a text produced by a professional organization, the NCTE/IRA *Standards* represent a "legitimization" of the knowledge that is valued in our society. As a representation of subject matter knowledge, as well as preferences for pedagogy and assessment, the *Standards* serve as a potential structural imposition on classroom practice . . . Even though the NCTE/IRA *Standards* were authored by many people, they were "written" by professional associations. Thus, the final determination of what students should know and be able to do comes from "experts" outside of the classroom (p. 2).

Those supporting the *Standards,* on the other hand, viewed their creation as something vastly different, a "clear vision for curriculum development and evaluation, one that has been evolving at least since the 1970s . . . an important phase in a long tradition of reform efforts" (Faust & Kiefer, 1998, p. 541; see also Applebee, 1974; Myers, 1994). Faust and Kieffer go on to say that "respect for teachers as professionals is another hallmark of these *Standards*, which are specific enough to guide decision making but not too specific that they become impositional" (p. 543).

The NCTE/IRA *Standards* provide a rigorously debated, open-ended guide to practice, rooted in a cognitive-social perspective and informed by the perspectives of such historical and contemporary educators as Vygotsky (1978), Dewey (1938), Emig (1971), Britton et al. (1975), Halliday (1978), Langer and Applebee (1987), Squire (1987), Blau (1993), and Myers (1996), among others. Intended to act as a generative starting point rather than a mandate, the *Standards* represent the goals of a profession unfettered by government interference. As such, the *Standards* are an important resource for developing a survey that seeks to determine whether students are enjoying the benefits of process instruction.

Student Perceptions

Most studies have examined writing instruction through classroom observations, teacher-reported data, or analyses of students' writing—such as Applebee's (1981) seminal study of writing in the secondary school, which surveyed a national sample of secondary teachers and included 309 classroom observations; or Britton et al.'s (1975) landmark work concerning writing functions. While some recent studies have examined curricular issues from students' viewpoints, the focus of this work has been on students' attitudes toward subjects (for example, Cretu, 2003; Day, 2002; Gentry & Springer, 2002; Kear, Coffman, & McKenna, 2000), and conceptions of subject matter (see Houston, Fraser, & Ledbetter, 2003; Walker & Zeidler, 2003). Less attention has been given to student perceptions of curriculum, and to the significant contribution these perspectives might make to our understanding of how school structures and norms coalesce into various formal and informal sorting mechanisms and opportunities (Wilson & Rossman, 1993). Erickson and Shultz (1992) note that "the absence of student experience from current educational discourse limits the insight of educators as well as that of

students" (p. 482). In fact, several studies (see, for example, Doyle, 1977; Rayneri & Gerber, 2004; Winne & Marx, 1980; Wittrock, 1978, 1986) have argued that an understanding of students' beliefs and perceptions is a necessary prerequisite to adequate interpretation of observed interactions (Rohrkemper, 1985). Giving voice to students also eases the "culture of silence" that exists in schools and classrooms, offering to fix the "unbalance" of power (Carroll, 1996; Freire & Shor, 1987; both cited in Innes, Moss, & Smigiel, 2001, pp. 207-8). Researchers are also quick to point out the limitations of self-reports. As Delpit (1995) writes, "We all interpret behaviors, information, and situations through our own cultural lenses; these lenses operate involuntarily, below the level of one's own conscious awareness, making it seem that our own view is simply the way it is" (p. 151). Prior knowledge, attention to the teacher, motivation and attribution for learning, affective processes, and ability to generate interpretations and understandings of instruction play critical roles in influencing student perceptions (Wittrock, 1986).

Given these influences, researchers synthesizing the perceptions of students must heed two threats to validity. First are internal factors that may influence the answers students provide on a survey instrument. For example, the self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1949) can lead to higher or lower student self-perceptions of ability, which may in turn shape and possibly distort students' views of classroom instruction and practices (Delpit, 1995; Rohrkemper, 1985; Wilson & Rossman, 1993; Wittrock, 1986). Likewise, students' choices and comments on a survey instrument may be informed by incomplete understandings of the task at hand. Second are external factors such as school and community norms, as well as the political climate. For example, comments about curriculum from administrators, teachers, parents, and guardians may influence student responses. Ways of addressing these threats to validity are explained in the methodology section.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. According to students, how often do they write, and what kinds of writing do they do in English language arts classes?
2. Do students believe that their teachers provide models?
3. How often do students report taking part in process-writing activities?

We targeted students across grade levels and tracks for two reasons. Since state-mandated writing tests were administered in particular grades, and students in the upper tracks (such as Advanced Placement) would most likely sit for college-credit examinations, the possibility existed that certain functions of writing might emerge (e.g., practicing for the test). Moreover, if our survey responses bore out research on differentiated instruction, students in higher and lower level academic tracks would receive qualitatively different instruction. We initially hypothesized

that the potential for quality writing instruction would be seriously compromised if students could not gain entry to appropriate materials, discussions, practices, and experiences. Likewise, if students were not exposed to a total program of literacy-based activities, the possibility of practicing writing and engaging in process experiences would be woefully restricted.

Method

Research Sites

Four schools in Florida were selected as sites for our survey research. Due to issues of access, time, and cost, a purposive sample, although less desirable than a random sample, was utilized (Babbie, 1990). Our sample of high schools was based upon information found on the Florida Department of Education Website. For example, each school district in which the sample schools were located experienced the tremendous population growth typical of most regions of the state. Each district from which schools were chosen differed greatly in terms of per-capita income, which was also representative of the differences among Florida's 67 counties. In terms of class size, finances, and drop-out rates, the schools were fairly representative of others in the state. Table 1 shows demographics (in percentages) for all the schools.

The four research sites also represented a balance of schools deemed excellent and average. Given a grade of "A" by the Florida Department of Education (DOE), School 4 ranked high academically, with 98% of its students passing the writing assessment, compared to the state average of 93%. Moreover, it had the second highest average SAT score of the four schools in the study (1051). School 1 also had a high average SAT score (1050), and many students did well on the state's writing test (94% pass rate); nonetheless, it had received a grade of "C" by the DOE. School 3, like School 4, did well academically and was given a grade of "A"; its average SAT score was 1083, and 97% of its students passed the writing test. On standardized assessments, students at School 2 did not do as well as those at the other schools. While 92% of its students passed the writing test, its average SAT score was 985, just below the state average of 993. Like School 1, it had also received a grade of "C."

TABLE 1: **Racial Percentages at Selected Schools and Total Population (in percentages)***

School	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other	n
1	67.8	20.9	2.1	5.7	3.4	1821
2	74.0	5.0	19.8	0.2	1.0	1871
3	70.4	17.7	7.5	2.9	1.0	1995
4	95.0	1.2	2.1	1.2	0.4	1407

*Data for 2001-2002, based on 01/08/02 Florida Department of Education Survey

We made contact with the four selected high schools during the period between January and February. After our initial contacts with the principals of Schools 2 and 3, they met with their respective English language arts faculties to ask for voluntary participation. At those meetings, the principals also confirmed the numbers of students who would receive surveys. Schools 1 and 4 were initially identified using the state's International Baccalaureate (IB) guide. In choosing these last two sites, we aimed for schools in varying regions of the state and with distinct student populations.

Student Participants

Participating students represented grades 9 through 12 in seven academic tracks (International Baccalaureate [IB] program; pre-IB classes; Advanced Placement [AP]; dual-enrollment composition, co-sponsored with local community colleges; honors; general/regular; and special education). Students in general and special education classes were considered to be in the lower tracks, and the remainder to be upper tracks. Each of the schools housed a specialized program of some sort. Schools 1, 3, and 4 each supported the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, while School 2 promoted a "School to Work" platform. However, each school did offer Advanced Placement (AP) classes. Begun in the 1950s as a means to provide college credit for high school coursework (Hammack, 2004), Advanced Placement programs have become commonplace; a more recent phenomenon is the International Baccalaureate program, a "rigorous college preparatory program with an internationally oriented philosophy," often offered as a "school-within-a-school" (Gehring, 2001, cited in Hammack, 2004, p. 20), as was the case in Schools 1, 3, and 4. Taken for college credit, dual-enrollment courses are often taught at the high schools themselves and usually sponsored by local community colleges.

Survey Development and Distribution

As discussed earlier, the NCTE/IRA *Standards* served as a starting point for developing a survey of items exploring student beliefs about writing. Because the *Standards* were created by professionals in the field, content validity had already been established. The first step in designing the survey was to match the *Standards* to literacy research and draft questions that represented the overlap (Scherff, 2002). Survey questions were cast in terms of access and exposure to writing. Access was defined as having writing experiences *available* within a particular type of writing, while exposure to writing involved whether particular genres or writing experiences were *introduced* at all. In addition, an open-ended section requested comments elaborating on earlier responses. These comments, coded and analyzed for emerging themes, added an additional dimension to our survey data.

The next factor was the total number of items and their wording. Respondents had to be able to read an item quickly, understand its content, and select an answer without difficulty (Babbie, 1990). Because the participants fell between the

ages of 14 and 18, the survey was kept short by cross-referencing the NCTE/IRA *Standards* and utilizing language appropriate to both high and low level students.

Quantifying the amount of time that writing occurred over the course of a school year would also be difficult for students, so we employed a modified Likert scale, which asked students to generalize the amount of time into manageable units. This format allowed findings to be reported in terms of "weekly" or "monthly" occurrences, or converted into number of episodes per year.

Once the survey was written, we gave it to three professionals in the field to establish face validity. These professionals were asked to answer six questions in regard to the survey:

1. Is the language of the survey appropriate for high school students?
2. Is the question length acceptable?
3. Are the layout and font visually appealing?
4. Are there any ambiguous questions?
5. Does the order of the questions make sense?
6. Does the interpretation of the *Standards* correlate with the questions asked?

Overall, respondents commented positively about the language, length, and order of questions; in a few instances, we revised the wording of particular questions to enhance their clarity. A small pilot test of the preliminary survey was completed with students in grades 9 through 11 at a local high school. From the feedback received, we were able to strengthen the survey by rewording questions that students found confusing.

A second pilot test (at the same school) was conducted with students to simulate our analytic process. While the pilot test sample (n=18) was too small to allow us to generalize any findings, interesting data emerged. For example, some students reported writing a wide variety of papers, others little else but summaries, the type and amount of writing depending in large part on particular teachers.

Survey reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha, which measured internal consistency and item relatedness. An analysis for the total sample resulted in a coefficient of .83 (at a confidence level of 95%). Consistency of the instrument, or its test-retest reliability, was also measured, yielding a coefficient of .8530 (at a confidence level of 95%).

Once validity and reliability were established, the pre-packaged instructions and surveys were sent to the schools' principals, who were responsible for distribution to and collection from the English language arts teachers (pre-packaged surveys were counted to match the number of students in each class and labeled by teacher and period to make the distribution and collection process easier). Students completed the surveys in their English language arts classes during a

three-week window in May, 2002. A total of 3,763 surveys were mailed to school sites with 1,801 returned, providing an average return rate of 47%. Individual return rates varied from a low of 29% from School 1, to a high of 76% from School 3. School 2 averaged 56%; School 4 averaged 61%. The low return rate from School 1 was due to a miscommunication regarding the number of surveys needed versus those sent. The administrators at School 1 did not want surveys pre-packaged; therefore, several hundred extra went unused.

Data Analysis

To answer our first research question, we analyzed responses to items 1a through 1l on the survey (see Appendix A), which focused on access and exposure to writing and the kinds of writing accomplished. To answer our second and third research questions, we studied responses to questions concerning teachers' use of student and/or professional writing examples and frequency of process writing, with specific attention to peer-editing sessions. Respondents had been directed to indicate whether individual writing activities occurred "almost every week," "once or twice a month," "once or twice a quarter," "once or twice a year," or "never or hardly ever." Because our sample was non-random, descriptive statistics (including cross-tabulations) determined the average frequencies for selected writing activities. Finally, we counted the total number of students completing the comment section (n=504), and used qualitative analysis procedures to organize the comments into issues and topics.

Results

Students' comments and responses to survey items are discussed as they pertain to each of the research questions. Where appropriate, information about school, track, and grades is embedded in the discussion.

(1) According to students, how often do they write, and what kinds of writing do they do in English language arts classes?

Our analysis of responses to our first survey questions (1a-1l) suggested a rather contradictory picture of how often students wrote. Looking at students' professed beliefs concerning the frequency with which they wrote in each of the twelve genres, we discovered that only one genre—responses to literature—occurred "almost every week." Three other genres—expository, persuasive, and summaries—occurred "once or twice a month." Two types of writing—narrative and comparison/contrast essays—were reported as "once or twice a quarter." And one category (research-based papers) was represented as "once or twice a year." Five types of writing—dramatic, poetry, personal, responses to art or music, and business letters—were "never or hardly ever" done at all.

Three-fourths of the total written comments focused on not completing enough writing during the school year. Of these, almost all linked encounters with writing, or lack thereof, to "liking" or "disliking" the curriculum. A junior AP student (School 3) with a favorable experience wrote, "The curriculum . . . was very rigorous and exciting. I feel I learned a lot about writing and literary techniques, and improved immensely on my own writing." On the other hand, a comment by an eleventh grade student exemplified a less-than-enthusiastic response: "During this class, I was assigned a great deal of work—textbooks, workbooks, all sorts of books. I learned a few more words in my vocabulary book, but that's all the knowledge I received . . . I was *never* taught *anything* in this class."

Despite the fact that many students reported completing several genres of writing at least "once or twice a month," the kinds of writing described—expository, persuasive, and summaries—were indicative of the schools' instructional foci. In other words, individual schools and teachers interpreted the state standards differently, thus determining in various ways what knowledge would be transmitted (Ruth, 1991; Snow-Renner, 2001).

From a simple analysis of the means for each genre of writing, we were able to ascertain which types were implemented in the classroom. As Table 1 shows, most responses tended to cluster around 3-4, meaning students reported these types of writing as occurring between "once or twice a quarter" and "once or twice a semester."

TABLE 1. **Mean, Number, and Standard Deviation for each Writing Genre (Questions 1a-1l)**

Question #/Genre	Mean	n	SD
Q1a: expository essays	2.56	1745	1.16
Q1b: persuasive essays	2.93	1771	1.13
Q1c: narrative essays	3.20	1732	1.26
Q1d: comparison/contrast essays	3.07	1741	1.13
Q1e: dramatic writing	3.91	1749	1.24
Q1f: poetry writing	3.61	1752	1.28
Q1g: personal writing	3.18	1745	1.60
Q1h: research-based papers	3.66	1755	1.11
Q1i: responses to literature	2.29	1739	1.24
Q1j: responses to art or music	3.96	1758	1.25
Q1k: summary writing	2.80	1732	1.32
Q1l: business letters	4.41	1757	1.02

1=Almost every week; 2=Once or twice a month; 3=Once or twice a quarter; 4=Once or twice a year; 5=Never or hardly ever

Responses to Literature: The Most Frequently Reported Writing Activity

Thirty-two percent of 1,739 students indicated this activity as taking place "almost every week." Another 29% (n=519) said it occurred "once or twice a month." Analysis across the four schools, grades 9-12, and academic tracks showed the same pattern. For example, a majority of students at three of the four schools conveyed that they wrote *responses to literature* "almost every week." The same trend appeared by grade level, with the majority of students in grades 9, 10, and 12 reporting this activity as an almost weekly practice. Except for the dual-enrollment group, all students, regardless of academic track, reported the same. Findings from the present study support past research (i.e., Applebee, 1981, 1993), which finds writing about literature dominating class time. Despite the encouraging numbers for this type of writing, our quantitative data only revealed how often literary responses occur, not what types of responses students complete. Here, student comments offered some insights into the range of possible responses. A 9th grade honors student at School 3 made a comment that was repeatedly echoed in our data: "We usually read all [the] stories from out of literature books . . . then we answered the questions at the end or did worksheets." Another at the same school said, "All we did was read books and stories and then answer questions."

Summaries, Expository, and Persuasive Essays: Monthly Occurrences

According to a majority of students, three types of writing occurred "once or twice a month": *expository essays*, *persuasive essays*, and *summaries*. The same pattern emerged for each of these genres—a majority of students, roughly 30% (n=580), reported writing *expository essays* and *persuasive essays* "once or twice a month," with another 28% (n=498) indicating that they occurred "once or twice a quarter." We must add here that the most frequent use of persuasive and expository writing took place in the 9th and 10th grades, the same grades in which these forms were tested by the state (formerly called the Florida Writes). Students' written comments indicated that much of the writing taking place was done solely to practice for the test; in fact, 5% of the 504 comments pertained to an emphasis on standardized test preparation. One 9th grader captured the concern of others: "Too much of our time was wasted on preparing for the FCAT and Florida Writes. That stuff isn't going to be as important in our lives as other things we could've been studying."

Twenty-seven percent of the students (n=477) wrote *summaries* "once or twice a month"; an additional 20% (n=365) wrote *summaries* "once or twice a quarter." Very few sub-groups (schools, grades, and tracks) varied from this pattern. The only noteworthy deviation took place in School 1, where close to 25% of all students (n=53) indicated that they seldom wrote *persuasive essays* and *summaries*. This lack of writing suggested that other aspects of the language arts curriculum were being given precedence, such as working with the literature anthology and

the accelerated reader program—a possibility confirmed by students' elaborated comments on our survey.

Narratives and Comparison/Contrast Essays: Occasional Writing

Two types of writing occurring "once or twice a quarter" were *narrative essays/ writings* and *comparison and contrast essays.* Although these essay categories might have been combined with the previous ones, we analyzed them separately since Florida students recognize these genres as different from the "expository" writing tested by the state. As Caplan (1984) points out, exposure to expository writing beyond the "explaining" paper is essential: "The comparison essay is one of the most important writing lessons that students can master" (p. 55). As with the types of writing already discussed, a pattern emerged for these, too. While a majority of students indicated completing these assignments a couple of times during the quarter, the second-highest group reported their even less frequent occurence. Twenty-five percent (n=453) of students said they wrote *narratives* on a quarterly basis, with another 25% (n=441) writing them "once or twice a month." For *comparison and contrast essays,* those numbers were 29% (n=526) and 26% (n=476), respectively. Students, in fact appreciated this type of writing, one going so far as to thank his or her teacher in a write-in comment: "The compare and contrast essays we did . . . helped me understand the works more. Thank you."

While further analysis showed that these same patterns remained relatively strong across schools and grades, some conflicting findings appeared. One-fourth of the students (n=91) at School 4 stated never doing *narrative writing,* with almost half (n=38) of these students coming from IB classes. Moreover, 26% of all writing-related comments concerned dissatisfaction with the lack of time for creative writing. As one individual noted, "We need to write more fiction. There were far too many five-paragraph essays with banal topics to actually feel any true connection with the work."

Research Reports: A Once-A-Year Event

The only type of writing reported as happening "once or twice a year" was the *research-based paper,* with 35% (n=634) noting its occurrence. The typical assignment seemed to be "one huge research paper at the end of the year" (student comment). Research skills, which entail knowledge about and application of the principles of sound assessment and evaluation, are crucial for students to learn (Spandel & Stiggins, 1997), yet 25% (n=445) reported "never or hardly ever" completing such assignments. In fact, 39% (n=230) of students at School 3, a top-ranked school that offered both AP and IB classes, did not do any research-based writing at all. Just as disappointing was the absence of research-based writing with students in grades 9 and 10; 35% (n=198) of 9th graders and 45% (n=135) of 10th graders reported "never" engaging in this genre of writing. By academic track, 36% of students (n=619) completed one research paper during the year, while another

26% (n=437) indicated "never" completing research-based writing. This pattern of response, moreover, occurred in each of the academic tracks.

Multiple Forgotten Forms

The most striking finding came with those types of writing reported as "never" or "hardly ever" happening: *business letters*, *responses to art/music*, and *dramatic, poetic*, and *personal writing*. Beginning with *business letters*, 67% (n=1199) of students reported "never" doing such writing, with another 15% (n=263) writing such letters "once or twice a year." While we were surprised to find that few students were learning to write business letters in their English language arts classes, we were even more surprised to learn that some students wanted this experience, especially those enrolled in a school-to-work program.

Almost 50% of students (n=859) "never or hardly ever" wrote *responses to art and/or music*, and 20% (n=355) wrote these forms only "once or twice a year." *Dramatic writing* was much the same. Forty-four percent (n=784) of students reported "never or hardly ever" doing such assignments, with another 23% (n=410) indicating they did so, but only "once or twice a year." Sadly, 34% (n=603) "never or hardly ever" wrote *poetry*. An additional 21% (n=372) composed poetry "once or twice a year," and 21% (n=376) indicated doing so "once or twice a quarter." One student's comment summed it up: "Unfortunately, IB has destroyed all creativity I once possessed. I never had the chance to write essays, poetry, or any other such creative work. Instead we got to write about symbols and structure . . . They have turned art into math and science" (11th grade IB student, School 3). These findings are discouraging given that creative forms of writing can be blended with the traditional essay and/or research paper (Dickson, DeGraff, & Foard, 2002; Glasgow, 2002; LeNoir, 2002; Mack, 2002).

Finally, an incongruous finding surfaced with regards to *personal writing*, including journals. While 33% (n=589) reported "never or hardly ever" doing any personal writing, and 13% (n=229) indicated doing so "once or twice a year," 24% (n=428) were exposed to personal writing "almost every week." A similar pattern was repeated in the analysis of school, grade, and track. For example, 39% of students (n=154) at School 2 and 40% of students in grade 12 (n=111) indicated doing *personal writing* "almost every week"; yet 25% of students (n=100) at that same school and 21% (n=59) in the same grade reported "never or hardly ever" doing such writing. By academic track, a similar inconsistency emerged; however, in this case the number of students indicating "never or hardly ever" completing personal writing increased with track level. The nearly 25% (n=100) not having this experience commented that the curriculum caused teachers to sacrifice "personal" aspects of English language arts. As one astute student said, "We didn't do journals this year to write our thoughts whether personal or for literature analysis. I think it's a good idea for students to write their opinions."

(2) Do students believe that their teachers provide models?

This second research question addressed student views concerning the use of professional or student samples to teach writing. Thirty-four percent of students (n=605) reported that their teachers used professional or student samples to teach writing. A significant percentage (28%, n=498) also indicated this happening on a monthly basis. One senior from School 1 voiced a common response to using models: "Never before have I actually had a teacher explain writing in a clear understandable manner; someone who helped me improve my writing skills and knowledge." Ten percent (n=178) of all students stated that their teachers were competent in providing writing instruction and/or modeling. However, these encouraging findings do not ignore the nearly 9% (n=159) who were never shown any models at all. This same pattern of responses occurred across schools, grades, and academic tracks.

(3) How often do students report taking part in process-writing activities?

This question focused primarily on response and rewriting, the foundations of writing process activity. In particular, we were interested in knowing how often students read each other's papers and made suggestions. Despite the fact that most teachers provided models for writing, few arranged for students to read each other's papers and make suggestions and improvements. Our analysis found little process writing occurring in classrooms, in contrast to calls in the literature for experiences with brainstorming, revising, and publishing (Atwell, 1987, 1998; Britton et al., 1975; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hillocks, 1995; McBride, 2000; NCTE/IRA, 1996; Olson, 2003; Thomas, 2001; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998). Twenty-eight percent (n=510) indicated they "never or hardly ever" practiced peer revision and editing in class, and an additional 15% (n=262) said they did so "once or twice a year." Many students' writing-related comments bore this out, such as this one: "This year we learned a lot, but we could've done a lot more . . . we wrote about two essays a quarter, but they weren't explained in great detail. We didn't check and grade each others' papers, or learn any different writing techniques. That would've helped many students, myself included" (9th grade student). However, 24% (n=428) spent time discussing writing "once or twice a month." Through closer analysis of school, grade, and track responses, we found that 35% (n=181) of students at School 1, 27% (n=111) at School 2, and 33% (n=164) at School 3 reported "never or hardly ever" participating in peer discussions. Likewise, 38% (n=215) of 9th graders and 34% (n=99) of twelfth graders also reported "never or hardly ever" doing peer revision. Most troubling, though, was the finding that students in several academic tracks said they "never or hardly ever" took part in these vital activities: 32% (n=256) in the general track, 37% (n=28) in AP, and 51% in pre-IB. The only group of students reporting frequent peer

revision and editing were dual-enrollment students, with 36% (n=22) indicating doing so "almost every week." These were the students who took Composition I through a local community college in lieu of a regular English language arts class.

For a number of students, peer revision and editing were not common occurrences in the classroom. Additionally, 20% (n=354) of students never wrote more than one draft of an essay during the school year. This breakdown did not occur by academic track, but by both school and grade. Nearly 30% of the students (n=151) at School 1 indicated "never or hardly ever" completing multiple drafts; slightly more 9th grade students (35%, n=198) also had the same experience.

If some students completed only a single draft, an equal number wrote multiple drafts of essays. Twenty-six percent (n=476) of students said they did this on a monthly basis, with another 24% (n=426) doing so "once or twice a quarter." Without knowing if multiple drafts represented substantive changes (or simply typing or surface editing), our findings regarding *peer* reviews for revision remained the same—that is, peer discussion was a neglected part of the writing process for a sizable number of students attending these schools.

Summary

Our results indicate that many students were not guaranteed multiple opportunities to write, nor were they given adequate exposure to best practices in instruction as advocated in the empirical and pedagogic literatures. Moreover, we found that this occurred, with few exceptions, across schools, grade levels, and academic track placements. Highlights of the results are summarized below.

As we studied our data with reference to our first question (According to students, how often do they write, and what kinds of writing do they do in English language arts classes?), we found several patterns:

- On average, 43% of all students across all high schools, academic tracks, and grades never wrote expressively or poetically (drama, poetry, responses to art/music).
- Research-based writing was seldom if ever done, especially in School 3, which was ranked as a Top 100 School by *Newsweek* (noted on the school's Web site). Report writing was also less frequent in grades 9 and 10, the grades in which FCAT testing was administered.
- Exposition, persuasion, and summaries were more often written in the 9th and 10th grades—considered FCAT "testing grades"—with 5% of the total population (all four high schools) reporting in the comment section that they spent time practicing for the test.
- Findings for personal writing showed a system of opposites working: By school and grade, students reported either doing such writing often or

"never or hardly ever." There seemed to be little middle ground. By academic track, analysis showed that as track level increased, personal writing decreased.

Regarding writing models, some of the major findings include the following:

- Large numbers of students across schools, academic tracks, and grade levels were exposed to teacher modeling of writing.
- Across schools, grades, and academic tracks, 9% were never exposed to modeling.

Lastly, with regard to process-writing activities, three important findings stood out:

- Almost equally across schools, grades, and tracks, students did not take part in responding to writing or revising.
- Equal numbers of students across schools, tracks, and grades did, however, do multiple drafts.
- Twenty-percent across schools, grades, and tracks never went beyond a first draft.

   As the data on process-writing activities suggest, without feedback and revision as a routine part of daily writing lessons, students missed an essential part of the writing process—revision, the stage in which studying the writer's craft (strategies and skills) takes place (e.g., Applebee, 1981, 1986; Applebee & Langer, 1987; Atwell, 1987; Olson, 2003). Further, the results concerning genres addressed in classrooms suggest that instructional priorities may have been influenced by the impact of assessment. In short, whether variability in results suggests individualization and effective choice or disenfranchisement and inferior instruction remains to be examined.

Discussion

Here we assemble survey conclusions into themes that suggest implications based on Florida's historical and political context. The first theme is that in spite of advances in writing research, little has changed in many high schools. The second indicates that in today's social and political climate, we need to investigate, once again, if a process/product pendulum swing has replaced balanced instruction.[1] Teachers are increasingly concerned about the focus on test-driven instruction and the decreasing time available for process writing (Strickland, Bodino, Buchan, Jones, Nelson, & Rosen, 2001). It remains to be seen whether current educational reform initiatives are flexible enough for teachers to navigate between process and

product instruction, or whether teachers will continue to see instructional programs and state mandates as mutually exclusive.

The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same

Nearly forty years after the publication of *The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18)* (Britton et al., 1975), our research suggests that for the students we surveyed, school writing mirrored what Britton and his colleagues found: "the dominance of transactional writing," with minimal emphasis on "expressive" and "poetic" writing (p. 173). While most teachers were aware of exposing students to writing for many purposes and audiences, student comments on the survey nonetheless pointed to an alarming trend in which writing was being used to achieve a narrow band of functions. Although many students in our study wrote substantially more often than others, as student comments indicated, much of this pertained to reading something in the book and then answering questions on paper or worksheets. "Writing about literature" can encompass many activities, including journal responses, analytical essays, creative pieces, and summaries; but our student comments suggested that in actual practice, this may not be the case. Because Florida's mandated test contained a reading component, with multiple-choice, short-answer, and long-answer sections, perhaps instruction simply mirrored the test rather than the writing process.

In addition to writing about literature, students reported that they were still primarily using writing for the informative function. One need only look at the third most practiced form of writing (after responses to literature and expository essays)—that is, summaries. These exercises in summarization could be seen as simple explanatory assignments requiring little higher level thinking or analysis, similar to Britton et al.'s (1975) record or report writing, categorized under the informative sub-category of the transactional function. Inasmuch as students chiefly completed summaries and expository pieces in their English language arts classes, they were sidestepping creative writing, including drama or poetry, personal writing, or real-world writing such as business letters. In fact, large numbers of written comments focused on the fact that students did not do particular kinds of writing, particularly those they labeled as creative. Given that creative writing can "help students better understand personal issues as well as literary works" (Burke, 1999, p. 104) and reinforce attention to sensory detail, we believe that this finding suggests missed opportunities for improving students' writing abilities (Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, 1999; Piazza, 2003; Romano, 1987). We further believe that the absence of these types of writing may be a result of Florida's Sunshine State Standards (SSS) (Florida Department of Education, 2003). While the SSS include detailed language about revising and editing (see LA.B.1.4.3), they make no mention of specific genres of writing. The SSS's vague reference to "uses creative writing strategies as appropriate to the purposes of the paper"

(LA.B.1.4.2) might be an invitation to ignore particular forms of writing (poetry, personal, etc.) in favor of those that are tested (expository, persuasive, etc.).

If creative writing was absent from the curriculum, so, too, was workplace or real-world writing (also absent in explicit language from Florida's SSS). This was unfortunate, given that one of the aims of effective instruction is to assist students in writing for many purposes (NCTE/IRA, 1996). Because most post-secondary students will read texts that are informational in nature, it is essential that writing be done for similar purposes (letters, memos, documents, etc.). Perhaps this is especially important for those not going on to post-secondary education. Completing an application, writing to a congressperson, or engaging in other real-world writing activities ought to be part of the schools' curricular scope and sequence.

Process and Product: The Pendulum Swings

Education is often criticized for its pendulum swings with regard to research and practice. However, in this case, current emphases concerning writing instruction seem to represent responses to official mandates. While state and federal standards may be open-ended, when defined by the high-stakes testing, their implementation often presents educators with hard choices about how to spend their time and resources. Almost three decades since writing-process research took hold in classrooms, in the present political climate of *No Child Left Behind,* an emphasis on direct instruction and accountability seems to pervade our schools.

One effective means of direct instruction endorsed by many writing educators is explicit modeling (Hillocks, 1995; Thomas, 2000, 2001; Tonjes, 1991). Students in our study indicated that, despite the varying amounts and types of writing included in their language arts classes, most were provided with literary models. What we do not know concerns the nature and purpose of these models. With such large numbers of students preparing for the writing assessment, we fear that writing models may have required students to follow structural formulas in the interests of achieving good scores. As with direct instruction of grammar, where no connection is made to reading and writing, instruction in *how* to write may have become simply an exercise in preparing for a test, leaving students with little or no understanding of writing's connection or relevancy to their lives—this despite the fact that one goal of the state's writing assessment program was to "engage students in the writing process" (Florida Writing Assessment, 1990). It seems that the FCAT "has become so dominating a concern . . . that curricula are sacrificed and teachers required to 'teach to the test'" (Siegel, 2004, p. 58). Hypotheses based on our own data leave us questioning whether the natural process of writing, with its stops and starts and restarts, has been compromised given the limited emphasis on product as narrowly defined through tests. The value of a balanced approach to writing and writing instruction seems so obvious, yet it appears to be missing from a large portion of our sample.

With limited time allotted to writing in school, instructors must make choices about how to use the available opportunities. Many teachers are aware of the challenge they face—the push and pull of external demands, and the limited instructional time for engaging students in a process that defines a quality product not as a formula for passing tests, but as a means of satisfying purpose, audience, genre, and other complex aims. Writing on a frequent and continual basis, with time for revision and feedback, is essential (Atwell, 1987, 1998; Murray, 1982; NCTE/IRA, 1996; Olson, 2003; Shafer, 2000). Our participants' responses suggest that little class time was used for writing conferences or peer review resulting in revision of multiple drafts, despite the fact that the SSS call for such activities (LA.B.1.4.1-3, see Appendix B). The implication is that teachers may not have been able to use class time for such activities given the pressures of FCAT preparation. In this age of high stakes testing, teachers often feel powerless to withstand the influence of state testing, succumbing to the pressure to ensure that their students perform well even though they may be criticized for teaching to the test (Ketter & Pool, 2001; Mabry, 1999; Strickland et al., 2001). Teacher decision making and problem solving will need to be an integral part of the dialogue if writing goals are to be met.

In addition to influences based on instructional demands and choices, the grade level in which students were enrolled appears to have affected access and exposure to a solid writing curriculum and effective practice. Whether by chance or design, our findings showed a higher frequency of particular types of writing (expository and persuasive) in grade levels that were typically tested. Students in grades 9 and 10 (grades tested in Florida) wrote significantly more than those in grades 11 and 12. While little research has occurred in Florida to document whether the state's system of testing has impacted instruction in language arts classes, the findings of this study support research completed in other regions of the country (e.g., Cimbricz, 2002; Ketter & Pool, 2001; Mabry, 1999; McNeil, 2000; McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001).

Finally, one cautionary point should be mentioned regarding our survey. Despite the findings, we do acknowledge the limitations of asking students to report what they do in school. Our experience as classroom teachers shows that students do not always know what is best for them, nor do they necessarily recognize an instructor's curricular perspectives. How students interpret writing activities is complex—shaped by social, developmental, and cultural factors—and possibly quite different from the way their teachers view these same activities (Dyson & Freedman, 2003; Freedman, 1987, 1992). Nonetheless, even with their inexperience and immaturity, students can be trusted to give valuable information regarding what occurs at school. Each year, for instance, as part of school improvement plans, administrators use students' responses to school-climate surveys to direct improvement efforts and accreditation processes. Likewise, information supplied

by the students in this study, especially statements concerning their willingness to take on work beyond what is assigned, is certain to be useful to teachers and administrators in planning instruction.

Having said this, however, we are always cautious about reaching definitive conclusions based on survey research. Studying actual day-to-day instruction requires observational data to provide a more complete picture of the type of assignments, the learning environment, the supporting materials, and a range of social relations and experiences in the language arts curriculum. Both survey responses and student comments give us reason to believe that there is a continued need to investigate what is actually happening in classrooms as social and political agendas change.

NOTE

1. Balanced instruction: Lessons that immerse students in the writing process (prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) while attending to the writer's craft, a set of strategies and skills ranging from creating text structures to writing similes or dialogue. The craft is usually taught during revision and takes into consideration the written product and its development.

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Appendix A: The Secondary School Language Arts Survey

This survey is designed to gather information about language arts classes in high schools. Please answer each and every question as truthfully as you can. You do not have to put your name, or your teacher's name, on this paper.

Please circle the correct choice.

Race	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	Other
Grade	9	10	11	12	
Level	IB	AP	Dual Enrollment	Honors/ Advanced	Pre-IB
	General	Remedial	ESE		

Circle the answer that best reflects your experiences in this class over the entire school year.

	1 ALMOST EVERY WEEK	2 ONCE OR TWICE A MONTH	3 ONCE OR TWICE A QUARTER	4 ONCE OR TWICE A YEAR	5 NEVER OR HARDLY EVER
1. On average we wrote					
a. expository essays	1	2	3	4	5
b. persuasive essays	1	2	3	4	5
c. narrative essays (stories)	1	2	3	4	5

d. comparison and contrast essays	1	2	3	4	5
e. dramatic writing (dialogs, plays, scripts)	1	2	3	4	5
f. poetry	1	2	3	4	5
g. personal pieces (journals, diaries, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
h. research-based papers	1	2	3	4	5
i. responses to literature	1	2	3	4	5
j. responses to music, art, photographs, etc.	1	2	3	4	5
k. summaries	1	2	3	4	5
l. business letters	1	2	3	4	5
2. Our teacher used student and/ or professional examples to show us good features of writing	1	2	3	4	5
3. In this class we read each other's papers and made comments/suggestions (revising/editing)	1	2	3	4	5
4. In this class we did multiple drafts of essays	1	2	3	4	5

Circle the answer that best reflects your experiences in this class over the entire school year.

	1 ALMOST EVERY WEEK	2 ONCE OR TWICE A MONTH	3 ONCE OR TWICE A QUARTER	4 ONCE OR TWICE A YEAR	5 NEVER OR HARDLY EVER
5. In this class we worked from					
a. a literature book (anthology)	1	2	3	4	5
b. a grammar book/workbook	1	2	3	4	5
c. a writing textbook/workbook	1	2	3	4	5
d. novels	1	2	3	4	5
e. teacher-made materials (copies of stories, poems, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
f. test preparation materials (FCAT, SAT, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
g. newspapers/magazines	1	2	3	4	5
h. a vocabulary/spelling workbook/text	1	2	3	4	5

For the following questions, please estimate the total number over the course of the entire year.

	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7+
6. As a class, how many novels did you read this past year? List as many titles as you can	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7+
7. As a class, how many plays did you read this past year? List as many titles as you can	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7+
8. For this class, how many group projects and/or presentations were you assigned?	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7+
9. How many field trips did you take for this class?	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7+
10. How many videos did you watch in this class? List as many titles as you can	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7+
11. How many computers are there in your classroom for students to use?	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7+

Please circle the correct choice for each question.

12. In this class I was assigned at least one research paper this year	YES	NO
13. In this class we were assigned oral reports and/or speeches	YES	NO
14. In this class we did projects/research using the computer (Internet, power point, etc.)	YES	NO
15. When we read stories, novels, plays, etc., we		
a. answered questions from the book/worksheets	YES	NO
b. had in-class discussions	YES	NO
c. responded in learning logs and/or journals	YES	NO
16. When we read in class we		
a. read silently	YES	NO
b. read out loud	YES	NO
c. listened to the teacher read to us	YES	NO
17. In this class we were assigned independent reading (our own choice of books)	YES	NO
18. Do you read books and/or write stories, poems, and essays on your own time?	YES	NO

Please use this space to write any comments regarding your language arts curriculum and materials.

Appendix B*

Language Arts
Grades 9-12

Reading

Standard 1:

The student uses the reading process effectively. (LA.A.1.4)

1. selects and uses prereading strategies that are appropriate to the text, such as discussion, making predictions, brainstorming, generating questions, and previewing, to anticipate content, purpose, and organization of a reading selection.
2. selects and uses strategies to understand words and text, and to make and confirm inferences from what is read, including interpreting diagrams, graphs, and statistical illustrations.
3. refines vocabulary for interpersonal, academic, and workplace situations, including figurative, idiomatic, and technical meanings.
4. applies a variety of response strategies, including rereading, note taking, summarizing, outlining, writing a formal report, and relating what is read to his or her own experiences and feelings.

Standard 2:

The student constructs meaning from a wide range of texts. (LA.A.2.4)

1. determines the main idea and identifies relevant details, methods of development, and their effectiveness in a variety of types of written material.
2. determines the author's purpose and point of view and their effects on the text.
3. describes and evaluates personal preferences regarding fiction and nonfiction.
4. locates, gathers, analyzes, and evaluates written information for a variety of purposes, including research projects, real-world tasks, and self-improvement.
5. identifies devices of persuasion and methods of appeal and their effectiveness.
6. selects and uses appropriate study and research skills and tools according to the type of information being gathered or organized, including almanacs, government publications, microfiche, news sources, and information services.

7. analyzes the validity and reliability of primary source information and uses the information appropriately.
8. synthesizes information from multiple sources to draw conclusions.

Writing

Standard 1:

The student uses writing processes effectively. (LA.B.1.4)

1. selects and uses appropriate prewriting strategies, such as brainstorming, graphic organizers, and outlines.
2. drafts and revises writing that: is focused, purposeful, and reflects insight into the writing situation; has an organizational pattern that provides for a logical progression of ideas; has effective use of transitional devices that contribute to a sense of completeness; has support that is substantial, specific, relevant, and concrete; demonstrates a commitment to and involvement with the subject; uses creative writing strategies as appropriate to the purposes of the paper; demonstrates a mature command of language with freshness of expression; has varied sentence structure; has few, if any, convention errors in mechanics, usage, punctuation, and spelling.
3. produces final documents that have been edited for: correct spelling; correct punctuation, including commas, colons, and common use of semicolons; correct capitalization; correct sentence formation; correct instances of possessives, subject/verb agreement, instances of noun/pronoun agreement, and the intentional use of fragments for effect; and correct formatting that appeals to readers, including appropriate use of a variety of graphics, tables, charts, and illustrations in both standard and innovative forms.

Standard 2:

The student writes to communicate ideas and information effectively. (LA.B.2.4)

1. writes text, notes, outlines, comments, and observations that demonstrate comprehension and synthesis of content, processes, and experiences from a variety of media.
2. organizes information using appropriate systems.
3. writes fluently for a variety of occasions, audiences, and purposes, making appropriate choices regarding style, tone, level of detail, and organization.

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4. selects and uses a variety of electronic media, such as the Internet, information services, and desktop publishing software programs, to create, revise, retrieve, and verify information.

Listening, Viewing, and Speaking

Standard 1:

The student uses listening strategies effectively. (LA.C.1.4)

1. selects and uses appropriate listening strategies according to the intended purpose, such as solving problems, interpreting and evaluating the techniques and intent of a presentation, and taking action in career-related situations.
2. describes, evaluates, and expands personal preferences in listening to fiction, drama, literary non-fiction, and informational presentations.
3. uses effective strategies for informal and formal discussions, including listening actively and reflectively, connecting to and building on the ideas of a previous speaker, and respecting the viewpoints of others.
4. identifies bias, prejudice, or propaganda in oral messages.

Standard 2:

The student uses viewing strategies effectively. (LA.C.2.4)

1. determines main concept and supporting details in order to analyze and evaluate nonprint media messages.
2. understands factors that influence the effectiveness of nonverbal cues used in nonprint media, such as the viewer's past experiences and preferences, and the context in which the cues are presented.

Standard 3:

The student uses speaking strategies effectively. (LA.C.3.4)

1. uses volume, stress, pacing, enunciation, eye contact, and gestures that meet the needs of the audience and topic.
2. selects and uses a variety of speaking strategies to clarify meaning and to reflect understanding, interpretation, application, and evaluation of content, processes, or experiences, including asking relevant questions when necessary, making appropriate and meaningful comments, and making insightful observations.
3. uses details, illustrations, analogies, and visual aids to make oral presentations that inform, persuade, or entertain.

4. applies oral communication skills to interviews, group presentations, formal presentations, and impromptu situations.
5. develops and sustains a line of argument and provides appropriate support.

Language

Standard 1:

The student understands the nature of language. (LA.D.1.4)

1. applies an understanding that language and literature are primary means by which culture is transmitted.
2. makes appropriate adjustments in language use for social, academic, and life situations, demonstrating sensitivity to gender and cultural bias.
3. understands that there are differences among various dialects of English.

Standard 2:

The student understands the power of language. (LA.D.2.4)

1. understands specific ways in which language has shaped the reactions, perceptions, and beliefs of the local, national, and global communities.
2. understands the subtleties of literary devices and techniques in the comprehension and creation of communication.
3. recognizes production elements that contribute to the effectiveness of a specific medium.
4. effectively integrates multimedia and technology into presentations.
5. critically analyzes specific elements of mass media with regard to the extent to which they enhance or manipulate information.
6. understands that laws control the delivery and use of media to protect the rights of authors and the rights of media owners.

Literature

Standard 1:

The student understands the common features of a variety of literary forms. (LA.E.1.4)

1. identifies the characteristics that distinguish literary forms.
2. understands why certain literary works are considered classics.
3. identifies universal themes prevalent in the literature of all cultures.

4. understands the characteristics of major types of drama.
5. understands the different stylistic, thematic, and technical qualities present in the literature of different cultures and historical periods.

Standard 2:

The student responds critically to fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama. (LA.E.2.4)

1. analyzes the effectiveness of complex elements of plot, such as setting, major events, problems, conflicts, and resolutions.
2. understands the relationships between and among elements of literature, including characters, plot, setting, tone, point of view, and theme.
3. analyzes poetry for the ways in which poets inspire the reader to share emotions, such as the use of imagery, personification, and figures of speech, including simile and metaphor; and the use of sound, such as rhyme, rhythm, repetition, and alliteration.
4. understands the use of images and sounds to elicit the reader's emotions in both fiction and nonfiction.
5. analyzes the relationships among author's style, literary form, and intended impact on the reader.
6. recognizes and explains those elements in texts that prompt a personal response, such as connections between one's own life and the characters, events, motives, and causes of conflict in texts.
7. examines a literary selection from several critical perspectives.
8. knows that people respond differently to texts based on their background knowledge, purpose, and point of view.

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The NCTE Books Program invites proposals for its TRIP series (Theory and Research into Practice). These books are single-authored and focus on a single topic, targeting a specified educational level (elementary, middle, or secondary). Each book will offer the following: solid theoretical foundation in a given subject area within English language arts; exposure to the pertinent research in that area; practice-oriented models designed to stimulate theory-based application in the reader's own classroom. The series has an extremely wide range of subject matter; past titles include *Creative Approaches to Sentence Combining, Unlocking Shakespeare's Language,* and *Enhancing Aesthetic Reading and Response.* For detailed submission guidelines, please visit the NCTE Web site at http://www.ncte.org/pubs/publish/books/107577.htm. Proposals to be considered for the TRIP series should include a short review of the theory and research, as well as examples of classroom practices that can be adapted to the teaching level specified. Send proposals to Zarina Hock, Director of Book Publications and Senior Editor, or Kurt Austin, Acquisitions Editor, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096; e-mail: zhock@ncte.org or kaustin@ncte.org.