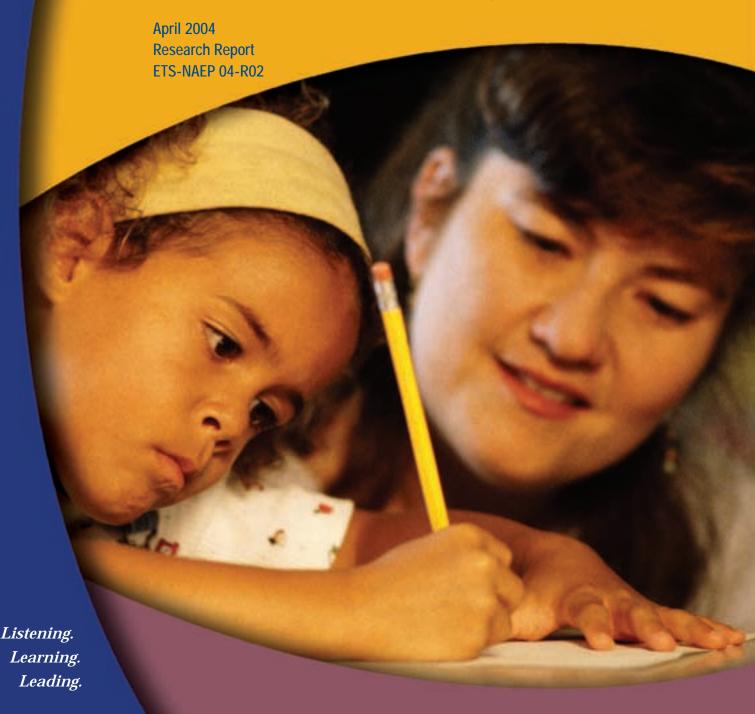# Writing in the Nation's Classrooms

Teacher Interviews and Student Work Collected from Participants in the NAEP 1998 Writing Assessment

April 2004
Research Report
ETS-NAEP 04-R02

Listening.
Learning.
Leading.

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# Writing in the Nation's Classrooms

Teacher Interviews and Student Work Collected from Participants in the NAEP 1998 Writing Assessment

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# A Special Acknowledgment

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# Executive Summary

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the nation's only ongoing survey of what students know and can do in various subject areas. Authorized by Congress and administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the U.S. Department of Education, NAEP regularly reports to the public on the educational progress of students in grades 4, 8, and 12. The National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), provides policy direction for NAEP.

The NAEP 1998 writing assessment has a national and a state component. The national component was conducted at grades 4, 8, and 12. The state component, which permits comparisons within and across states, was conducted at grade 8. This study, Writing in the Nation's Classrooms, was conceived as an extension of the national NAEP 1998 writing assessment. The purpose of the study is to supplement information about classroom practices and techniques gained from the questionnaires routinely administered as part of NAEP assessment. In these questionnaires, teachers whose schools participate in the NAEP assessment respond to a series of questions about their instructional practices. The study has two major components: a summary of teacher interviews and an evaluation of self-selected student writing pieces.

## Teacher Interviews

One hundred fourth-grade and one hundred eighth-grade classrooms that participate in NAEP were selected through a sampling process. The teachers of these classrooms were interviewed by a trained interviewer who used a protocol of twenty-four questions. Some of the interview questions in the protocol are similar to some of those asked in the Teacher Questionnaire administered as part of the NAEP 1998 writing assessment. Others ask for somewhat different information. The interview format allowed the selected teachers to elaborate on their instructional practice and to comment on personal experiences that affect their instructional techniques. Appendices containing writing assignments and the full text of four interviews are included.

Due to the open-ended nature of the interview questions, findings may not appear to be as definitive as those gained from the NAEP teacher background questionnaires. Nevertheless, the results point to widespread adoption of a highly interactive writing process as the basis for instruction.

- In 88 percent of fourth-grade and 73 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicate that brainstorming or some other form of prewriting activity is the first step undertaken by students as they begin a writing assignment.

- In 96 percent of fourth-grade and 98 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers report emphasizing drafting in writing instruction.

- In 87 percent of fourth-grade and 91 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers give students feedback on their drafts.

- In 76 percent of fourth-grade and 54 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers conduct one-on-one conferences with their students to discuss the students' writing.

- In 54 percent of fourth-grade and 47 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers have students share their finished writing with classmates or other school audiences.

- In 81 percent of fourth-grade and 82 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers have students reflect on or assess their own writing.

- In 94 percent of fourth-grade and 89 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers collect student writing in folders or portfolios.

- In 90 percent of fourth-grade and 97 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers report that students write on computers, and in 70 percent of fourth-grade and 68 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers report that student writing has changed because of computers.

## Student Writing

The second component of the study involved the submission of writing pieces by students whose teachers participated in the interviews. Students were asked to submit two examples of completed writing pieces from their portfolios or workfolders. They were directed to choose pieces that represented their best writing and to select two different types of writing. These pieces were coded as to the type of writing each represented and were then evaluated on a four-point scale by trained scorers with a rubric developed for this purpose. The average score and distribution of the students' self-selected writing samples by type of writing were then compared to these students' performance on the main NAEP 1998 writing assessment. This comparison permitted an examination of the range of writing students undertake in the classroom, as well as the degree to which classroom performance and performance on NAEP appear to be related. A sampling of student writing pieces is included in this part of the report. The findings include:

- Narratives and essays/reports were the types of writing most frequently submitted by the students in the study.

- Average scores did not vary significantly across the different types of writing pieces submitted by the students in the study. The averages ranged from 2.7 to 3.0 on a four-point scale.

- At both grades 4 and 8, performance on the submitted writing pieces (selected by students as their best) and performance on the NAEP 1998 writing assessment showed a positive correlation ($r = .442$ at grade 4 and $r = .513$ at grade 8); where there were differences, students tended to receive higher scores on the submitted writing pieces compared with the NAEP writing scores.

# chapter one
## Introduction and Background

Since the advent of television, and possibly earlier, there have been concerns about our society becoming increasingly dependent on visual and oral communication to the detriment of written language. It appears, however, that written communication has become increasingly important. This is partly due to the development of computer technologies such as e-mail and the Internet. Today's children may be bombarded with images and sound, but they are also bombarded with printed words and opportunities to write. The importance of writing is recognized by educators and by those in the business community, and manifests itself in many ways. Standards for writing skills are an important part of all state language arts standards, while standards in the other academic disciplines also highlight writing skills in that discipline. This report focuses on what teachers across the country are doing to teach these skills and looks at the written communications that students are producing in the classroom.

Writing has been an important part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) since 1969. The results of the NAEP writing assessments have contributed significantly to the expanding body of research on the writing process, writing instruction, and writing assessment. With each assessment and each set of writing test objectives, NAEP has attempted to reflect advances in writing instruction and measurement. All NAEP assessments are based on a content framework developed through a process that involves teachers, curriculum experts, parents, and members of the general public. The NAEP writing framework,[1] adopted by the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) in 1998, provided objectives and guidelines for constructing the assessment. The framework, informed by current research and theory, emphasizes that writing addresses a variety of purposes and audiences. The framework describes three purposes for writing: telling a story (narrative), informing the reader, and persuading the reader. Since the 1998 assessment was based on a new framework, student performance on this assessment cannot be compared to student performance on earlier assessments

The NAEP 1998 writing assessment was administered to national samples of fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-graders. It was also administered to eighth-graders in states and jurisdictions that participated in the state-by-state NAEP assessment. Across all three grades, nearly 160,000 students were assessed in the national and state samples.

The Writing in the Nation's Classrooms study, the basis for this report, was conceived as an extension of the main NAEP writing assessment. The purpose of the study was twofold:

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[1] National Assessment Governing Board. (n.d.) *Writing Framework and Specifications for the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress.* Washington, DC: Author.

1) To provide more detailed information about classroom practices and techniques than that gained from the questionnaires routinely administered to teachers in participating schools as part of the main NAEP assessment. In NAEP, these responses are then linked to the NAEP performance of the students whose teachers responded to the questionnaire in order to identify any patterns of association between teacher characteristics and student performance.

2) To examine student performance on writing done in the classroom in relation to student performance on the main NAEP writing assessment. This portion of the study was undertaken to address concerns about the differences between the writing students typically do in the classroom and on-demand writing tasks of the kind found on NAEP as well as on many state assessments.

The NAEP 1998 teacher questionnaires asked teachers whose students participated in NAEP about their instructional practices and methods. In many cases, the questions presented in the interview protocol overlap with those in the NAEP background questionnaires—questions about steps in the writing process, for instance—but the structure of the background questions and the structure of the interview questions were not sufficiently similar to make direct question-by-question comparisons fruitful. Each mode represents a slightly different lens through which to examine teacher practice. In general, however, when a background question and an interview question covered similar ground, the results tended to be similar. For instance, when fourth-grade teachers were asked in the background questionnaire if they worked with students on the writing process, 98 percent of fourth-graders had teachers who reported that they did, either centrally or in addition to other parts of their program. Similarly, the interviewed teachers overwhelmingly reported that they engaged students in the individual steps of the writing process. The interested reader can find complete results from the NAEP 1998 teacher questionnaire on the NAEP website: *http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard.*

The second part of the study focused on a validity concern raised by many in the writing community: whether an on-demand prompt in a standardized test could be an accurate measure of a student's writing ability.

## Classroom Practices and Techniques

To address the first purpose, fourth- and eighth-grade teachers whose schools participated in the NAEP 1998 assessments were selected through a stratified sampling process. To arrive at 100 responding schools for each grade, a sample of 129 fourth-grade schools and 134 eighth-grade schools was selected, compensating for anticipated loss due to a variety of factors. From each of the 103 grade-4 schools and 107 grade-8 schools that agreed to participate, one class was randomly selected. In-depth information on the selection process can be found in appendix A.

The teacher of the selected class was interviewed by a trained interviewer who used a protocol of 24 questions (see figure 1.1). Some of the interview

| F I G U R E | Protocol for teacher interviews, NAEP Writing in the Nation's Classrooms |
| :---: | :--- |
| **1.1** | study, grades 4 and 8: 1998 |

*Section 1: Writing activities*

1. I would like to begin by asking you about your approach to writing instruction. If you had to summarize it in a few sentences, how would you describe your overall approach to teaching writing?

2. Now I would like to ask you about the writing activities that typically take place in this class each week across the school year. If I had the opportunity to spend a week in your classroom, what are four or five writing activities I would be most likely to see you and your students doing during that week?

3. Please take me through a single writing assignment so that I can get a sense of the sequence of activities involved. You decide what kind of assignment you want to think about. Then take me through the steps you and your students typically go through, from preparing for the assignment all the way through to its completion.

4. Do you and your students follow the same steps as in the previous question for all assignments and for all kinds of writing? For example, would the steps be different for an assignment that is longer or shorter than the example you gave?

*Section 2: Evaluation and instructional strategies*

5. In your writing instruction in general, what kinds of advice or feedback do you give students about their writing? What do you tend to emphasize?

6. How and when do you convey your advice and evaluations to students?

7. Do you read and evaluate students' writing at different points or in different ways for different assignments or students? If so, how?

8. Do your students look at or listen to each other's work during class?
   - If no: go on to next question.
   - If yes: When and how is peer response or evaluation done in your class?

9. How, if at all, do you have your students use self-assessment or reflection to develop their writing?

10. What have you found works best to get all students engaged in writing?

11. What have you found is the best way to teach technical aspects of writing such as grammar, spelling, and vocabulary?

*Section 3: Time spent on writing*

12. In any given week, approximately how many hours are students engaged in writing activities in class, not including writing they do in the context of other subject areas:  _____ hours

13. While we're on the topic of time, do you ever give your students writing assignments to be completed across several days or more?

14. Do you ever give your students writing assignments to be completed across more than one week?
   - If yes: Approximately how often?

**Protocol for teacher interviews, NAEP Writing in the Nation's Classrooms study, grades 4 and 8: 1998**

### Section 4: Favorite assignment

**15.** Now please describe in detail an assignment or activity that you have found to be particularly effective with students. (If sample is available, please collect it and xerox it at the end of the interview.)

**16.** What about this assignment made it work well?

**17.** How did you come up with this assignment? (If interviewee says it was adapted from a book or another source, try to get author and title of source. If book is available, xerox copyright information at end of interview.)

### Section 5: Collections of students' work

**18.** Apart from this study, do you or your students collect their writing over time in a work folder or portfolio?
- If no: go on to Question 19.
- If yes: answer questions 18a-18d.

**18a.** What is the purpose of these collections? Can you tell me briefly how you and your students use them?

**18b.** Do you use portfolios in parent conferences?

**18c.** Do you use portfolios for grading or assessment purposes?

**18d.** Do you use portfolios for instructional purposes?

### Section 6: Computer use

**19.** Do any of your students write on computers?
- If no: go on to question 20.
- If yes: answer questions 19a and 19b.

**19a.** Approximately what percentage of your students write on computers at least some of the time? _____

**19b.** Have you noticed that being able to use computers has changed how students write?
- If yes: how has using computers changed students' writing?

**19c.** How do your students use computers in writing and how do you use computers in writing instruction?

### Section 7: Support and obstacles /self-evaluation

**20.** Who or what has most influenced the way you teach writing, and how?

**21.** How, if at all, have your goals or methods for writing instruction been influenced by the curriculum, standards, or assessments of your school, district, or state? (Specify which.)

**22.** What is the single most important additional support or resource (such as books, workshops, curriculum supervisor) you would like to have available to you?

**23.** What changes would you like to make in your writing instruction, if any?

**24.** Finally, if you could pass on to a beginning teacher one important lesson or strategy you have learned for teaching students to write well, what would you tell her or him?

That's the end of my list of questions. Are there any other questions you wish we had asked that might help us better understand your writing program?

questions in the protocol are similar to those asked in the teacher questionnaire administered as part of the NAEP 1998 writing assessment. Others ask for somewhat different information. The interview format allowed the selected teachers to elaborate on their instructional practices and to comment on personal experiences that affect their instructional techniques. Their responses were tape recorded, transcribed, and then coded by topic. This allowed reporting on the frequency with which certain techniques and practices were mentioned in the course of the interviews. The interviewed teachers commented on techniques and practices in such areas as

- prewriting activities for students;

- teaching an iterative writing process, which includes drafting, feedback, and revision;

- feedback to students at various points and for various purposes;

- varied assignments and tasks with instruction tailored to the assignment;

- varied approaches to instruction on grammar and mechanics;

- use of peer editing and self-editing;

- collecting student writing in a portfolio or workfolder; and

- use of computers in the writing process.

Teachers also expressed their opinions on the influence of state and local assessments, the need to further their knowledge of writing instruction, and the need for certain kinds of resources. Throughout the report, comments from teachers are included along

with the data gained from coding and tallying their responses. The comments are intended to convey in more depth what teachers mean when they indicate that they engage in a certain practice or technique. An appendix listing some of the assignments discussed by the teachers interviewed is also included as a resource for teachers, parents, and other readers of this report (see appendix C). In addition, transcripts of four interviews are included in appendix B to convey the full flavor of the discussions.

## Evaluating Student Writing

The second component of the study involved the submission of writing pieces by students whose teachers participated in the interviews. In fourth grade, this typically involved the single class taught by the teacher. In eighth grade, where teachers typically teach more than one class, one of the classes in which the teacher taught writing was selected. Every student in a selected class was asked to submit two examples of completed writing pieces from his or her classroom work. The students were directed to choose pieces that represented their best writing and to select two different types of writing. These pieces were then coded as to the type of writing each represented. Each piece was evaluated on a four-point scale by trained scorers with a rubric developed for this purpose. The rubric appears in chapter 4 of this report.

The process of comparing performance on classroom writing to performance on the main NAEP 1998 writing assessment was more complicated. NAEP

assessments are based on sampling techniques that are designed to create a nationally representative sample. One consequence of this procedure is that not all schools participate in NAEP, and, even within a selected school, not all students in a grade are actually assessed. Rather, students are selected randomly from the total school population at a grade level. Thus, some of the students who submitted writing pieces for this study did NOT participate in the NAEP 1998 writing assessment. Therefore, for the purposes of comparing performance on NAEP with performance on classroom writing, the study could examine only the smaller group of students within the selected classes who participated in NAEP. Nonetheless, the sample size was sufficient to allow examination of both the range of writing assignments students complete in the classroom and the degree to which classroom performance and performance on NAEP appear to be related.

## Overview of the Report

This report contains two kinds of information: 1) information drawn from extensive interviews with a sample of teachers who had participated in the NAEP 1998 writing assessment, and 2) information based on writing pieces collected from students in the classrooms of those teachers. Chapters 2 and 3 present information based on the frequency with which particular responses to the interview questions were given.

Chapter 2 presents teachers' responses to questions about their actual classroom practices and explores those practices that occur most frequently. Chapter 3 presents teachers' responses to questions on a variety of topics: how their students use computers and resource needs and the influence of accountability systems, including standards and assessments, on classroom practices.

In chapter 4, results from the other main part of the study, the collection of student work, are presented, including information about the kinds of writing submitted, the quality of that writing, the correlation of scores on classroom writing to scores on the NAEP 1998 writing assessment, and sample student writing.

Four appendices are included. Appendix A more fully explains how the study was conducted. Appendix B contains four complete interviews, two from grade 4 teachers and two from grade 8 teachers. These interviews are included to give the reader a fuller flavor of the issues raised by the teachers. Appendix C contains a representative listing of the assignments conducted by students in the classroom, extracted from the collection of student work submitted for the project. Appendix D contains the complete data for all the tables presented in this report, including the standard errors for the estimated percentages and average scores.

# chapter two
## How Teachers Teach Writing

**T**his chapter presents information on how the teachers interviewed for this study characterize the writing process and the frequencies with which they mention various approaches, techniques, activities, and feedback and evaluation strategies as part of their writing instruction. The choice of interview questions was influenced by the kinds of information about classroom practices and techniques that are gathered as part of the NAEP assessments. Questionnaires are routinely administered to teachers whose schools participate in NAEP, and the responses to them provide a snapshot of teaching practices in the United States. In 1998, teachers were asked about their general approaches to writing, the activities and assignments they have their students undertake, and the kind of feedback they give to students. Teachers were also asked questions about the availability of resources and the use of computers in instruction (data from the NAEP 1998 background questionnaires are available on the NAEP website at *http://www.nces.ed/nationsreportcard*).

The primary reason for conducting in-depth interviews with teachers in this study was to supplement the information gained from the NAEP background questionnaires, which necessarily constrain answer choices. The in-depth interview format allowed the selected teachers to elaborate on their instructional practices, to comment on personal experiences that affect their practices, and generally to present a detailed and integrated picture of how writing instruction unfolds in the classroom. The difference between teachers' responses to NAEP background questions and to questions in the in-depth interview is similar to that between multiple-choice or short-answer tests and long essay tests. The information in the interviews serves to help interpret the quantitative data gathered from the NAEP questionnaires, while comments excerpted from the interviews help to define and illustrate the data derived from the interview coding process.

In general, the picture that emerges from both the interviews and the NAEP 1998 teacher questionnaires is one of iterative and interactive writing instruction by teachers. As they discuss what they do, teachers consistently speak of guiding students through the steps of planning, drafting, receiving feedback from teachers and peers, revising, and sharing work. Individual conferences with students about a piece of work in progress emerge as an important part of the teacher's instruction. Students are encouraged to reflect on their work and on the progress they have made over time. Focusing grammar instruction on errors or weaknesses revealed in student writing is another aspect of the interactive nature of the instruction described in these interviews.

In this chapter, the results of the coding of the interviews are presented in tables that present the weighted

percentages of classrooms whose teachers mentioned a particular item. The responses given in the table represent responses most frequently mentioned by teachers in the course of the interview, not a priori categories. In the narrative text accompanying each table, comments from the interviewed teachers are included to define and illustrate the information in the tables and to convey the flavor of the discourse typical of the interviews. To further enhance the picture of teaching emerging in this report, the transcribed text of four full interviews is included in appendix B. Included in appendix C is a compendium of assignments discussed by teachers.

## Typical Writing Activities

In the teacher questionnaire administered as part of the NAEP 1998 writing assessment, teachers were asked how often their students engage in certain activities as part of writing instruction. These teachers were presented with 12 types of activities and asked to indicate how frequently these would be observed during a typical week in their classes. A similar inquiry was posed to the teachers selected for the interview, but in an open-ended fashion. The interviewer asked: "If I had the opportunity to spend a week in your classroom, what are four or five writing activities I would be most likely to see you and your students doing during that week?"

| TABLE 2.1 | Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on the most commonly practiced writing activities, grades 4 and 8: 1998 |
|---|---|

| *What are four or five writing activities you and your students do during a week?* | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Creative or personal narrative | 52 | 39 |
| Informative writing | 47 | 54 |
| Journal writing (responses to literature) | 47 | 51 |
| Grammar/spelling/vocabulary exercise | 37 | 37 |
| Freewriting | 20 | 13 |
| Research reports | 20 | 8 |
| Brainstorming/webbing/prewriting | 19 | 18 |
| Poetry | 18 | 23 |
| Persuasive writing | 15 | 28 |
| Speech/oral presentation/dramatic presentation | 6 | 3 |
| Peer review | 5 | 5 |
| Descriptive writing | 4 | 14 |

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because each option is independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

Table 2.1 shows that in 52 percent of fourth-grade and in 39 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers mentioned writing creative or personal narratives as an activity that would occur in a typical week. This finding is consistent with the kinds of writing submitted for the study by the students of the interviewed teachers. As described in chapter 4, narrative pieces constituted 52 percent of writing turned in by fourth-graders and 48 percent of the pieces turned in by eighth-graders.

Many teachers also mentioned writing informative essays as a typical activity. In 47 percent of fourth-grade and 54 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated they are likely to assign this genre during a typical week. Informative writing includes the "how to" type of essay, the compare-and-contrast format, and literary analyses. Teachers suggested a variety of topics for informative essays, with many teachers focusing on tasks familiar to students, such as how to make a certain kind of food or how to perform a familiar activity. Compare-and-contrast essays were also mentioned frequently. At both grades, these assignments often took the form of comparing and contrasting characters or settings from literature that the students were reading. Teachers also mentioned asking students to write in this format on more familiar or personal topics, such as comparing a week during the school year with a week in the summer.

Some teachers mentioned that they coordinated writing assignments with work in other subjects, such as science and social studies. Many teachers also expressed a desire to do more cross-curricular assignments or regretted that they have not been able to do such assignments. Teachers reported more frequently that they coordinated student writing with reading assignments. In 47 percent of fourth-grade and 51 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that, during a typical week, students would be engaged in journal writing. This was usually as a response to or commentary on the literature they had read.

In 28 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers mentioned persuasive writing as a typical activity; in only 15 percent of fourth-grade classrooms did teachers mention persuasive writing. One fourth-grade teacher suggested that good persuasive assignments often incorporated a purpose for writing in conjunction with high interest motivators. For example, one fourth-grade teacher gave the following assignment: "Persuade me not to give you homework and I'll consider it." Other topics included essays advocating a specific opinion on a change in school starting time, on water contamination in the community, on drug testing for athletes, and on other school- and community-related issues. Teachers indicated that their students need to become familiar with and practice techniques to attempt to change a reader's previously held opinion.

In 18 percent of fourth-grade and 23 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers stated that they encouraged their students to write poetry in such genres as haiku, couplets, limericks, or free verse, depending on the requirements of the curriculum. In 4 percent of fourth-grade classrooms and 14 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that the writing of descriptive essays would be a typical activity in any given week. Teachers reported that they use an array of descriptive prompts, such as having students "describe eating a marshmallow," "describe what changes have occurred in school with the new administration," or "invent and describe a new machine." Teachers

*"Persuade me not to give you homework and I'll consider it."*

also indicated that their students worked on research reports. In 20 percent of fourth-grade and 8 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that they engage their students in this type of activity. It may seem surprising that the percentage of teachers mentioning research reports is higher among fourth-grade teachers than among eighth-grade teachers. It may be possible that fourth-grade teachers assign brief research projects that can be completed within a week, whereas eighth-grade projects are more likely to be complex, stretching over a longer time period and, hence, are not typical of any given week.

## Steps in the Writing Process

Having identified several general writing activities that occur during a typical week, the interviewed teachers were then asked to discuss the sequence of activities involved in completing an assignment. The teachers were prompted as follows: "Take me through a single writing assignment so that I can get a sense of the sequences of activities involved. You decide what kind of assignment you want to think about. Take me through the steps you and your students typically go through, from preparing for the assignment all the way through to its completion." The responses to this part of the interview yielded a great deal of commonality, with brainstorming or prewriting, drafting, feedback and revision, and publishing or sharing finished work most frequently cited as the typical steps.

Table 2.2 presents the frequency of fourth- and eighth-grade teachers' responses to this question. In a large majority of classrooms, teachers (88 percent of fourth-grade and 73 percent of eighth-grade classrooms) indicated that brainstorming

was one of the first steps undertaken as their students begin the writing process. Brainstorming was accomplished in a variety of ways: in discussions with the whole class, in small-group discussions among students, in one-on-one discussions between a teacher and a student, and with techniques such as webbing (a graphic organizing technique that diagrams connections among words or ideas), drawing, or other artwork.

One fourth-grade teacher commented, "There's always some kind of pre-discussion of writing. I get them to use a prewriting technique. I call it making a 'story map' where they make a diagram of the different paragraphs, the main idea of the paragraphs." Another fourth-grade teacher indicated that "brainstorming also means to me that you have time . . . take one minute, two minutes, talk about what you think, share the words you have. A child who's reticent to raise his/her hand now has talked to a partner and shared . . . the brainstorming stage . . . [this] breaks down that uncomfortable period of 'you're going to edit me, you're going to find what's wrong'."

Teachers mentioned other steps or sequences of instruction as prewriting strategies. These include reviewing models of writing, reading or being read to, and researching or gathering information as a basis for writing. In 39 percent of fourth-grade and 42 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that they used models of various types, sometimes displaying the work of other students, sometimes even writing an essay themselves and "thinking aloud" as they work. One eighth-grade teacher shared an experience wherein modeling, drafting, and revision came into play: "Whenever I

| TABLE 2.2 | Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on the sequence of activities involved in writing assignments, grades 4 and 8: 1998 |
|---|---|

| Take us through a single writing assignment so that we can get a sense of the sequences of activities involved. | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| ■ *Before drafting:* | | |
| Brainstorming | 88 | 73 |
| Reviewing models or other samples | 39 | 42 |
| Reading or being read to as basis for writing activity | 28 | 40 |
| Researching/gathering information as basis for writing activity | 20 | 8 |
| Outlining | 17 | 24 |
| Drawing or other art-related reinforcement | 13 | 6 |
| Freewriting | 10 | 7 |
| Creating rubric for assignment | 10 | 13 |
| "Real-life" exposure such as visitors, other stimuli as basis for writing activity | 6 | 5 |
| Listening/viewing other media as basis for writing activity | 2 | 8 |
| Prewriting | 1 | 3 |
| ■ *Drafting and feedback:* | | |
| Students engaged in drafting | 96 | 98 |
| Teacher giving feedback on draft | 87 | 91 |
| Student making changes as a result of feedback | 78 | 86 |
| Teacher conducting one-on-one conferences | 76 | 54 |
| Teacher giving written comments | 42 | 59 |
| Teacher giving informal comments to individual students | 32 | 38 |
| Teacher giving comments to a group or class | 28 | 22 |
| Teacher giving grade on draft or final product | 27 | 50 |
| Teacher giving feedback based on rubric or list of requirements | 17 | 20 |
| First draft is final version | 1 | # |
| ■ *Publication:* | | |
| Sharing of final or nearly final version | 58 | 51 |
| Sharing with classmates or other school audience | 54 | 47 |
| Sharing with outside audience | 3 | 4 |
| Sharing with unspecified audience | 1 | 2 |

# Percentage is between 0.0 and 0.5.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because each option is independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

model any writing, I have them give me topics because I want them to know that you can write on things extemporaneously if you think first. And when they see me write, and they see me make mistakes, they see how I correct them, and they see how messy my draft writing is. They can see my brainstorming. I'll just start out with notes and then I'll turn that in and state 'Oh, yeah, that is pretty ugly looking.' I say, 'That's what a rough draft is supposed to be'."

In almost all of the classrooms (96 percent of fourth-grade and 98 percent of eighth-grade classrooms), teachers indicated that drafting was an important part of the process. One teacher revealed how instruction and practice came together: "In writing the drafts, we talk about introductions, thesis sentences, topic sentences, things like this that you want to include in a draft—usually at this level, a five-paragraph essay format."

In a high percentage of classrooms (87 percent of fourth-grade and 91 percent of eighth-grade classrooms), teachers mentioned the importance of giving feedback to students. Whether feedback took the form of a one-on-one conference, comments based on a rubric or list of requirements, written comments on the submitted work, or more generalized comments to the whole class, teachers reported that students do make changes in their writing as a result of feedback. In 78 percent of fourth-grade and 86 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that their students revise their drafts as a result of discussions on suggested changes. One eighth-grade teacher commented, "Every writing assignment I give, I have learned that it's better for the kids if they have to write a first draft,

*"I have learned that it's better for the kids if they have to write a first draft, second draft, third draft . . ."*

second draft, third draft—if they have to go through the process. They do try to improve their writing."

Feedback often takes the form of a conference with students during the writing process. In 76 percent of fourth-grade and 54 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers stated that they make suggestions and help students with drafts in one-on-one conferences. One teacher described activities in the classroom: "We rotate in the classroom to have conference times. And I like to focus on just a few students each day or during that writing period so that I can conference with them for five to ten minutes on their writing and give them some feedback one-on-one orally. Then I ask them to take the notes or jot it down as we read their piece together." In 59 percent of the eighth-grade classrooms, teachers reported that they give written commentary on student papers; a lower percentage (42 percent of the classrooms) was reported for fourth grade.

In 58 percent of fourth-grade and 51 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers reported that they have their students share final versions of writing, mostly with classmates or other school audiences, but infrequently with outside audiences. Teachers often mentioned displaying samples of student work on a bulletin board or in a school publication. A fourth-grade teacher commented, "Sometimes we will take a day for authors to read their own work. We also have as a school-wide activity where children make their own books. And so then we have opportunities to share with other classes, to share with other children from classes, and they also can share with those here in the room."

As a follow-up to the previous inquiry, which involved delineating a typical sequence of steps, teachers were asked if the steps were always the same. The interview question was: "Do you and your students follow the same steps as in the previous question for all assignments and for all kinds of writing? For example, would the steps be different for an assignment that is longer or shorter than the example you gave?"

In 88 percent of the fourth-grade and 70 percent of eighth-grade classrooms (table 2.3), teachers reported that the steps in the writing process varied with assignment, although a few said the steps did not vary. Teachers mentioned a number of conditions that influence which steps are emphasized or minimized: the nature of a given assignment, the proficiency of the students, and the familiarity of students with a given assignment. Some teachers reported that, as their students became adept at the steps for producing a certain kind of writing, variations of these steps were introduced and adapted to different types of assignments. One eighth-grade teacher suggested that only certain

assignments reach the final draft stage: "Basically, we do the writing process where you do a mini-lesson of some sort to teach a skill or to teach an idea. And then they'll [students] do a prewriting, brainstorming kind of activity, either the whole class or by themselves. And then we'll begin the writing process where they'll write and then revise. Not every piece goes to final draft . . . oftentimes once a quarter, they will choose their best piece and put it to final draft."

A fourth-grade teacher indicated that time of year influences what steps are used: "If it's at the beginning of the year when I'm introducing the steps to writing, or if it's at the end of the year when I expect them all to be able to write in paragraph form." On the other hand, an eighth-grade teacher reported, "The steps themselves, like the sequence of steps, are always the same. The duration of time in between the steps may be longer. For example, if we're doing a research project, which we did, that took a much longer time in the brainstorming and information-gathering stage than it did when we wrote an autobiography, which could be

*"The steps themselves… are always the same. The duration of time in between the steps may be longer."*

| T A B L E 2.3 | Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reported variability in steps in the writing process, grades 4 and 8: 1998 | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Do you and your students follow the same steps as in the previous question for all assignments and for all kinds of writing?* | | 4th grade | 8th grade |
| Steps in the writing process vary by assignment | | 88 | 70 |
| Steps in the writing process vary by student choice | | 44 | 46 |
| Steps do not vary | | 6 | 20 |

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because the first two options are not mutually exclusive.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

generated right out of their heads. So the time may have changed, but the steps that we do always remain the same." Another teacher was in agreement that the steps remain constant: "That's just de rigeur even for essay questions. The only difference is because it's an essay question, they don't have the opportunity to do a final draft."

### Feedback and Evaluation Strategies

Both the NAEP 1998 writing assessment teacher questionnaire and the questions that were part of the interview protocol for this study addressed the issue of feedback and evaluation. In the NAEP 1998 teacher questionnaire, teachers were asked to indicate the degree of importance they assigned to grading mechanics, organization, coherence, creativity, length of papers, and whether students had accomplished the purpose of the writing.[1] In the interviews conducted for this study, a more open-ended question was posed: "In your writing instruction in general, what kinds of advice or feedback do you give students about their writing? What do you tend to emphasize?" Further questions regarding the method, frequency and timing of feedback were asked, as well as questions about peer evaluation and student self-assessment.

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[1] See the NAEP web site at http://www.nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata.

| TABLE 2.4 | Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on the kinds of advice or feedback given to students about their writing, grades 4 and 8: |

| *What kinds of advice or feedback do you give students about their writing? What do you tend to emphasize?* | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Grammar/mechanics, etc. | 66 | 72 |
| Details/description/elaboration | 46 | 31 |
| Content/adequacy of ideas | 41 | 39 |
| Organization/sequence | 38 | 49 |
| Provide positive feedback/support | 23 | 30 |
| Grammar only | 22 | 10 |
| Vocabulary | 12 | 11 |
| Clarity | 12 | 24 |
| Fulfillment of assignment | 8 | 12 |
| Creativity | 7 | 8 |
| Voice/style | 3 | 12 |

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because each option is independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

### Evaluation Criteria

Feedback and grading on mechanics, organization, and adequacy of ideas and content were discussed by many of the teachers during the one-on-one interviews (see table 2.4). In 66 percent of the fourth-grade and 72 percent of the eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that they comment on students' grammar and mechanics. In 38 percent of fourth-grade and 49 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers also indicated that they give feedback to their students concerning the organization and sequence of ideas in their writing. Comments made by teachers in the interviews suggest that different criteria are emphasized at different times. Teachers might comment on coherence and logical order on a draft and later provide feedback and advice on elements of grammar and mechanics.

In 23 percent of fourth-grade and 30 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers mentioned the importance of positive feedback and support. One eighth-grade teacher expressed a strong opinion about creating negative associations: ". . . you always want to encourage. I get

very upset when teachers use writing as a punishment; for your punishment you have to write what you're going to do better next time . . . a lot of the kids that you're trying to reach grow up with that attitude, that writing is punishment."

Another eighth-grade teacher indicated that feedback could reflect both positive and, yet, corrective elements: "I always try to talk to them [about] at least one thing on the content. And for every negative, or so-called 'negative' criticism or helpful idea, I'll try to find at least one thing that they did right."

### Timing of Feedback

In addition to the types of advice and/or feedback that teachers give to students about their writing, the interviewer asked about the timing of feedback at different stages of writing. Teachers were asked, "Do you read and evaluate students' writing at different points or in different ways for different assignments or students?" Their responses are summarized in tables 2.5 and 2.6.

In approximately one-fourth of fourth- and eighth-grade classrooms,

*"And for every negative, or so-called 'negative' criticism or helpful idea, I'll try to find at least one thing that they did right."*

---

**TABLE 2.5** Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on the timing of reading and evaluating student writing at different points in the writing process, grades 4 and 8: 1998

| Do you read and evaluate students' writing at different points? | 4th grade | 8th grade |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Before drafting, during prewriting | 27 | 25 |
| During drafting | 80 | 87 |
| On final product | 31 | 47 |

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because the options are not mutually exclusive.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on the frequency of teacher feedback to students in the course of a writing assignment, grades 4 and 8: 1998

| How and when do you convey your advice and evaluations to students? | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| They give feedback one time in the course of a writing assignment | 52 | 43 |
| They give feedback two times in the course of a writing assignment | 35 | 45 |
| They give feedback three times in the course of a writing assignment | 5 | 9 |

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because some of the interviewed teachers may not have addressed this issue in the course of the interview.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

*"I think that it's a lot more effective for the students to get the information right away, versus how long it would take to correct it and get it back to them."*

teachers reported that they give advice to students **before** they begin drafting their writing assignment. In 80 percent of the fourth-grade and in 87 percent of the eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that they give advice and/or evaluations **during** the drafting process, when students' ideas are beginning to take shape (table 2.5).

The interviews themselves reveal a wide range of specific strategies mentioned in response to this question. One eighth-grade teacher commented: "I try to do it during the process itself, during the revising and even during our creating process itself. I think that's a lot more effective for the students to get the information right away, versus how long it would take to correct it and get it back to them."

A fourth-grade teacher, however, mentioned a different tactic: "After they've had peers help them revise [a first draft] and after they've had peers help them edit. I don't look at their writing until those

two things have happened and they've written a second draft. Then we have a conversation."

In 31 percent of fourth-grade and 47 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that they give advice and evaluation on the final product as well. One eighth-grade teacher reported, "I can walk around and speak to them personally . . . and then I'll give them written feedback . . . for the ones who really need it, they can come in on their own because they're afraid or ashamed to talk about it in class . . . I wouldn't just give it only written, I'd give it personally. I'd give it spoken. I'd show them examples." Another eighth-grade teacher stated: "They always get written feedback on their papers. Now, it's going to be short comments because there are not enough hours in the day to be able to write a 'letter' to each child . . . the other thing that I will do is speak to a child individually. . . ."

The percentages of classrooms in which teachers reported that they give advice and evaluation to students several times in the course of an assignment indicate that an iterative, interactive approach to writing instruction has become relatively common. When asked how and when they give feedback and evaluation to students, teachers in approximately 40 percent of fourth-grade and in approximately 54 percent of eighth-grade classrooms reported that they give feed- back two or three times in the course of a writing assignment (table 2.6).

### Peer Feedback and Evaluation

Teachers were asked: "Do your students look at or listen to each other's work during class?" Additionally, they were asked to discuss the details of when and how peer feedback and evaluation are done. The data in tables 2.7 and 2.8 show the frequency of teacher responses to the question on peer review and feedback.

| TABLE 2.7 | Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on whether or not peer feedback is used during class, grades 4 and 8: 1998 |
|---|---|

| Do your students look at or listen to each other's work during class? | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Yes—there is peer feedback | 100 | 96 |
| No—there is no peer feedback | 0 | 1 |

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because of a possible error by interviewers (see appendix A, page 70).

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

| TABLE 2.8 | Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on when and how peer feedback is done in class, grades 4 and 8: 1998 |
|---|---|

| When and how is peer response or evaluation done in your class? | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Paired discussion/exchange of papers | 74 | 75 |
| Peer review/editing | 72 | 61 |
| Whole class discussion | 31 | 24 |
| Small group discussion | 30 | 26 |
| Feedback from parent/others on any draft | 13 | 16 |

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because each option is independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

Almost all of the interviewed teachers reported that they encourage their students to give feedback to each other. Various configurations were mentioned: in paired discussions, with the whole class, or in small groups. Teachers also mentioned other techniques, such as copying writing onto transparencies to provide a platform for classwide editing suggestions.

In about three-quarters of both the fourth-grade and eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that their students engage in paired discussions with each other or exchange papers at some time during the writing process. In 72 percent of fourth-grade and 61 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers reported that their students review and edit each other's work (table 2.8). Discussions involving the entire class and small-group discussions were mentioned less frequently.

Some teachers reported that they give specific guidelines to students as they evaluate their peers' work. A fourth-grade teacher mentioned that students would be directed to pair off, read each other's papers, and tell the other person two good things about the paper and one thing that could be changed. Another teacher used the format of a "response group"—a group of three or four students who ". . . each read what they wrote, one time without responding; then they read it again and get responses from each other. Then they

take notes on what their response group said to make it better. Then they would use that in the revision."

Many teachers commented on the benefits of peer review and evaluation, such as confidence-building, collegiality, and connecting with an audience.

## Self-Assessment and Reflection

Interviewed teachers were asked: "How, if at all, do you have your students use self-assessment or reflection to develop their writing?" Teachers indicated that they encourage their students to assess their own written work in a large majority of classrooms. The data in table 2.9 provide evidence that many teachers of fourth- and eighth-graders direct their students to assess their writing, often with tools such as rubrics, checklists, or scoring guides. In 81 percent of fourth-grade and 82 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers reported that their students assess their writing in some manner. How they engage in this activity is diverse and often specific to a particular teacher's preferences.

One fourth-grade teacher described a checklist used to facilitate students' self-assessment of their writing: "When we write descriptive paragraphs at the beginning of the year, I have a little self-assessment sheet that says, 'my paragraph . . .' and they just circle *yes* or *no*, [with items such as] 'my paragraph accurately

| How, if at all, do you have your students use self-assessment or reflection to develop their writing? | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Yes—students assess their own writing | 81 | 82 |
| No—students do not assess their own writing | 6 | 13 |
| Student proofreads his/her own work | 47 | 51 |
| Student uses rubric or list of requirements | 31 | 29 |
| Student uses reflective writing | 5 | 14 |

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because some of the interviewed teachers may not have addressed this issue in the course of the interview.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

describes what I was trying to describe.' They go through and do their own self-assessment on some of their writing also." Another fourth-grade teacher presented a more detailed checklist for students to use. This checklist contained such items as Can I follow this easily? Did I begin all sentences with capital letters? Did I indent? Are my sentences complete? Do they all express a complete thought?

In nearly half of both the fourth-grade and eighth-grade classrooms, teachers reported that students proofread their own papers. Several teachers reported that they teach techniques of editing and proofreading. Some teachers encourage reading aloud as an editing technique: "I tell them that I like to read it aloud no matter what it is—read it aloud to yourself and you will typically be able to hear the error. You will hear where you have left words out."

## Collecting Student Work

The NAEP 1998 writing report card presented data on whether students or their teachers saved students' written work in a folder or portfolio. Information presented in that report indicated a positive relationship between saving student writing and student performance in fourth, eighth and twelfth grades. The report further stated, in part, that at the three grade levels, students who saved, or whose teachers saved, their writing work in folders or portfolios had higher average scale scores on the NAEP assessment than students whose work was not saved.[2]

*". . . read it aloud to yourself and you will typically be able to hear the error."*

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[2] Greenwald, E.A., Persky, H.R., Campbell, J.R., and Mazzeo, J. (1999). *The NAEP 1998 Writing Report Card for the Nation and the States* (NCES 99-462). Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics.

TABLE
2.10

**Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on collecting student writing in a work folder or portfolio, grades 4 and 8: 1998**

| Part 1—Do you or do your students collect writing over time in a work folder or portfolio? | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 94 | 89 |
| No | 4 | 11 |
| **Part 2—What is the purpose of these collections?** | | |
| For parent conferences | 76 | 64 |
| To see growth or improvement | 64 | 60 |
| For assessment | 64 | 35 |
| For instruction | 56 | 46 |
| Students take work home to show parents | 26 | 8 |
| To pass on to future teachers/become part of student's file | 22 | 23 |
| Student selects pieces | 22 | 22 |
| Student reflection/self-assessment | 13 | 16 |
| Teacher or school accountability | 10 | 10 |
| Student revises earlier work | 6 | 13 |
| For storage only | 3 | 3 |

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because some teachers may not have addressed this issue in the course of the interview in Part 1. In Part 2, more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

Teachers interviewed in the Writing in the Nation's Classrooms study responded to a series of questions about collecting student work: Do you or your students collect their writing over time in a work folder or portfolio? What is the purpose of these collections? Do you use the portfolios in parent conferences, for grading or assessment purposes, or for instructional purposes? Table 2.10 presents data on the collection of student work and the purpose of these collections. In 94 percent of fourth-grade and 89 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers reported that they collect and save examples of student work over time, an indication of how widespread this practice has become.

In 76 percent of fourth-grade and in 64 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers reported that they refer to the collected works of their students during parent conferences. One eighth-grade teacher stated, "Our parent conferences have to be really short because we have so many parents we have to meet. But what I do is leave them [student portfolios] out

on the table along with samples of finished products that they've done so they have an ongoing portfolio of everything they've done this year."

In 64 percent of the fourth-grade and 60 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers reported that the writing folder or portfolio was used as a means of reviewing student growth or improvement. One teacher stated, "In this school district we have district portfolios that start at seventh grade and [students] carry them all the way till twelfth grade. Each year a different style of writing is put in there so that we know our kids . . . by the time they leave at twelfth grade, [they] will have been exposed to all different genres of writing."

Teachers reported that they ask students to review, reflect on, or revise written work from their folder or portfolio. In one instance, an eighth-grade teacher commented, "The portfolio keeps [students'] writing together where we can use it . . . later on in the school year, right before the end of the year, we're going to take some of their writings that they did at the beginning of the year and redo those topics and let them compare how their writing has grown from the beginning to the end."

Similarly, another eighth-grade teacher stated, ". . . I have them go back and look in their folders and say, 'look how you've grown.' And then at the end of the year they're just amazed. They read their first piece and go, 'I can't believe I wrote that!' And then they look at their last piece and go, 'Wow, I've really improved.' "

In 64 percent of fourth-grade and in 35 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that the materials from the portfolios or work folders were used for assessment. Teachers reported that the selections contained in the folders were used not only for assessment in varying degrees, but for instruction and for information during parent conferences.

## Engaging and Motivating Students

Several related questions were posed to the interviewed teachers. They were first asked: "What have you found works best to get all students engaged in writing?" As an additional probe, they were asked to describe in detail an assignment or activity that they have found to be particularly effective with students. They were also asked about what made this assignment work well. Finally, they were asked: "How did you come up with this assignment?"

*"They read their first piece and go, 'I can't believe I wrote that!' Then they look at their last piece and go, 'Wow, I've really improved.' "*

Table 2.11 shows that in 36 percent of fourth-grade and 41 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that they sometimes allow students to select their personal topics based on their own interests. Some examples of topics chosen by students were writing a detective story, suggesting several New Year's resolutions, creating an autobiographical sketch, and composing an "advice" column for a student newspaper.

Teachers also reported that they use various types of stimuli such as audio-visuals, pictures, and hands-on materials to engage students. Teachers in 31 percent of fourth-grade and 28 percent of eighth-grade classrooms mentioned such

techniques. For instance, one fourth-grade teacher had students make masks, followed by a writing assignment on how to make a mask. Students were encouraged to write songs, dialogues, plays, and monologues—all based on some type of stimuli.

In 29 percent of fourth-grade and 35 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers reported that they base some assignments on their students' prior knowledge and experiences. For example, teachers indicated that they often asked students to write on events occurring at a specific time of year, on local or national happenings, or on the needs of the students. Several teachers used real-life student concerns as the basis for

**TABLE 2.11**

Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on techniques used to get all students engaged in writing, grades 4 and 8: 1998

| What have you found works best to get all students engaged in writing? | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Allowing student choice based on interest | 36 | 41 |
| Engaging students with stimuli (audio/visuals, pictures) | 31 | 28 |
| Encouraging student knowledge and experience | 29 | 35 |
| Encouraging imagination and creativity | 23 | 19 |
| Showing models of what is expected | 19 | 8 |
| Displaying/sharing/publishing (students' pride) | 17 | 15 |
| Providing structure/system/series of steps for writing | 15 | 9 |
| Having students work in groups | 13 | 17 |
| Presenting clear criteria | 11 | 7 |
| Showing teacher enthusiasm | 8 | 8 |
| Positive feedback (communicating worth of student ideas) | 6 | 1 |
| Application to other writing | 5 | 1 |
| Individualizing instruction (based on differing abilities) | 3 | 1 |
| Communicating importance of passing high stakes tests | 1 | 1 |
| High expectations | 0 | 1 |

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because each option is independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

<table>
<tr><td><strong>TABLE 2.12</strong></td><td>Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on sources of effective writing assignments for students, grades 4 and 8: 1998</td></tr>
</table>

| How did you come up with a particularly effective assignment? | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Own experiences/ideas | 42 | 51 |
| Other teachers, administrators | 21 | 14 |
| Books, articles, textbooks, Internet | 18 | 23 |
| Workshop or conference | 8 | 1 |
| School, district, or state curriculum materials | 6 | 8 |
| Students | 2 | # |

\# Percentage is between 0.0 and 0.5.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because some of the interviewed teachers may not have addressed this issue in the course of the interview.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

persuasive writing assignments: extending lunchtime for fourth-graders, or, for eighth-grade students, controversial community or school issues. Descriptive essays included such varieties as a detailed tour of a student's bedroom, the contents of a refrigerator, or a day at the mall. Personal topics were included, such as writing about the moment when the student felt most proud of himself/herself.

Teachers suggested additional methods to engage and motivate students to write. In 19 percent of fourth-grade and 8 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that they present their students with some type of model. One teacher commented that the writing process was a joint effort between teacher and student: ". . . but I model by writing an essay at the time that they write theirs, and I always read my essay to them. And that makes them feel better about the

process, because I think they realize that it can be done." One teacher emphasized the need to, ". . . write along with your students. Use dialogue and let them write the dialogue as you go through it. And let them write on things that they like to write on and not all the time what we want them to write on."

Teachers were also asked where they found the particularly engaging assignments they discussed. The results in table 2.12 show that in 42 percent of fourth-grade and 51 percent of the eighth-grade classrooms, teachers reported that their own experiences or ideas were the source for writing assignments. In 21 percent of fourth-grade teachers and 14 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers reported that they use ideas suggested by other teachers and professionals. Books, articles, textbooks, or information on the

*". . . let them write on things they like to write on and not all the time what we want them to write on."*

Internet were mentioned by teachers in 18 percent of the fourth-grade and 23 percent of the eighth-grade classrooms.

In the interviews, teachers discussed collaboration with colleagues as a source of engaging assignments. One teacher reported, ". . . the art teacher and I were sitting around talking about [the fact that] it would be neat to have students write children's books. So we all got together, and this is our second year of doing it, and it just keeps getting better every year." Schoolwide efforts were also mentioned: "Our leadership team was thinking of some ideas to get us ready for the state writing assessment. Writing across the curriculum, trying to involve everyone so our kids see that it's not just . . . the humanities teacher that teaches writing. So it was just sort of an invitation to get everyone to write . . . we did an activity which involved our whole school (in humanities, math, science, etc.). Kids really seem to like that, to do a little bit of writing throughout the whole day with different teachers. Everybody, all 400 kids, plus the whole faculty was doing it." A teacher's sense of humor was evident in a statement concerning the origin of an assignment: "I stole it with pride. I stole it with pride from someone else."

## Technical Aspects of Writing

As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, a substantial number of teachers reported that grammar, spelling, and vocabulary exercises are typical activities in their classrooms (see table 2.4). In response to that question, teachers in more than one-third of both the fourth- and eighth-grade classrooms reported that they engage in these activities during a typical week (see table 2.1). Teachers were asked specifically about the technical aspects of writing in a later question: "What have you found is the best way to teach technical aspects of writing, such as grammar, spelling, and vocabulary?"

Discussion of the technical aspects of writing in the teacher interviews was not confined to the responses to this particular question. The discussion suggests that teachers addressed the technical aspects of writing both formally and informally. One approach was presenting instruction in the context of student reading or writing, offering instruction as students encountered a problem. For example, teachers would do a "mini-lesson" on the rules of capitalization when drafts revealed that students did not understand the conventions of capitalization. The other approach was direct instruction not tied to student writing. Within those two categories, however, teachers mentioned a variety of strategies and techniques.

As shown in table 2.13, in 30 percent of fourth-grade and 28 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that they address spelling. Vocabulary instruction was mentioned by teachers in 16 percent of the fourth-grade and in 22 percent of the eighth-grade classrooms. Various specific approaches for teaching spelling and vocabulary were discussed in the interviews. The discussions suggest that individual teachers vary their strategies. When student writing presents an opportunity for instruction in spelling, teachers capitalize on the opportunity. Vocabulary instruction is often linked to student reading. Several teachers mentioned asking students to incorporate new words into sentences or paragraphs. On the other hand, the same teacher may well address spelling and vocabulary directly on other occasions.

TABLE
2.13

Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on different ways of teaching the technical aspects of writing, grades 4 and 8: 1998

| What is the best way to teach the technical aspects of writing (approaches to teaching grammar, spelling, and vocabulary)? | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Spelling lessons and quizzes | 30 | 28 |
| Use of grammar book | 24 | 16 |
| Mini lessons | 19 | 21 |
| Vocabulary quizzes, lists | 16 | 22 |
| Daily oral language | 16 | 14 |
| Teacher commentary on student work | 8 | 15 |
| Daily sentence correction | 6 | 3 |
| Extended assignments based on grammar | 4 | 7 |
| Peer commentary on student work | 4 | 4 |
| Modeling | 3 | 7 |
| Spellcheck on computer | 3 | 5 |
| De-emphasis on grammar in early assignments | 0 | 2 |
| Diagramming | 0 | 2 |

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because each option is independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

*". . . if I go through and I see that children are having a hard time with tenses, then I try to do a mini-lesson on that rather than just teaching grammar."*

In 19 percent of fourth-grade and 21 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers mentioned grammar mini-lessons, or mini-lessons in spelling and/or vocabulary. Again, teachers mentioned a variety of strategies for how they went about this. One teacher reported, ". . . if I go through and I see that children are having a hard time with tenses, then I try to do a mini-lesson on that rather than just teaching grammar." One teacher asked students to locate different parts of speech and different types of sentences in a piece of literature that they were reading.

In 24 percent of fourth-grade and 16 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that they use a grammar book. In 16 percent of fourth-grade and 14 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers mentioned the technique of daily oral language, which usually involves discussing a sentence or two with students and having them edit the sentences. The sentences are crafted to contain errors or structural problems that provide a spring-board for discussion and instruction on a structural or grammatical convention. Some teachers mentioned using this kind of technique in connection with other strategies. For example, a fourth-grade teacher selects sentences that have been written by students in the class and uses those as the basis for the editing activity.

*"They have to know that writing can be for any subject. It's not just a separate entity unto itself."*

## Time Spent on Writing

Interviewed teachers were asked: "In any given week, approximately how many hours are students engaged in writing activities in class, not including writing they do in the context of other subject areas?" Their responses are summarized in table 2.14. In 42 percent of fourth-grade and 66 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that they spent between 1 and 3 hours on writing instruction during a typical week. This question as posed was somewhat difficult for teachers to answer. The text of their answers to this question suggests that a more accurate way to understand how time is spent is to think of fluctuating amounts of time linked to the kind of work or the particular assignment students are doing.

One eighth-grade teacher's comments typify the rhythms of the classroom: "Generally, I would say about an hour-and-a half out of a week, because we focus so much on journal assignments, and usually the journal assignment may be anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the topic . . . some assignments may require two to three days, and I want the kids to be organized, and have the essay to have focus, be organized, and generally be an acceptable college-type essay—basic but effective. So I would give them maybe two to three days to work on it—class time and home time." A fourth-grade teacher indicated that time spent on writing would, "vary from week to week depending on . . . what we had to do . . . but we try to get writing in every day in some form, writing across the curriculum. Writing is going to be writing no matter where you do it and when you do it, and they [students] need to become familiar with that. Because you don't just do social studies during social studies. They have to know that writing can be for any subject. It's not just a separate entity unto itself."

**TABLE 2.14** Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on the amount of time students are engaged in writing activities in class, grades 4 and 8: 1998

| In any given week, approximately how many hours are students engaged in writing activities in class, not including writing they do in the context of other subject areas? | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Less than 1 hour | 2 | 6 |
| 1–2 7/8 hours | 42 | 66 |
| 3–4 7/8 hours | 36 | 20 |
| 5 hours or greater | 19 | 4 |
| Blank | 1 | 5 |

NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

# chapter three
## Technology, Resources, and Accountability Issues

**T**his chapter presents information on the use of computers for writing instruction, the availability of resources, and the impact of state accountability measures on teachers and their delivery of writing instruction. Information is also presented on additional resources that teachers identified to help them improve instruction. The discussion consists of general comments derived from teacher interviews with specific suggestions concerning the resources teachers find most applicable to classroom writing instruction.

### Use of Computers in Writing

The teacher questionnaire administered as part of the NAEP 1998 writing assessment posed several questions to teachers concerning computer accessibility for their students' use. At the fourth-grade level, 58 percent of students had teachers who reported that their students wrote drafts on the computer at least one or two times each month. Sixty-four percent of students in the eighth grade had teachers who reported that students composed at the computer at least one or two times each month.[1] Eighth-graders who wrote drafts on the computer one or two times a month performed better than students who never used computers to write drafts. Fifty-three percent of students in the fourth grade had teachers who reported that their students never or hardly ever

used the tools of a computer, such as the spell and/or grammar checker, and 68 percent of students in the eighth grade had teachers who reported a similar limited use of computer tools.[2]

Discussions during the teacher interviews of the study presented a somewhat different picture of computer use by both fourth- and eighth-graders. Interviewed teachers reported that a large majority of their students wrote on computers, although school use and home use are not differentiated. Table 3.1 indicates that, in 90 percent of fourth-grade and 97 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers reported that their students used computers in their writing.

The teachers also reported that student writing has changed because of computer use. Table 3.1 shows that, in 70 percent of fourth-grade and 68 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers believed that computer use had changed student writing. The interviewers probed teachers to discuss these changes and the results of the discussions are also reported in table 3.1. Two areas of change were identified by teachers:

1) an increase in students' motivation and
2) an increase in students' time spent on writing and revising their work.

In 39 percent of fourth-grade and 47 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers reported that computer use

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[1] See the NAEP web site at http://www.nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/.
[2] Ibid.

**Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on students' use of computers for writing, grades 4 and 8: 1998**

| *Do any of your students write on computers? Have you noticed that being able to use computers has changed how students write? How do your students use computers?* | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| *Students write on computers:* | | |
| Yes | 90 | 97 |
| No | 8 | 1 |
| | | |
| **Students writing changed because of computers** | | |
| Yes | 70 | 68 |
| No (or neutral—not much effect) | 14 | 22 |
| | | |
| *Teachers' observations on the effect of computer use* | | |
| Increases student motivation | 39 | 47 |
| Helps students with spelling/grammar | 27 | 31 |
| Improves appearance of writing | 19 | 26 |
| Easier for students who have difficulty with handwriting | 16 | 9 |
| Harder, slower for students who have trouble typing | 4 | 5 |
| Poorer spelling/grammar | 2 | 6 |
| Students plagiarize more | 2 | 1 |
| Students focus excessively on appearance | 1 | 2 |
| Less human interaction | 0 | 0 |
| | | |
| *What students do on computers* | | |
| Type and print out/publish final copy | 68 | 71 |
| Draft/revise | 29 | 47 |
| Use spell check/grammar check | 29 | 32 |
| Other | 18 | 12 |
| Do research using Internet or other computer-based resources | 5 | 5 |
| Use e-mail | 0 | 0 |

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because some of the interviewed teachers may not have addressed this issue in the course of the interview. Some of the options are independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

*"There's something about the draw of the computer. It's very motivating to the kids to have the computer available to them."*

motivated their students to write. One teacher stated that students who wrote on the computer "do make a better effort at the revising stage . . . because it's too hard for them to hand write everything a second or third time." Another teacher commented that the student who has an essay ". . . on a computer has an easier job of going back, making changes and moving sentences from one spot to another. And so the process of evaluating and improving a paper is much easier." Many teachers commented on student enthusiasm for composing on the computer. One teacher said "There's something about the draw of the computer. It's very motivating to the kids to have the computer available to them." Only a few teachers mentioned that writing on the computer could be harder and slower for students who have difficulty typing. In only 4 percent of the fourth-grade and 5 percent of eighth-grade classrooms did teachers report student difficulty with typing on the computer.

Anticipated problems such as focusing excessively on appearance or plagiarism seemed to be minimal. In 29 percent of fourth-grade classrooms and in 32 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that their students use such tools as spell or grammar checkers in word processing. One teacher stated that students using the computer had definite positive outcomes: "I find grammar is more accurate, spelling is more accurate. I think they [students] take advantage of some of the utilities, the spell check and grammar checks . . . and just superior papers, I feel." Some teachers reported that the appearance of student writing has improved with the use of computers. In 68 percent of fourth-grade and 71 percent of the eighth-grade classrooms, teachers reported that final copies are printed on the computer. Both fourth- and eighth-grade teachers indicated that their students are only beginning to use the computer as a source for accessing information on their research projects. Teachers predicted that as computers become more accessible and as students become more proficient in navigating the various websites, the frequency of computer use for research will greatly increase.

Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on more than one use of computers for writing, grades 4 and 8: 1998

| What students do on computers: (e.g., draft/revise, use Internet resources, use spell checker/grammar checker) | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Two uses | 26 | 42 |
| Three uses | 18 | 20 |
| Four uses | 3 | # |

# Percentage is between 0.0 and 0.5.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because some of the interviewed teachers may not have addressed this issue in the course of the interview.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

*"I didn't have a set of standards before all of this, before all of our change started."*

Table 3.2 indicates that in 44 percent of the fourth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated two or three uses of computers in their writing instruction e.g., drafting, using spellcheck, and printing out final copy. In 62 percent of the eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated two or three uses of computers in their programs.

## Influence of State, District, and Local Curricula, Assessments, and Standards

Teachers were asked if and to what extent the curriculum, standards, or assessments generated by the state, district, school, or department influenced their teaching of writing. These results are presented in table 3.3.  In 26 percent of fourth-grade and in 28 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that the influence of standards was neutral or had not caused them to change their teaching.

This does not necessarily indicate lack of awareness; in many cases, teachers felt that their current instructional practice was aligned with their state's standards and assessments. In other cases, the teachers may come from states that have not placed a strong emphasis on standards. In 35 percent of fourth-grade and in 37 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that standards (unspecified) had exerted an influence on their goals or methods for writing instruction. In 21 percent of fourth-grade and 25 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers reported that state standards influenced their writing instruction.

Many teachers reported that they have been involved in efforts to match local curriculum to state standards. In 43 percent of fourth-grade and in 39 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers reported that an external curriculum

| T A B L E 3.3 | Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on the influence of curriculum, standards, or assessments on writing instruction, grades 4 and 8: 1998 |
|---|---|

| How, if at all, have your goals or methods for writing instruction been influenced by the curriculum, standards, or assessments of your school, district, or state? | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| *Source of influence* | | |
| *Standards* | 35 | 37 |
| State | 21 | 25 |
| District/school | 9 | 14 |
| Other | 7 | 6 |
| *Curriculum* | 43 | 39 |
| State | 13 | 10 |
| District/school/department | 31 | 22 |
| Other | 36 | 39 |
| *Testing* | 34 | 41 |
| State | 29 | 32 |
| District/school | 3 | 5 |
| Other | 4 | 5 |
| | | |
| *Positive influence* | | |
| Provides specific goals or direction | 30 | 29 |
| Increases awareness of/emphasis on writing | 14 | 9 |
| Raises standards for students/teachers | 8 | 6 |
| Offers helpful rubrics for writing | 1 | 1 |
| Provides resources | 0 | 3 |
| | | |
| *Negative influence* | | |
| Creates excessive demands | 4 | 5 |
| Does not match curriculum/narrows view of writing | 2 | 6 |
| Restricts teacher's freedom | 2 | 1 |
| Insufficient funding/resources | 1 | 2 |
| Encourages too much teaching to test | 0 | 0 |
| Guaranteed failure for some students | 0 | 0 |
| | | |
| *Neutral or no real influence* | 26 | 28 |

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because each option is independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

influenced their instruction. A smaller percentage mentioned state curriculum as exerting an influence (13 percent of classrooms at grade 4 and 10 percent at grade 8).

Some teachers felt that they needed more information on implementing standards. A teacher reported, ". . . I didn't have a set of standards before all of this, before all of [our state's] change started. With the new updating, we just had someone go off to the state writing workshop, and she came back with new 'stuff' for all of us to try. I find that very valuable, the training that we send our teachers out to get, and they come back and share with us."

For others, the alignment of state standards and the local curriculum was relatively new. One teacher stated, "the standards had a big influence on me personally . . . I didn't really have a program. . . so it gave me goals. And so now I'm looking for more help to meet those goals."

### *Influence of Assessments on Goals and Methods*

In 34 percent of fourth-grade and 41 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that testing programs exerted an influence on their teaching writing in general, with state assessments mentioned more frequently than district or school assessments. One teacher commented that the goal is ". . . just trying to keep pace or keep track of what the state is looking for, letting the students know how they will be evaluated and giving them similar situations, to the degree that it is possible, with the writing tests and assessments."

Another teacher felt that the assessments have exerted an influence on goals and methods for writing instruction: "The state has certain writing styles that they're going to have on the statewide assessment. I try to at some time during the year to introduce most of these."

There was relatively little indication of negative effects of curriculum, standards, or assessments on writing instruction.

## Background, Educational, and Professional Influences on Teachers' Writing Instruction

Teachers were asked about other influences on their teaching, such as the advice or suggestions of colleagues or professors. Teachers were first asked: "Who or what has most influenced the way you teach writing, and how?" Their responses reflected a variety of influences, from their own educational and training backgrounds to personal experiences or professional resources. Teachers often felt that a combination of influences contributed to their repertoire of methods and approaches to the teaching of writing. Table 3.4 summarizes classroom teachers' responses to the types of influences on their teaching.

### *Influence of Background and Training*

In 25 percent of fourth-grade and in 21 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that they had a personal experience with writing that, in turn, influenced their own strategies and methodology. The following comment from an eighth-grade teacher is typical: "As I was going through school . . . I loved to write. And my teachers made me love to

*"As I was going through school, I loved to write. And my teachers made me love to write."*

TABLE
3.4

**Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on who or what has influenced the way they teach writing, grades 4 and 8: 1998**

| Who or what has most influenced the way you teach writing? | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| *Teacher's background and training* | | |
| Personal experience with writing | 25 | 21 |
| College or graduate school class/teacher | 22 | 26 |
| K–12 class teacher | 18 | 17 |
| | | |
| *Professional resources* | | |
| Professional workshops | 25 | 26 |
| Book on writing | 11 | 21 |
| Writing consultant | 1 | 1 |
| Professional organization membership | 0 | 1 |
| | | |
| *School colleagues* | | |
| Teacher who is peer or colleague | 33 | 21 |
| School principal | 7 | 1 |
| Curriculum supervisor | 2 | # |
| Teacher's aide | 0 | 0 |
| Student teacher | 0 | 0 |

\# Percentage is between 0.0 and 0.5.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because each option is independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

write. I had two excellent teachers in high school. One was a strict, traditional grammarian dinosaur—of which I now am the dinosaur; and the other was a creative writing teacher . . . I could do anything in writing. You could rule the world. But I see kids struggle trying to be understood and trying to be taken seriously. And I've always told them that if they . . . could structure a letter or a paragraph about something that they truly believed in or wanted to see happen, if they could present it logically and clearly, they would have a lot of power because writing is power."

In 22 percent of the fourth-grade and 26 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers mentioned their college or graduate school classes or professors as an influence on their methods of teaching writing. This question elicited such thoughts as: "I went to graduate school

and got a master's degree in history . . . and wrote a master's thesis. And although that's pretty far removed from eighth grade, I find that the things that I struggled with, just being clear and . . . really having to focus on my own grammar and spelling and detail, . . . and having various professors who were reading my papers. That influenced me, I think, most as far as writing [is concerned]."

### Influence of School Colleagues
In 33 percent of fourth-grade and 21 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers reported that peers had a direct influence on their instructional techniques. One teacher recounted, ". . . every Thursday all the language arts teachers get together and we . . . brainstorm different things. Everybody brings something to the table." Another teacher indicated, "over time, as a classroom teacher, you steal, borrow, gather, create every kind of idea that you can get from all of your peers."

Curriculum supervisors and school principals were mentioned as an influence very infrequently. For 7 percent of fourth-grade and 1 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, principals were rated influential, and for 2 percent of fourth-grade and .5 percent or less of eighth-grade classrooms, curriculum supervisors were rated influential.

### Additional Resources
Teachers were asked: "What is the single most important additional support or resource (such as books, workshops, curriculum supervisor) you would like to have available to you?" Table 3.5 summarizes their responses. Although the question asked for the single most important resource, many of the teachers mentioned more than one, and these responses were coded.

*"Over time, as a classroom teacher, you steal, borrow, gather, create every kind of idea that you can get from all of your peers."*

In 37 percent of fourth-grade and 27 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that they would like more training to better prepare themselves to teach writing to their students. The wish for more professional development on the teaching of writing was a recurring theme during the teacher interviews.

Some teachers identified written resources such as books, articles, or professional materials as the single most important additional support they would like. In 18 percent of fourth-grade and in 22 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that access to computers or more computers in their classrooms as an additional resource. One fourth-grade teacher stated, ". . . we need computers because the children, when they're doing their writing, there are some who are not blessed to have a computer . . . . If it's in my classroom, I can give you a few minutes so that your paper will look just as good as the other child's. You know, give you a fair chance, too."

In 9 percent of the fourth-grade and in 17 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated that they would like more time for writing instruction during the school day, a concern reiterated in response to the following question, concerning changes teachers would make in their writing instruction.

**Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on the most important resource they would like to have available, grades 4 and 8: 1998**

| *What is the single most important additional support or resource (such as books, workshops, curriculum supervisor) you would like to have available to you?* | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| *Classroom contexts* | | |
| More training in writing instruction | 37 | 27 |
| Written resources | 21 | 21 |
| More time | 9 | 17 |
| More or better curriculum materials | 8 | 2 |
| More time for consultation with other teachers | 4 | 4 |
| Smaller classes/fewer students | 3 | 5 |
| More time for writing instruction/for students to write | 2 | 2 |
| More time for conferencing with students | 2 | 2 |
| More training in assessing writing | 2 | # |
| Integration of writing across curriculum | 1 | # |
| More time for providing feedback on writing to students | 0 | 1 |
| | | |
| *Technology* | | |
| Computers | 18 | 22 |
| Software programs | 8 | 3 |
| Training on how to use computers | 4 | 3 |
| Technical assistance | 1 | 1 |
| | | |
| *Access to personnel* | | |
| Another teacher or aide in classroom | 10 | 8 |
| Curriculum supervisor | 6 | 8 |
| Outside writing consultant | 2 | 2 |
| Professional writer/author | 2 | 3 |

# Percentage is between 0.0 and 0.5.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because each option is independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

*"I think as a first-year teacher, I could have pushed the kids harder had I been more confident in myself . . ."*

### Desired Changes

Teachers were asked, "What changes would you like to make in your writing instruction, if any?" Table 3.6 presents the teachers' responses. In 39 percent of both fourth-grade and eighth-grade classrooms, teachers indicated they would like to have more time in general for writing instruction. In 12 percent of fourth-grade and 9 percent of eighth-grade classrooms, teachers wished for more time for student conferences.

Other recurring wishes were for workshops and more information on technology, time management, and techniques for children who were having difficulty with writing. "It's easy to work with the kids who already know how to write," said an eighth-grade teacher. "It's another thing to work with the ones who are well below grade level."

Some teachers indicated that they wanted to demand more of students and to give students more responsibility. One fourth-grade teacher stated, "I'd like to move toward pushing [students] to do more. You know, I think as a first-year teacher, I could have pushed the kids harder had I been more confident in myself and known what I wanted and have been confident enough to maybe be stricter in their eyes. Next year, I want to push those kids harder because I think they'll rise to the challenge." A related concern was student independence; one eighth-grade teacher stated, "I would like to be able to let go a little more and let the students write more without me even reading. And, I don't know, I feel like everything they do I have to be able to read and evaluate it. And maybe that's not right, maybe they need to be able just to write and then pick a piece and then let me evaluate one. But I haven't gotten to that point yet. But I think that would be okay." Another teacher mentioned pacing and wished "to slow down, maybe not to do quite as many writing activities, and to make the activities a little bit more meaningful."

TABLE
3.6

Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on changes they would like to make in their writing instruction, grades 4 and 8: 1998

| What changes would you like to make in your writing instruction, if any? | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| *Time* | | |
| More time | 39 | 39 |
| For writing instruction | 19 | 13 |
| For other purposes | 14 | 9 |
| To conference with students | 12 | 9 |
| Rearrange time | 3 | 3 |
| To provide feedback | 1 | 10 |
| Consult with other teachers | 0 | 0 |
| | | |
| *Approaches* | | |
| Assign more writing | 6 | 4 |
| Utilize greater variety of assignments | 5 | 6 |
| Motivate students | 4 | 5 |
| Focus more on basics as grammar | 3 | 2 |
| Encourage creativity | 1 | 1 |
| Better integrate grammar and mechanics with writing assignments | 0 | 6 |
| Focus more on writing process | 0 | 1 |
| Assign more homework | 0 | 0 |
| | | |
| **Testing concerns** | | |
| Focus less on a test | 3 | 5 |
| | | |
| **Technology** | | |
| Learn to use technology | 2 | 4 |

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because each option is independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

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# chapter four
## Student Performance on Classroom Writing and on NAEP

The second component of the writing in the nation's classrooms study involved the submission of writing pieces by students whose teachers participated in the interviews. This effort was undertaken with two purposes in mind:

1) To examine the range of assignments and the kinds of writing that students actually do and what they perceived as their best classroom work and

2) To shed light on the question of differential performance on NAEP and within the classroom by comparing scores on the NAEP 1998 writing assessment with scores on classroom work.

### Methods

In fourth grade, writing was collected from the single class taught by the interviewed teacher. In eighth grade, one of the classes in which the teacher taught writing was selected. Every student in a selected class was asked to submit two examples of completed writing pieces from his or her portfolio or workfolder. The students were directed to choose pieces that represented their best writing, and to select two different types of writing. These pieces were then coded as to the type of writing each represented. This work was done by a group of writing teachers with experience in essay scoring, using guidelines developed by the development committee (see appendix A). Each piece was evaluated on a four-point scale by trained scorers with a rubric developed for this purpose. The rubric appears in figure 4.1 (words indicate in bold print key concepts for scorers to keep in mind). In fourth grade, 2,395 students participated, with a total of 4,459 writing pieces scored. In eighth grade, 2,480 students participated, and a total of 4,410 writing pieces were scored. Some students did not submit pieces or submitted only one piece.

### Comparing Performance on Classroom Writing to Performance on the NAEP 1998 Writing Assessment

The process of comparing performance on classroom writing to performance on the NAEP 1998 writing assessment involved finding a method to compare writing done by the same student under two very different conditions: 1) as part of classroom work and 2) in a standardized testing situation. NAEP assessments are based on sampling techniques that are designed to create a nationally representative sample. One consequence of this procedure is that not all schools participate in NAEP and, even within a selected school, not all students in a grade are actually assessed. Rather, students are selected randomly from the total school population at a grade level. Thus, some of the students who submitted writing pieces for the writing in the nation's classrooms study did NOT participate in the NAEP 1998 writing assessment. Therefore, for the purposes of comparing performance on NAEP with performance on classroom writing, this study could examine only the smaller group of students within the selected classes who participated in NAEP.

**Rubric developed for scoring writing submitted by students for the Writing in the Nation's Classrooms study, grades 4 and 8: 1998**

| Score | Quality of writing (mark only one) |
|---|---|
| **4** | **Elaboration**, **sustained organization,** and **clear development** are used to lead a reader through the piece. **Details** are used to expand or connect ideas. **Precise word choice** and *language use* enhance the presentation. Few errors are evident. |
| **3** | There is a **clear progression** of events or information. The writing is **focused** and **developed**. **Some details** are used. Language is generally fluent. Some errors are evident. |
| **2** | Presentation, development, and organization may be **uneven** in places OR may be **mostly undeveloped** with **few details**. Errors in language use may interfere with understanding. |
| **1** | Ideas are **not developed**. The organization is **difficult to follow**. Piece may be **incoherent in places**. Errors permeate the piece and make it difficult to understand. |
| **N** | Not enough evidence to judge: Piece is only a few words that may be somewhat linked (list, cluster, spelling tests, closed answer skill sheets, entirely plagiarized, etc.). |
| **I** | Illegible |
| **B** | Blank |

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

Nonetheless, the sample size was sufficient to allow for examining both the range of writing students do in the classroom and the degree to which classroom performance and performance on NAEP appear to be related. Because the sample that "overlapped" both the NAEP participants and the classroom writing participants is not randomly selected, it cannot strictly be considered to be representative of the nation. A sampling of students' writing pieces is also included in this chapter.

## Types of Writing

The writing pieces submitted by the students participating in the study were categorized by type of writing. These categories were derived from examining the student writing itself. Rather than using broader classifications, such as those in the NAEP writing framework, the development committee attempted to create a more nuanced picture of the student writing submitted for the study. Based on a review of a substantial number of the writing pieces provided, categories

were created, and each piece of writing was classified. For the purposes of having a sufficient sample to report results, a few of the original categories were combined to create the following categories for reporting:

- Narratives: writings about personal events, people known to the writer, journals, stories, dramatic scenes

- Essays/reports: reactions to literature or film, reports on a topic, interviews, descriptive writing

- Persuasive pieces: essays or letters presenting an opinion or position

- Poetry

- Letters: thank-you letters, informative letters to an informal or formal audience, invitations

In addition to coding the kind of writing each submitted piece represented, scorers were asked to rate each piece of student work on a four-point scale. In consultation with teachers at fourth grade and at eighth grade, a scoring guide was created that focused on the elements of the writing process that are emphasized in the NAEP writing framework: development including use of details, organization, language use, and command of writing mechanics. Samples of student work representing each point in the scale are presented on pages 49–65. The number of pieces, weighted percentage, and average score by type of piece are presented in table 4.1.

As might be expected, narratives and essays are the first and second most commonly selected types of pieces in both grades. It is not possible to ascertain for certain that such pieces are also the most frequently assigned, but data from the teacher interviews suggest that this might be the case. In eighth grade, a greater number of persuasive pieces was submitted than in fourth grade.

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T A B L E
**4.1**

**Number of writing pieces, weighted percentage, and average scale score by type of writing submitted by students for the Writing in the Nation's Classrooms study, grades 4 and 8: 1998**

| | 4th grade | | | 8th grade | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number of pieces | Weighted percentage of pieces submitted | Average score | Number of pieces | Weighted percentage of pieces submitted | Average score |
| **All pieces** | **4,459** | **100** | **3.0** | **4,410** | **100** | **2.9** |
| Poetry | 297 | 7 | 2.9 | 416 | 10 | 3.0 |
| Essays/reports | 1,218 | 29 | 3.0 | 1,188 | 25 | 3.0 |
| Narrative | 2,398 | 52 | 3.0 | 2,035 | 48 | 2.9 |
| Persuasive | 228 | 5 | 2.9 | 599 | 14 | 2.9 |
| Letters | 318 | 7 | 2.9 | 172 | 3 | 2.7 |

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

This is not surprising in view of the kind of writing often added to the middle school curriculum.

Table 4.2 presents the percentage of writing pieces receiving each level of scoring by type of writing submitted by students for the study.

| TABLE 4.2 | Percentage of writing pieces receiving each level of scoring by type of writing submitted by students for the Writing in the Nation's Classrooms study, grades 4 and 8: 1998 |
| --- | --- |

| All pieces | Percentage of writing pieces | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Score | 4th grade | 8th grade |
| 1 | 3 | 3 |
| 2 | 20 | 26 |
| 3 | 52 | 44 |
| 4 | 25 | 26 |
| *Poetry* | | |
| 1 | 5 | 3 |
| 2 | 25 | 25 |
| 3 | 50 | 44 |
| 4 | 21 | 28 |
| *Essays/reports* | | |
| 1 | 4 | 3 |
| 2 | 16 | 25 |
| 3 | 52 | 45 |
| 4 | 28 | 27 |
| *Narratives* | | |
| 1 | 3 | 3 |
| 2 | 21 | 27 |
| 3 | 51 | 44 |
| 4 | 25 | 26 |
| *Persuasive* | | |
| 1 | 1 | 3 |
| 2 | 23 | 28 |
| 3 | 58 | 43 |
| 4 | 19 | 27 |
| *Letters* | | |
| 1 | 3 | 8 |
| 2 | 19 | 35 |
| 3 | 59 | 40 |
| 4 | 20 | 17 |

NOTE: Scores are based on the four-point scale in the scoring rubric developed for the study (see figure 4.1). Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

Number of writing pieces and average scale score by type of writing from students who participated in both the Writing in the Nation's Classrooms study and the 1998 NAEP writing assessment, grades 4 and 8: 1998

| | 4th grade | | 8th grade | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number of pieces | Average score | Number of pieces | Average score |
| **All pieces** | **2,012** | **3.0** | **863** | **2.9** |
| Poetry | 143 | 2.9 | 80 | 3.0 |
| Essays/reports | 553 | 3.0 | 245 | 3.0 |
| Narrative | 1,068 | 3.0 | 385 | 2.8 |
| Persuasive | 107 | 3.0 | 113 | 2.9 |
| Letters | 141 | 2.9 | 40 | 2.4 |

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

Table 4.3 presents the number of pieces and average score by type of writing for students who participated in both the NAEP writing assessment and the classroom writing study. These data suggest that there was not a systematic difference in student performance related to type of writing. In other words, the average scores for poetry pieces, for example, did not differ from those for narratives, persuasive pieces, and letters.

As mentioned, only a subset of the students selected for the study participated in the NAEP writing assessment. At fourth grade, 1,005 students participated in both the classroom study and in the NAEP 1998 writing assessment. These fourth-graders submitted 2,012 pieces of writing. Similarly, 452 eighth-graders participated in both studies and submitted a total of 863 pieces of writing. Table 4.4 presents the percentage of pieces receiving each level of scoring by the type of pieces submitted by students who participated in both studies.

| *Poetry* | Percentage of Pieces | |
|---|---|---|
| Score | 4th grade | 8th grade |
| 1 | 4 | 3 |
| 2 | 26 | 25 |
| 3 | 48 | 44 |
| 4 | 22 | 29 |
| *Essays/reports* | | |
| 1 | 4 | 3 |
| 2 | 18 | 20 |
| 3 | 52 | 47 |
| 4 | 26 | 30 |
| *Narratives* | | |
| 1 | 3 | 5 |
| 2 | 21 | 32 |
| 3 | 52 | 42 |
| 4 | 24 | 21 |
| *Persuasive* | | |
| 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 2 | 19 | 26 |
| 3 | 57 | 50 |
| 4 | 23 | 23 |
| *Letters* | | |
| 1 | 3 | 13 |
| 2 | 21 | 40 |
| 3 | 57 | 43 |
| 4 | 20 | 5 |

NOTE: Scores are based on the four-point scale in the scoring rubric developed for the study (see figure 4.1) Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

Comparing performance of the total group of students who participated in the study with that of students who participated in both the study and the NAEP 1998 writing assessment suggests that there was little difference between the two. However, a comparison of how the smaller group of students within the study scored on the NAEP 1998 writing assessment with how the same students performed in self-selected writing pieces might be made.

In order to make this comparison, it was necessary to create a common scale. In the NAEP writing assessment, a six-point scale is used for scoring responses. For the purposes of this study, the NAEP scale was collapsed into three ranges: high, medium, and low. Similarly, the four-point scale on the classroom-based writing sample was also collapsed to high, medium, and low. These labels are chosen for convenience of reporting and are not meant to coincide with the National Assessment Governing Board's achievement levels or to suggest levels of satisfaction with student writing performance. Table 4.5 displays how the main assessment and special study writing score levels were collapsed into the common scale. The average of both pieces written by each student in the main assessment and both pieces submitted by students as part of the special study was used to place students in the high, medium, or low range. If a student submitted only one piece of writing, the single score was used; the average of the scores for two submitted writing pieces was used for most of the students.

| TABLE 4.5 | Criteria for combining scale score points from the Writing in the Nation's Classrooms study scale and the NAEP 1998 writing rubric score scale into low, medium, and high categories, grades 4 and 8: 1998 |

|  | Low | Medium | High |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Writing in the nation's classrooms study scale points | 1–1.99 | 2–3.49 | 3.5–4 |
| NAEP 1998 writing rubric score levels | 1–2.99 | 3–3.99 | 4.5–6 |

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

Performance on the NAEP 1998 writing assessment compared to that on pieces of classroom writing submitted for the study is presented in table 4.6 for grade 4 and table 4.7 for grade 8. The tables present a cross tabulation of the percentages of students whose scores were classified as low, medium, or high on the two writing scales. The results in the tables suggest that there is a positive relationship between performance on NAEP writing and classroom writing. The correlation between the two sets of writing scores was $r = .442$ for fourth grade and $r = .513$ for eighth grade. Both of these correlations are significantly different from zero, indicating that there is a positive relationship between classroom writing and NAEP test scores. Some variance between the two measures of student writing examined here is to be expected, given the differences in the nature of the NAEP writing prompts and the classroom writing assessments, as well as differences in scoring procedures between those used in NAEP and those in this study. The self-selected writing pieces also differ qualitatively from each other, even within type, reflecting varying amounts of time and effort that students spent on the assignments. The instruction to select "best" pieces may also have had the effect of restricting the range of performance in the classroom writing pieces.

The information on the whole suggests, at least on this nonrandom sample, that the likelihood that students' performance on NAEP writing and their performance on classroom writing assignments will rank-order in similar fashion.

Looking at the percentages in the highlighted diagonal cells of tables 4.6 and 4.7 suggests that on the cross-tabulated data few students scored in the low category, many more scored on both in the middle category and a modest percentage (11 to 14 percent) fell into the high category on both tests. Note that if the results of the tests were perfectly aligned (a correlation of $r = 1.0$) the values in the diagonal cells would total to 100 percent and there would be no entries in the other cells.

The data in table 4.6 and 4.7 also appear to suggest that student performance on their "best" classroom writing received somewhat higher ratings than their NAEP writing, as best as can be judged allowing for the differing scales. Lower percentages of students were in the low category on classroom writing (4 percent at fourth grade and 5 percent at eighth grade) than fell into that category on the NAEP scale (18 percent at fourth grade and 13 percent at eighth grade). In addition, higher percentages of students attained the high category with classroom writing (33 percent at fourth grade and 30 percent at eighth grade) than in the NAEP assessment (17 percent at fourth grade and 21 percent at eighth grade). Since the students were asked to select their best pieces of writing from the classroom (for which, unlike their NAEP writing samples, they may have had ample time to gather input and revise) these results are not surprising.

**4.6**

**Cross tabulation of the percentages of students by score category for the Writing in the Nation's Classrooms study and the NAEP 1998 writing assessment, grade 4: 1998**

| | Percentage of Students | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Writing in the nation's classrooms study scores | | | | Number of Students |
| NAEP Scores | Low | Medium | High | Total | |
| Low | 2 | 13 | 2 | 18 | 176 |
| Medium | 1 | 45 | 20 | 66 | 661 |
| High | 0 | 6 | 11 | 17 | 168 |
| Total | 4 | 63 | 33 | 100 | 1,005 |

NOTE: Percentages may not add to totals due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

T A B L E
**4.7**

**Cross tabulation of the percentages of students by score category for the Writing in the Nation's Classrooms study and the NAEP 1998 writing assessment, grade 8: 1998**

| | Percentage of Students | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Writing in the nation's classrooms study scores | | | | Number of Students |
| NAEP Scores | Low | Medium | High | Total | |
| Low | 2 | 10 | 1 | 13 | 60 |
| Medium | 3 | 47 | 15 | 65 | 295 |
| High | 0 | 8 | 14 | 21 | 97 |
| Total | 5 | 65 | 30 | 100 | 452 |

NOTE: Percentages may not add to totals due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

Table 4.8 presents a slightly different way of displaying the data. Percentages of students are presented for three mutually exclusive categories: those who scored in a higher category on classroom than on NAEP, those who scored in the same category on both assessments, and those who scored in a higher category on NAEP than on classroom writing. In both grades, the majority percentage appeared in the category of "performed the same." However, only 7 percent of fourth-graders and 11 percent of eighth-graders scored in a higher category on NAEP than on the classroom writing. These percentages are significantly lower than would be expected if the data were randomly distributed.

This is similar to the finding above, that student scores were apparently higher on their best classroom writing than on the NAEP writing samples.

These results also support common-sense assumptions about the limitations of on-demand writing assessments—such assessments allow the production of an initial draft, but do not permit the process of revision and feedback, as described in the teacher interviews, to unfold. Nevertheless, these results suggest that facility in producing initial drafts, in being able to write on demand, is related to better performance on classroom writing assignments.

**TABLE 4.8** Comparison of students' performance on the writing submitted for the Writing in the Nation's Classrooms study and the NAEP 1998 writing assessment, grades 4 and 8: 1998

| Percentages of students who | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| performed better on the self-selected writing pieces for the writing in the nation's classrooms study than the NAEP 1998 writing assessment | 35 | 26 * |
| performed the same for both writing in the nation's classrooms study and NAEP 1998 writing assessment | 58 * | 63 * |
| performed better on the NAEP 1998 writing assessment | 7 * | 11 * |
| Total number of students who participated in **both** the writing in the nation's classrooms study and the NAEP 1998 writing assessment | 1,005 | 452 |
| Correlation | .431 | .501 |
| Mean for the writing in the nation's classrooms study | 2.97 | 2.86 |
| Mean for the NAEP 1998 writing assessment | 3.47 | 3.63 |

*Significantly different from a third of the study sample who also participated in the NAEP writing assessment.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

## Student Work—Fourth Grade

The following pieces were selected to illustrate how students' writing was scored at fourth grade. The selections come from the two categories with the highest relative number of submissions—Narratives and Essays/Reports. In each category, one piece at each of the four score points is presented. In the actual scoring sessions, two papers at each score point, or "anchor papers," were used to illustrate the scale for the readers.

---

*Narrative—Score: 4*

Hi ! I'm Budy a "Golden Retriever" or at least that is my name and breed. Yesterday I went to the park with my owner. We took a nice walk next to the creek. As we were walking back I saw a cat and started chasing it when my owner called me back. By then it was time for breakfast. We went home and I was fed. I took a nap while my owner got ready to go do something called fishing. I overheard that it is really fun so i was willing to give it a try. I got in the car with him and we started to drive along the river. It took a long period of time before we finally reached the lake. We got out of the car and someone was there to greet us. The man had a smile on his face and they (meaning my owner and the other man ) , hugged. My owner, the man , and I all unloaded the car. We did some unpacking while the man started to cook dinner for us all. By the door there was a bed just for me, which made me really happy to have so much comfort. Since we did not bring any food for me. I ate the same as them except I did not eat at the table.

The next morning we got up real early and we finally went fishing! When we caught something I was allowed to go and pin it down on the dock. Total, we caught twelve-fish that day and guess what we had for dinner, fish.

Today we are mostly resting and watching football on TV. On the weather channel it said we are going to get some snow tomorrow and boy what an adventure that will be.

---

# The flood Story

It all started with the long winter. My mom woke me up at 6:30. She said there was a Big flood. There were sirins, people evacuading and people sand baging. It was craise!!!

My brother and I went to my grandma and grandpa's house. My mom and dad stayed in GrandForks and sand baged. I went to school in Velva for 2 weeks. Then there was a Big Big fier!!! At the Frist Nocove Bank.

When we came back it was diffrent. There was water evryware, Mud in basments, house off of there founa dashons, and fiers. We got not evin a inch in over basmint. But we had to get new carpet.

We traveld a lot. We went to Velva for 2 weeks, Fargo for 2 weeks and the lake for 2 wreks. The water got up to 54 feet. Now people are bilding, ficsing basments, and moving back into houses. Things are geting back to normil. They are going to tare down some howls and make dikes were the house were.

By

writing

"I love to play football"

I love to / play the linebacker
its cool. I love to tackle.
I have hurt somebody.
I learned to play
football when I was
4 years old. I love
football.

# The Flood

I was ling lving in my bad then my mom akte ne to go to the mall. waln we got out of the mall it was snow at night I swau my Causns coing in I was sprise too see them. They stat hore for 10 day. we did a lote ta gare one day it clodrd up they went home.

# School clothes☺ #2

"Students should not be required to wear school uniforms." in the United States we have freedom. Students won't be more disciplined by matching their clothes. If the girls wear skirts they won't play the sports like soccer, and other kinds of stuff that should be worn with shorts or pants. We all have diffrent amount of money so all peaple wount beable to buy a uniform. People are diffrent shapes and sizes so some peaple might think they look funny. Some people want to look unique. And if they got to pick thier clothes they would learn to be a good decision maker.

You should never judge a person by thier looks or size. Some may be blind or deaf. Some dont have legs to walk with or arms to trow with.

It's very wrong to judge somebody. If somebody. If someo. did you like that would you like it If you don't want somebody talking about you than don't talk about them.

So insrtead of talking about someone, you should be thanking God for what you have. Because he is good. He gave everthing to you that you have now.

Rain forests help us in many different ways. The Rain Forest produces Oxygen. Oxygem keeps us alive we breath Oxygen from the Rain Forest and we breath out carbon dioxside from trees. Rain Forest's plants give us medicine to live. The plants, trees, and Flowers give us medicine. We could die without the medicine from the Rain Forest. Animals depend on trees for homes. Animals also get food from the Rain Forest. If we cut down the Rain Foest we will destroy, 50 percent of the world's Oxygen.

WartHead

Alligators are one of the Dinkor.
Relitevs alligators have tow set ( of eyes
one tow protect the clen set, of eyes
alligator eet fish deer ands edru t peape

I dint Lik it bicas it was Big c
fat and scere and it ets peopol
and other animales lik Rabbits
docks fish

## Student Work—Eighth Grade

The following pieces were selected to illustrate how students' writing was scored at eighth grade. These samples were selected from the pieces that were anchor papers. The selections come from the two categories with the highest relative number of submissions—Narratives and Essays/Reports used in the training of scorers. In each category, one piece at each of the four score points is presented.

---

### *Narrative—Score: 4*

### A Dream

Have you ever wondered why you can never finish a dream while resting at the beach? Well, I am here to tell you the crazy, simple answer to this weird question. It is as easy as this.

First, there are the waves, rumbling into the shore leaving a deep impression on the soft, smooth sand and then departing in a silent song of ripples. Then there are people and kids running around on the sand, kicking it up into a cloud of dust. Kids are constructing castles and covering each other in sand, yelling and screaming. Music plays up and down the streets from stores and homes, keeping the beat, while some people dance in the streets.

From your seat you can smell the relaxing, clean ocean air. Moist, tender air gently hits your face with every slight breeze. Even bubbles, falling from rising apartments and stores hit your face in a delicate pattern.

A breeze even carries the sweet aroma of food down the street. Partial to ice-cream, I head down to the ice-cream shop. There I had a large variety of flavors to choose from; but, of coarse, I had to get to a sweet, delicious, chocolate ice-cream.

As I sat there I began to fall asleep, but was awaken by the sounds and smells of the beach. Standing up I saw all the excitement running around on people's faces. I just figured that the beach is too exciting and loud to rest, besides, what is the point, there is just so much to do, while at the beach.

---

## The perfect pet

I was at the mall and I went into the pet store. I saw a big sign that said "The perfect pet." I went over to the cage. It was an alien, It was so cute. When I got home, I told my mom that it was what I wanted for my Birthday.

Because they are so little and cute, it makes me really want one. They are light green and they have big round belluyies. They have little round head and they do not have any hair.

They are very well behaved. Sometimes they act silly and funny. They often act crazty. Because they are so smart, it could help me with my homework.

It's so much like me and that makes it just right for me. It is even silly like me. I love to go shopping too! Every one should have one.

The next day was my birthday and I was to the last present. It was the smallest box. I opened it and it was just what I wanted, a baby alien. I named it ziggy and I was so happy.

### The Friend

There once was an little girl who didn't have any friends to play with. One morning she woked up to be an new friend. She asked, "where did you come from?" Then the friend replied I come when ever you become lonely, I will be their as a friend. So they both went down stairs for breakfast. Do

If I suddenly found the courage to do ot thing I have always been afraid of doing is driving a car Because if I was going really fast and somebody drove though a red light something could brake or get killed. Or if someone ran in front of my car and I couldn't stop.

*Essay/report—Score: 4*

Dear Mr. ▆▆▆▆▆▆

      Upon hearing of your proposal to add an additional hour to each school day, I regret to inform you that I was quite opposed to this idea. I have decided to write you to discuss my position on this issue. Foremost, you must keep in mind that we, as teenagers, have responsibilities at home that must be done, on top of completing homework. Adding an extra hour will prevent us from having ample time complete everything that is asked of us. Also, we are already exhausted at the end of the day, enforcing this new time schedule would be draining us of any remaining energy we may still possess. Finally, this will cut out on after school practice times for outdoor athletic programs.

      First, as I mentioned, we teenagers have responsibilities outside of school. For example, when I get home, I am suppose to wash the dishes in the sink, feed the dogs, goats, turtles, chickens, and the ducks, and straighten the living room, my room, and any other rooms in the house. Then, after all that I must do my homework and get ready for school the next day before my 10 o'clock bedtime. When I get home now I barely have enough time to do everything I'm supposed to. I'd hate to think how much would go unaccomplished if I had to attend school for an extra hour each day.

      Furthermore, I get up at 5 o'clock every morning to get ready for school and catch the bus at six-fifteen and go to my classes. By the time three-thirty rolls around I'm completely exhausted, and far more ready to go home. Adding an extra hour will probably put me staying at school until four-thirty. If I can barely contain myself until three-thirty there are a myriad of chances that I'll begin falling asleep in my classes. As we both know, children who sleep in class end up missing out on an extreme amount of important, valuable

information. This, in turn, will cause my grades to slip and my future at Harvard grim.

Finally, as you may already know our athletic program consists of several students. I personally participate in quite a few after school activities such as track, volleyball, and basketball. Our practices are everyday after school from three-thirty until five-thirty. Because most of the school year falls under Day Lights Savings time, it gets dark outside around five-thirty. Now, since school lets out at three-thirty instead of four-thirty we have just enough time to complete practice before dark and get home. Adding the extra hour will extend practice until six o'clock which is thirty minutes after dark. Most parents, and coaches, won't allow us to practice until dark, therefore, forcing us to cut practice an hour short. Most people who attended ███████████ School realize how important the physical education is. ████████ is one of the top ranked schools within ████████████ School District as far as sports go. Losing an hour to every day of practice will ultimately cause us to lose that spot.

In conclusion, I think very strongly that adding an extra hour to the school day will not be in best interest for the students or the school. When I think about the idea to add the additional hour I feel empathetic towards your idea, but I'm determined to stick with my opinion for the well-being of the students, parents, teachers, and most importantly the school. Mr. ████████, think back to when you were a teenager, would you really have wanted an extra hour of school?

> Sincerely,
> Jane Doe

I think it is unfair the all the students are only alowed two minutes between class. The reson I think it is unfair is because two minutes just gives us enough time to get to class. Another reson is because some time teachers loste track of time and let us out late and then we are late for class and then we don't have enough time to use the bathroom. So please consider the following.

When we are walking from class to class we tend to talk and walk a little slower then we usually do. Most of use get to class rite on time or are late. If we are late to class the teacher gives us a warning the first time. Then she gives us two more. After all three warnings are gone she writes us up or gives us detension. Most of us don't like to be on the bad records.

Another reson I think this rule is unfair is because when we are in class doing our work we are

not paying any attention to the time so we loose track of the time. The teachers also loose track of time so they let us out late. Or if the class is acting up, the teacher tells us she wont let us out untell we are quite. So when we fonally get out of class and get to our next class we are late.

Since we have to hurry to get from class to class we don't have enough time to use the bathroom so when we get to class a bundle of people have to use the bathroom. The teacher lets the first two or three people go then she gets tierd of us asking so she doesn't let any one else go. Sometimes we cant hold it any longer so we decied to us the bathroom between classes then were late.

The conclusion I came to is if you could give us one or two more minutes we would all be happier. It would not take away much of our libraning time. It is hard for us to consintrate when we have to use the bathroom or got detension on our mind. All were asking for is one more minute.

One reason I think the eighth graders score low is because they did not have a good breakfast. So they did not have a good reason to consequenty to there work because they are hungary. The effect was they could not think nor folses on the writing. Because all they thinking about is they are hungary and they can't weit until lunch.

Second reason I think the eighth graders score low is because some of the eighth graders did not take the test. Some did not want to take the test nor some kids were not here to take it. The effect was that they made the other eighth graders go down. So the kids who would have scored high did not take it because they was sick or they could not make up a make up test.

Third reason I think the eighth graders score low is because lots of them was

they just wrote anything or just sat there doing nothing.

<u>Do children get their rights by given respect to their elders.</u>

Children have the rights to talk on the phone if they need to. They can hear there Kind of music if they like it. Some children don't have some of these rights because of there parents.

Kids have to respect there elders to get there rights, of doing what they wont. If you don't respect, you don't get rights af doing what you wont.

Like talking on the phone, watching T.V. or playing sports. Children get their rights by given some respect to their elders. But do children have enough rights to do what they feel like to do.

Almost every Kid has some of their rights.

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# appendix A
# Procedures for the Study of Writing in the Nation's Classrooms

## Overview

The *Writing Framework and Specifications for the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress* specified that the NAEP 1998 writing assessment should include a "classroom writing component . . . [to] allow NAEP the opportunity to study samples of student writing based on classroom assignments."[1] The 1998 writing assessment was administered to national samples of fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-graders. It was also administered to eighth-graders in states and jurisdictions that participated in the NAEP state-by-state assessment. Across all three grades, nearly 160,000 students were assessed in the national and state samples.

This study, designed with the help of an advisory committee consisting of members of the NAEP writing development committee, focused on the classroom writing of students at the fourth and eighth grades. As planning for the study proceeded, two primary purposes evolved:

1) To supplement information about classroom practices and techniques gained from the background questionnaires routinely administered to teachers in participating schools as part of the main NAEP assessment

2) To examine student writing done in the classroom in relation to performance on the NAEP writing assessment

Educational Testing Service (ETS) oversaw the design, administration, analysis, and reporting of the study. Westat conducted field operations for the study.

## Design of the Study

One hundred intact classrooms each, at fourth and eighth grades, in schools that participated in the main NAEP assessment, were chosen to participate in the study. To arrive at 100 responding schools for each grade, a sample of 129 fourth-grade schools and 134 eighth-grade schools was selected, allowing for anticipated school withdrawals.

Within this subsample of schools from the national NAEP assessment, one language-arts classroom was selected using a random number process from a list of all language-arts classrooms for the grade at which the school was sampled. Within the selected classroom, all students were asked to participate in the study, thus the ultimate sampling unit is the classroom, not the student as in main NAEP. The samples of schools, from which the schools for the writing study were a subset, were selected from a complex stratified cluster sample, necessitating the use of weights to make the sample of classrooms representative of all fourth- or eighth-grade language-arts classrooms in the nation. Note that this is not the same as a representative sample of language-arts teachers, since

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[1] (National Assessment Governing Board). (n.d.) *Writing Framework and Specifications for the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress*. Washington, DC: Author.

in each school the language-arts teachers teach varying numbers of classes. Therefore this sample is a representative sample of classrooms, not teachers.

Weights were also created for students in the samples for the writing study, so that the study sample can be representative of the language-arts students in the fourth or eighth grade. One caveat, however, is that the subsamples formed by the students who took both the study and the main NAEP writing assessment were not weighted to be a representative sample. It was felt that these overlaps might not be representative, so results for these subsamples were reported unweighted, and no inference should be made back to the population of fourth- and eighth-grade language-arts students.

In the selected classes, each student was asked to submit two pieces of writing, with each piece being a different kind of writing (such as a story and a report) that represented the student's best work. For each piece submitted, students responded to a brief questionnaire that asked them to describe the assignment and to respond to some questions about how they wrote the piece.

Most of the teachers of the selected classes had responded to the main NAEP teacher questionnaire, and a number of their students had also participated in the main NAEP writing assessments. Therefore information about the schools and teachers gathered from the main NAEP assessment could be connected to information obtained in this study. While the principle measure of performance for this study was student scores on the writing pieces submitted for the study (i.e., writing done for class), those scores also were compared to the students' scores on the main NAEP assessment.

In addition, the teachers of the selected classes were interviewed by trained interviewers. In these interviews, teachers were asked to describe their general approach to writing, to describe the steps in a typical assignment, to discuss how they give feedback, to describe whether and how they used peer editing, portfolios, and computers, and to indicate what additional resources they would like. Each interview, which lasted about 45 minutes, was audiotaped, transcribed, and then analyzed.

## Teacher Interviews
### *Developing and Administering the Interview*

A subcommittee of the NAEP writing development committee oversaw the development of the interview protocol. The committee included Arthur Applebee, University of Albany/SUNY; Miles Myers, formerly of National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE); Pat Porter, Texas Education Agency; Eileen Baldwin, fourth-grade teacher, South Brunswick, NJ; Doughtry Long, ninth-grade teacher, Trenton, NJ. The subcommittee decided upon the aims of the study and chose the subjects for the teacher interview. They recommended that the interview address such issues as how teachers used the writing process, how teachers evaluated student work, how teachers used portfolios and computers, how teachers were influenced by state and district assessments and standards, and what additional resources teachers needed.

ETS staff experienced in the design of interviews drafted the interview protocol in accordance with the committee's recommendations. The questions were then tried out in interviews with several

fourth- and eighth-grade teachers in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and California. Feedback from the interviewed teachers was used to revise and sharpen the interview questions. The complete protocol is presented in figure 1.1 in chapter 1 of this report.

### Training the Interviewers

Westat conducted a full-day training session for interviewers in December 1997. The people who administered the interviews were experienced Westat test administrators, some with more than 20 years of experience in administering NAEP assessments. In the day-long training, ETS staff who had worked on the development of the interview protocol served as trainers. The trainers went over every question with the Westat administrators who would be doing the interviewing. They provided a document that listed possible answers and provided guidance on when and how to ask follow-up questions. They also showed excerpts from videotaped interviews so that the interviewers could anticipate the kinds of responses they were likely to receive. The interviewers then worked in teams to practice interviewing.

### Analyzing the Interview Responses

The body of this report includes both quantitative and anecdotal information from the teacher interviews, reported in tables and quotations, respectively. Some of the information from the interview was asked in yes/no format (e.g., "Do you use portfolios?"), or in easily quantifiable form (e.g., "How many hours a week do you spend on writing?"). Other information was not presented in readily quantifiable form (as when teachers described the steps in a typical assignment). ETS researchers worked with several teachers to develop a coding scheme for analyzing the

interviews. The staff worked inductively, first by reading through up to 70 interviews and noting responses to questions. Those responses that occurred in more than one interview were noted. Eventually, responses that occurred frequently became the basis for the coding categories. An "other" category was created to handle infrequent or unique responses for some questions.

Five local teachers (three at eighth grade and two at fourth grade) were then chosen to be "interview coders" and to apply the coding scheme to the 200 interview transcripts. Each of the teachers had extensive experience in either coding interviews, participating in similar research projects, or evaluating teachers.

The five teachers met for two days with ETS staff to practice using the coding scheme and, most importantly, to agree on terminology. They began with a list that defined most of the terms on the coding scheme; they then discussed and revised those definitions. They then coded interviews that had been precoded by ETS staff, compared their codings, and came to consensus when there was disagreement. They continued to confer with each other and with ETS researchers in the course of coding the interviews as they refined the categories and reached consensus on the appropriate application of the categories.

Two interview coders read each teacher interview. Differences were then resolved by a third coder. Information from the interview codings was then key-entered and translated into a database. The interview questions were organized into sections for reporting: activities, evaluative and instructional strategies, time spent on writing, a favorite assignment, collections of student work, computer use, support and obstacles.

The interview questions were presented in a standard order during the interviews. Sometimes in answering one question, a teacher might also offer a response to a question scheduled to be asked later in the interview. Within any given interview, the coders were not concerned with *how often* a particular technique, assignment, or practice was mentioned, or whether it was mentioned in connection with a particular question, but rather *whether* it was mentioned at all.

## Collecting, Coding, and Scoring Student Work

### Creating the Scoring and Coding System

In an earlier NAEP study of classroom-based writing done as part of the NAEP 1992–writing assessment, student work was separated into categories for the three modes of writing described in the NAEP framework: persuasive, informative, and narrative, as well as categories for skill sheets and "other."[2] For this study, the development committee advised that using categories derived from the writing pieces students submitted and using more categories would provide a more nuanced picture of the writing submitted for the study. Therefore, based on review of the samples provided, categories were derived to cover the range of student work. The categories were: personal narrative, creative narrative, essay/report, persuasive essay/report, poem, skill sheet, and other.

In addition to coding for type of writing, scorers were asked to rate each piece of student work on a four-point scale. In consultation with teachers at the fourth and eighth grades, ETS researchers devised a scoring guide that recommended an approach, taking into account the holistic scoring process on elements recommended in the NAEP framework: development, including use of details, organization, language use, and command of writing mechanics. Those aspects of writing are also the basis of the guides used in scoring the main NAEP assessment of writing in 1998 (see the *NAEP 1998 Writing Report Card for the Nation and the States*).[3]

### Sample Selection and Further Refinement of the Scoring and Coding Systems

Five K–12 educators from the San Francisco area, all of whom were experienced essay readers and who had served as scoring leaders for other large-scale writing assessments, were selected as scorers. They met with ETS research staff in the spring of 1998 to review the coding and scoring systems and to select pieces of writing to use during the training. These scoring leaders worked together for two days, first as a full group, then as grade-level groups (one for fourth grade and one for eighth grade), discussing distinctions between coding categories and scoring levels.

These educators verified that the single scoring guide was usable and seemed reasonable for all types of writing and for both grade levels. They then selected writing pieces from the samples that they considered to be clear examples of each coding category and scoring level. They also selected student samples that they felt would be difficult to code or score in order to train the scorers how to approach problematic samples.

[2] Gentile, C.A., Martin-Rehrmann, J., and Kennedy, J.H. (1995). *Windows Into the Classroom: NAEP 1992 Writing Portfolio Study*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics.

[3] Greenwald, E.A., Persky, H.R., Campbell, J.R., and Mazzeo, J. (1999). *NAEP 1998 Writing Report Card for the Nation and the States* (NCES 99-462). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Educational Statistics.

***Coding for Type of Writing***

As noted earlier, the coding system included several broad categories. Scorers were asked to assign each piece of classroom writing to the category that seemed to best capture the intent of the writing. Two types of narrative writing were delineated in the coding system: personal narrative (stories about self) and creative narrative (stories about fictionalized events or people). While personal narrative could be fictionalized or exaggerated, it was typically nonfiction written in the first person; examples included journal writing and descriptions of an important person or event in a student's life. Creative narrative involved events and characters created by the student.

Poetry was coded as a separate classification. Included in the examples shown to readers were a variety of poems in different forms, including free verse, acrostic poems, diamantes (a form in which two objects are described in a poem that uses a common characteristic of both as a turning point), and haiku. Another category encompassed informative writing and was called "essay/report." Writing in this category included descriptive writing, explanation of a topic or event, research reports, and reviews of books or films. A separate category, persuasive essay/report, was used to describe essays in which the writer took a stand and/or tried to persuade the reader to take a particular action.

Communications in a letter format were classified in a separate category. Included in the letter category were letters to family members (some of which detailed events) and to pen pals. Letters that tried to convince the reader of a particular

| FIGURE A.1 | Writing categories for the Writing in the Nation's Classrooms study, grades 4 and 8: 1998 |

*Type of writing: (mark only one)*

- Personal narrative (personal writings [e.g., journals] about events, people etc.)
- Creative narrative/writing (e.g., fictionalized story, dramatic scene)
- Essay/report (e.g., reactions/reviews of films/books, topic reports, interviews, descriptive writing)
- Persuasive essay/report (e.g., presenting an opinion or stand in essay or report form)
- Letter (e.g., thank you, invitations, informative letters to informal or formal audiences)
- Persuasive letter (e.g., letter to the editor, complaint letter)
- Poem (e.g., song lyrics, haiku)
- Skill sheet (e.g., closed response such as a list)

stance were called "persuasive letter." Included in this category were letters to political figures stating the student's opinion on an issue, letters advocating a position, and even letters that incorporated historical research and creative narrative (e.g., a letter home written from the perspective of a Civil War soldier).

Finally, two additional categories were included in the coding system to account for pieces that did not fall into the other categories. The skill-sheet category called for the identification of closed responses such as vocabulary or spelling lists or a response of a few disconnected words or incomplete thoughts. Because of the nature of the assignment, many skill sheets were thus given a score of "not enough evidence to judge." The "other"

category was included for pieces that could not be classified into the other categories. On the whole, scorers were encouraged to try to fit student samples into categories other than the skill sheet or "other" category when possible: a few sentences were sufficient to place an essay in the essay/report rather than skill sheet category (though that essay might receive a very low score, depending on the quality of the writing).

### The Scoring Guide

The scoring guide shown below was used in conjunction with sample pieces of writing. The four-point scale could essentially be divided in half: upper-level writing performance demonstrated command of development, language use, and mechanics; lower-level pieces demonstrated difficulties expressing or develop-

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**FIGURE A.2**  Scoring guide (rubric) used by raters to evaluate student-submitted writing for the Writing in the Nation's Classrooms study, grades 4 and 8: 1998

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*Quality of writing: (mark only one)*

- **(4)** **Elaboration**, **sustained organization,** and **clear development** are used to lead a reader through the piece. **Details** are used to expand or connect ideas. **Precise word choice** and **language use** enhance the presentation. Few errors are evident.

- **(3)** There is a **clear progression** of events or information. The writing is **focused** and **developed**. **Some details** are used. Language is generally fluent. Some errors are evident.

- **(2)** Presentation, development, and organization may be **uneven** in places OR may be **mostly undeveloped** with **few details**. Errors in language use may interfere with understanding.

- **(1)** Ideas are **not developed**. The organization is **difficult to follow**. Piece may be **incoherent in places**. Errors permeate the piece and make it difficult to understand.

- **(N)** Not enough evidence to judge: Piece is only a few words that may be somewhat linked (list, cluster, spelling tests, closed answer skill sheets, entirely plagiarized, etc.).

- **(I)** Illegible

- **(B)** Blank

ing ideas clearly and fully and a lack of control of language use and mechanics.

In addition to the four levels of writing, the scoring system contained three other categories: blank, illegible, and not enough evidence to judge. In some cases, students did not submit two pieces of writing or submitted only the cover sheet explaining the piece without actually including the writing. In such instances, pieces were categorized as blank. In other cases, a piece was indecipherable, usually because of incomplete or light photocopying. Rather than have readers attempt to score these, they were marked as illegible. The other category, "N" for not enough evidence to judge, was used to identify pieces that did not include enough student writing for the reader to judge the quality. Examples in this category included many of the pieces coded as skill sheets or "other," including word lists or clusters, outlines, closed-answer skill sheets, or graphics without writing. Pieces that were judged by the scorers to be entirely copied from another source, such as the Internet or an encyclopedia, were also categorized as having not enough evidence to judge the quality of student writing.

### Selection of Scorers

For the purposes of this study, classroom teachers were thought to be the best evaluators of student work. The majority of the scorers were classroom teachers. A few scorers had recently taken administrative roles in schools, and two were recently retired from teaching. A number of the scorers had served as scorers for other large-scale assessment programs. Although the same scoring guide was used at the two grade levels, the samples for each grade level demonstrated a higher level of expectation for eighth grade than for

fourth grade. The two grade levels were read separately in two three-day readings.

Based on their experience in essay reading and training, some scorers were asked to serve as table leaders. One scorer at each grade level acted as chief reader whose charge was to lead the training of scoring, answer questions and otherwise direct the scoring. Three other scorers at each grade level served as table leaders; they answered questions from scorers at their table, and read pieces previously read by scorers at their table to ensure accuracy in coding and scoring.

### Training Procedures

Each scoring session began with the chief reader explaining the coding system and showing examples of pieces that fit each category. The scorers were given precoded pieces, then asked to assign additional pieces to categories. They compared their decisions on the practice pieces to those agreed on beforehand by the chief reader, table leaders, and ETS staff. Some minor adjustments were made in response to scorers' comments.

The chief reader then introduced the four-point scoring guide and showed some prescored papers to familiarize scorers with the scoring scale. The chief reader then discussed a set of anchor papers, which consisted of two papers at each score point, representing different categories of writing. The student work samples with scores at the end of chapter 4 would be examples of anchor papers. Finally, scorers were asked to read and code several groups of practice papers. These sample sets were organized into groups so that scorers would encounter papers in different modes and at different score levels, as they would during live scoring. Samples were included at a wide

range of score points especially for categories in which the majority of pieces fell, such as essays, poems, and creative and personal narratives. After reading each group of practice papers, scorers revealed their scores and discrepancies were resolved. Scorers' questions were resolved by the table leader or the chief reader. Additional time was spent answering questions before readers began looking at actual folders of student writing. The initial training on the first day of the reading took about four hours. Additional training sets were selected and used by the scoring leaders on the second and third days to highlight particular questions or issues. Those training sets were built in part from papers encountered during the live scoring to address any issues that had not been previously dealt with in discussion.

### Scoring Support

Table leaders spent most of their time scoring pieces previously scored at their table and discussing with scorers any differences of opinion about the score or the code the piece received. In this way, scorers received frequent, informal feedback on how well they were doing. Any piece coded as "other" or scored as not enough evidence to judge or illegible was re-read by one of the table leaders.

### Scoring Procedures

Prior to the reading, the folders were randomized, placed in batches, and score sheets inserted. Using a random number chart, approximately 15 percent of the batches were selected for second readings. Each piece of writing in a folder was scored by a different reader, and the score, and the score sheets were removed after scoring to ensure that no reader saw the score that another reader had given to a piece.

### Analysis of the Scores

In order to have enough papers in a category to support meaningful analysis, a few of the categories used by the scorers to code the pieces of writing as to type of writing were combined. The resulting categories are as follows:

- Narratives (combined the categories of personal and creative narratives)
- Essays/reports
- Persuasive pieces (combined the categories of persuasive essays and persuasive letters)
- Poetry
- Letters

Because of the wide range of writing pieces submitted and the fact that the pieces were self-selected, as well as the relatively small number of students involved, all interpretation of the data on student performance should be done very cautiously. In addition, although the sample was chosen to be representative of schools across the nation, the teachers selected are not a representative sample of teachers, nor are the students a representative sample of students. Thus, this study does not include an analysis by subgroups. Instead, the focus of this study is on the narrower questions of what types of writing students produced, student performance by type of writing, and comparisons of student performance on NAEP and on writing pieces submitted for the study.

# appendix B
# Teacher Interviews

## Overview

In chapter 2 of this report, the results from the coding of the interviews are presented as percentages of classrooms in which teachers who mentioned a particular item. What is lacking from this information is the complex thinking that underlies each coded response, and the interconnectedness of the teacher's work. These transcribed interviews are included to convey more authentically the teachers' thinking. These four interviews were selected because they touch on themes that are expressed in many of the interviews. They were not chosen because they express a particular viewpoint or represent particular methods of teaching. Indeed, each interview was as individual as each teacher, and reading through these four interviews should convey a sense of both the common ground and the individuality of the interviewed teachers.

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### Interview I—Fourth Grade

***Q*** I would like to begin by asking you about your approach to writing instruction. If you had to summarize in a few sentences, how would you describe your overall approach to teaching writing?

***A*** Well, we always work on mechanics for writing. But beyond that, I feel like writing instruction needs to involve something that the students have some knowledge of. So any writing topic that we do we have a pre-writing, information-gathering type of activity so that they have some understanding of what they're going to be writing about.

And a lot of times I connect the different subject areas with the writing, and also try to involve art a lot in our writing.

***Q*** I saw the drawings attached with your samples. Okay, now I'd like to ask you about the writing activities that typically take place in this class each week across the school year. If I had the opportunity to spend a week in your classroom, what are four or five writing activities I would be most likely to see you and your students doing during that week?

***A*** Okay, every day we write in a journal. And the journals are a personal type of writing that isn't necessarily graded. I do give them the subject, but it'll be very broad. For instance, one of the subjects might be respect, or ice cream, or "My Dog," things like that. And so they write every day for a short amount of time in their journal. It's not a long assignment.

We do a lot of writing connected with our reading. One of the things that I always ask them to do when we read stories in our reading book is to summarize and give their opinion of the stories.

We try to work with doing different types of writing with them, so we work on descriptive writing, we work on narrative writing, we work on expository writing to familiarize them that there are different kinds of writing. And so maybe once a week we'll choose one of those types of writing and work on that.

I usually have them do an autobiography during the last part of the year, where they write about themselves and we make a book and they have that to take home.

I don't know how many that was.

**Q** Please take me through a single writing assignment so that I can get a sense of the sequence of activities involved. You decide what kind of assignment you want to think about, then take me through the steps you and your students typically go through from preparing for the assignment all the way through to its completion. I think you said you did a lot of pre-writing. Something that would show what steps you do.

**A** We just did a writing assignment that is one of my favorite ones, so I'll tell you about it. First of all, I connect this assignment with social studies, with grammar, with literature, with art, and with writing.

And the first thing that I do is we talk about medieval times and how people lived during that time period in history. And we talk about some of the things that we have heard about medieval times—for instance, the knights and wearing their armor, and the dragons that the knights were supposed to fight. And we talk about which of those things would be fantasy and which of those would be nonfiction.

And then I read them the book *St. George and the Dragon*. And the particular book that I have is illustrated in a medieval fashion, where each page has got a border with a lot of drawings from the time period about it. And I read them that book, and then we take the description of the dragon that St. George fought, and we talk about all the adjectives that describe the dragon, and we talk about the adverbs that describe his behavior.

And then their first assignment, other than listening and discussion, is they draw a picture using the old illuminated-type manuscript drawings that they used in the medieval times to make books. They do a drawing of a dragon. Another thing we talk about is how books used to have to each be written by hand, and writing with feather pens and using ink and ink bottles and all of that.

And, so, then they draw their picture of the dragon and then we have a writing assignment that is for them to describe the dragon that they've drawn. And they have to write at least two paragraphs. One paragraph has to tell about what the dragon looks like, and one paragraph has to tell about how he acts, his behavior.

And then a follow-up writing activity to that is to write a fantasy story about a dragon. The students seem to enjoy doing that—well, of course, because they like dragons and because it's finally a chance for an illustration they can put blood in. So they like that. And they do better on their writing when they've gotten some enthusiasm for what they're going to be writing about, I think.

**Q** I've heard that many times. Then that's the end; they've written the story. Do you and your students follow the same steps as in the previous question for all assignments, for all kinds of writing? For example, would the steps be different for an assignment that is longer or shorter than the example you gave? Or do you pretty much follow the exact same?

**A** There's always some kind of pre-discussion of writing. And every time I ask my students to write, we go over the mechanics that are necessary to have good writing. We review that every time.

And another technique that I get them to use a lot of the time is a pre-writing technique—I call it "making a story map"—where they make a diagram of the different paragraph . . . the main idea of the paragraphs. And then coming off from that main idea, it's sort of a brainstorming type of thing of what they want to write about. And then they can use that for their paragraphs, because one of the problems that they have is sticking to a main idea. They'll start rambling around in the same paragraph about all different kinds of topics. So they're starting to get the idea of staying with that main idea in their paragraph.

For a longer writing assignment, I would probably follow the same steps, there would just be more of the . . . maybe the story map would have more paragraph "bubble." We don't do a lot of long writing assignments.

**Q** Okay, that question is going to be coming, too. Evaluation and instructional strategies: In your writing instruction in general, what kinds of advice or feedback do you give students about their writing? What do you tend to emphasize?

**A** Okay, well, we made up a rubric in my class that has the things written down.

**Q** I'm sorry. Define "rubric" because not everyone that's listening to the tape is going to know. Define "rubric" for me.

**A** A rubric is just a list of what you're going to be looking for in the assignment. And sometimes rubrics have got points assigned to each of the different areas that you're going to be looking at. So the rubric that I have, I have possible points on it and then I have a place for the students to evaluate their own work. So they can decide how many points they think that particular part of the writing deserved. And then I go back and I put my points, and then we look at it together to see, you know, what did you think, what did I think. They're usually a little tougher on themselves than I am.

And one of the most important things that I stress in writing, besides mechanics, is that their sentences need to make some sense. And sometimes they think they wrote something a certain way, but when we read it back it doesn't say what they thought it did. So we're working on, you know, pay attention to what you actually wrote compared to what you thought you wrote.

I have mechanics in the rubric—capital letters at the beginning of the sentence and other proper places; punctuation at the end.

**Q** I see that you have the possible points and then they have the points.

**A** Sure, and then the most points, the area that I give the most points on is whether or not the story makes sense. So in this area on continuity, does it have a good beginning and a middle, something interesting happening, and then a definite ending?

**Q** Okay, so that's what you emphasize. How and when do you convey your advice and evaluations to students?

**A** We do a rough draft writing and then we take the rubric. I give them the rubric at the beginning so that they can follow along with their rough draft. And then after they've written their rough draft, they evaluate it, they hand it in to me. I go over it, I evaluate it with points, do some correcting on their papers—I prefer to talk with them about it, but I don't always have time to talk to every single one. And then I hand it back to them.

If they have questions about anything I've written, they can come and ask me. And

then they need to look at what I've corrected and the way I've evaluated their points, and they need to go over their writing again and do a revised copy. And usually we stop there with the revised. We don't do another one because they really balk at copying things too many times. And then that next step, revised copy, is generally more correct than the rough draft.

**Q** Do you read and evaluate students' writing at different points or in different ways for different assignments or different students? And if so, how?

**A** Most of my students are real anxious to bring what they're writing up to me to see if they're doing it right and if it's okay. I encourage them to finish it before they start showing me what they've written—unless they've got a question about how to do it. But some of them don't have enough confidence to do their whole assignment and they just want the reassurance that, yes, you're doing it right; yes, you indented your paragraph; yes, that's right— just keep going, you're fine, keep going.

Sure, I think that you do evaluate differently for different students, because different students have different needs for what you need to be talking to them about. Some students I have are very independent; they'll get through their whole rough draft and sometimes not even need to do a revised copy. Then I have some that, you know, could stand to do two or three more copies. But it's a big variety of students that I have.

**Q** Okay, I think that answers it. Do your students look at or listen to each other's work during class?

**A** Yes, they ask each other to read what they've written. And they work together on ideas, and they're allowed to give each other advice or ideas about what they're writing.

**Q** When and how is peer response or evaluation done in your class?

**A** During their rough draft is when they work together. And they can ask whomever they want to. They can ask their friends. Some of the students are better writers, and so some people go to them for advice because they know that they're better writers. Was that question just about other students?

**Q** Yes, peer response. Do you ever read aloud or to each other or in front of the class?

**A** Every day.

**Q** How, if at all, do you have your students use self-assessment or reflection to develop their writing?

**A** Well, I think the rubric helps them with that. It's a way that they *can* do self-assessment. It gives them a little list of things to look for whereas, if they don't have the rubric, they don't really, I mean, they know capital letters and they know punctuation, but they don't know specific things to go through and check off. I think that it has helped them to be more organized because we talked about how brainstorming is really wonderful, and all these great ideas come, but they're not in any kind of order. And in order to make sense, we have to get our great ideas and organize them so that they come together in groups of what we're talking about so other people will understand.

The rubrics work well for that. And also I think the story maps help them with that, too, organizing their thoughts.

**Q** What have you found works best to get all students engaged in writing?

**A** Well, if you can find a topic that they are all interested in, of course, it's the best thing. I think that the more writing you do and the more praise you can give them for their efforts, the more they'll like to write.

I usually try to incorporate some kind of art with the writing, so that sometimes that's a little more fun for them too . . . .

**Q** At this age they like to draw in conjunction?

**A** Right. And I even made up a special paper where it's the 8 1/2 x 14 paper, and half of it has lines on it and the other half is blank. And so we write. And then the other side is . . . sometimes we put our story maps over there and sometimes we put drawings over there.

**Q** So they can illustrate the story with their writing. What have you found is the best way to teach technical aspects of writing, such as grammar, spelling, and vocabulary?

**A** Well, my students like to use an overhead projector. And so sometimes we'll make some sentences that have grammar in them, incorrect grammar or incorrect mechanics in the sentence. And then they take turns going up and correcting the sentence on the overhead projector to kind of give . . . they think it's like a little game then.

**Q** Okay, so they're erasing it in front of everyone else and putting in the right thing and you can see until it gets . . .

**A** Right. And I think an overhead projector is a way of getting their interest other than writing on the chalkboard—they'll tune you out. Or mimeograph papers, they don't do too well on those. But it kind of keeps everybody involved if you have the image up there on the screen.

**Q** Section three, time spent on writing: In any given week, approximately how many hours are students engaged in writing activities in class, not including writing they do in the context of other subject areas? Just strictly writing.

**A** So just creative writing?

**Q** Or not even creative— any kind of writing just for the sake of writing; for the English, not for history or whatever in conjunction with anything else.

**A** What about summaries for stories, would that be also?

**Q** I would think so. How many hours in a typical week?

**A** Maybe 10 hours a week.

**Q** While we're on the topic of time, do you ever give your students writing assignments to be completed across several days or more?

**A** Yes.

**Q** If yes, approximately how often during the school year?

**A** Oh, maybe once a month we have an assignment that would be that long.

**Q** Do you ever give your students writing assignments to be completed across more than one week?

**A** No, not at this particular . . . unless we start it in the middle of the week.

*Q* Section four, a favorite assignment. I think we asked to kind of keep in mind something that was a favorite assignment. This might run over to your last one you talked about. Now, please describe in detail an assignment or activity that you have found to be particularly effective with students.

*A* Well, one of my favorite assignments is the one I was telling you about, *St. George and the Dragon*. And I've already explained all that, so . . .

*Q* Pretty much. Is there something else, something you left out or a different one?

*A* I might tell you about another one that's a lot of fun. I ask the kids to choose some person from some profession. And, or course, we get lots of football players and then we have ballerinas and we have different types of people—jobs. And it kind of relates to thinking about jobs and what you might want to be when you grow up.

We do a large drawing of a person in that profession. And we put as many details on them as they can think of. Then they label all the nouns that they can find on their drawing. And after they have finished doing that, then we use all those drawings and make a book of professions, and they write about each of the professions. If it's something that they think that they might like to do when they grow up, they can write it from that standpoint. If it's just that they admire that person, why do they admire them? There's a lot of different . . . what would you say, a different way of writing about the person that they've drawn. They have some choices there.

And it's more of a descriptive and a type of their opinion of that person kind of writing than it would be like a narrative. It isn't really a narrative or a fiction story. And they enjoy that assignment also.

*Q* They like that. That sounds like an interesting one. What about this assignment made it work well?

*A* I think it's because they got to pick somebody that they were interested in. And whenever they're interested in what they're doing, of course they're going to do a better job of it. So anytime I can let them have their choice, so that their own interests are involved, I do that.

*Q* How did you come up with this assignment?

*A* I just made it up. Well, I was trying to figure out a way to teach them about nouns. And, actually, my background is in art. I have a bachelor's degree in fine arts and I have 21 hours of undergraduate work in education that gave me a special teaching certificate to only teach art. And so I've always been interested in art and elementary school children, and I taught art first through sixth grades for four years. And then I stopped teaching to raise my children, and when I went back into teaching, there were no art teachers in the elementary schools.

So I went back to school and I got my master's degree in elementary education in the regular classroom. And so whenever I can stick some art in, I always do because I feel like an art program in the elementary schools is a really important thing for them to have—and they don't, there isn't one.

So kind of it just was sort of my own idea. Plus, how can I teach nouns? Well, this is a good way—it's easy to find all the nouns on a person, because almost everything is a noun. So that's, I don't know, just thought it up.

**Q** It's original, it's creative. Section five, collection of students' work. We have three more sections to go. Apart from this study, do you or your students collect their writing over time in a work folder or a portfolio?

**A** We keep portfolios.

**Q** What is the purpose of these collections? Can you tell me briefly how you and your students use them?

**A** Well, I ask them to date their work, and periodically we go through the folders and bundle all the work together and put it into some sort of a booklet. They are able to see, and I discuss this with them, what did your writing look like when you first started in fourth grade? Can you see a difference in your writing? What do you think has changed? Do you think it's gotten better? And, of course, it has. You know, they change a lot in fourth grade from the beginning of the year to the end.

So it gives them . . . most kids don't really save all their schoolwork. And so if you don't keep it for them, it's just gone in the trash and they don't think about it anymore. So they've got that continuity of their writing where they can look at it. And I think it helps them to

see, you know, what they're learning.

**Q** Do you use portfolios in parent conferences?

**A** Yes.

**Q** Do you use portfolios for grading or assessment purposes?

**A** Yes.

**Q** Section six, computer use: Do any of your students write on computers?

**A** No. We just had a bond pass that we're going to be getting computers in our classrooms that should have printers for next year. So that will be something that we will be able to do.

Now, some of my students have their own computers at home that they write on. And sometimes we have a writing assignment and they will ask me, "Can I write it on my computer at home?" And I always say sure, and then they bring it. But here in the classroom we don't.

**Q** The students that you have, approximately what percentage do you think would write on the computer at least some of the time?

**A** All of them.

**Q** Everybody in the class has access to a computer?

**A** Oh, you mean *does* write on computers?

**Q** At home, what percentage do you think would use computers at this grade level?

**A** If they had . . . if they had access to the computers, *would* use them? Or *do* use?

**Q** What percentage do?

**A** Maybe a third of my students have computers at home.

**Q** Have you noticed that being able to use computers has changed how students write?

**A** I think computers give them a way of writing that's interesting to them. So maybe they would tend to write a little more if they had the use of a computer. And a lot of students hate that handwriting. You know, it's just hard for them to write all that and their little hands get tired.

**Q** Think of the feather you were talking about.

**A** Exactly! I told them, "What if you had to write with a feather?"

**Q** We're progressing. Section seven, support and obstacles/self-evaluation: Who or what most influenced the way you teach writing, and how?

**A** Well, let's see. I have been to some really good workshops on creative writing, and the workshops were given through the school district. I had a teacher at the university who was good in creative writing and supportive for me to learn how to write. So I think that probably helped my teaching.

**Q** How, if at all, have your goals or methods for writing instruction been influenced by the curriculum, standards or assessments of your school, district or state? And specify which.

**A** Well, more and more we're becoming accountable for the things that we do. And so the portfolios are something that not only do I think they're good, but they are also required.

And the rubrics are something that we've been working on here at our school for the last maybe five years, developing rubrics that would function for the kids to be able to use them.

**Q** Do you have a department head or anyone at state or district level that checks? Are there any tests that your kids *have* to pass to . . .

**A** Well, in fourth grade we have the writing assessment, which is a state test given to fourth-graders each year. And when they first started doing those, they gave us a lot of information on different types of writing and what they would look for when they scored the tests.

**Q** So they have a rubric.

**A** Yes. And we've been doing that for . . . gee, I don't even know . . . at least five years, I imagine. So that's the only required writing. This year we changed from ITBS to CTBS tests. The CTBS had a lot of places in it where the students had to do their own writing, rather than just all multiple choice as the ITBS test was.

**Q** What does "ITBS" and "CTBS" stand for?

**A** CTBS is . . . I thought it was California, but it isn't, it's something else that I don't remember. And it's also called the Terra Nova.

ITBS is Iowa Test of Basic Skills. It had more multiple choice where you just "bubble" in all your answers for the whole test. And then this new one they have a little booklet that includes blanks for the students to write their feelings, their opinions, their answers in their own words. And this is the first year we've given it.

They're trying to see how it works out.

Now, obviously, grading is going to be more difficult and time-consuming. But as far as finding out a little bit more about the student, I think it sounds like a good idea.

**Q** What is the single most important additional support or resource, such as books, workshops, curriculum supervisor, you would like to have available to you?

**A** To me as a teacher?

**Q** Yes. As a writing instructor.

**A** As a writing teacher. I think the workshops would be the most helpful to me. I have a lot of resources that I've collected all the years that I've been teaching, so maybe for a new teacher, some resources to use to give ideas to the students would be something that would also be good. But I've got a lot of things like that. So for me the workshops, where I can get other people's ideas, that helps me to think of my own, too.

**Q** What changes would you like to make in your writing instruction, if any?

**A** I'd like to be able to spend more time on writing instruction. Our curriculum

is pretty extensive in fourth grade. We have a lot of things that . . . the basic core subjects. We have a lot of things that we are required to teach.

And so what I find is that fourth-graders do better if you don't rush them all the time. But in order to get in all of our subjects—social studies, science—it's hard because there aren't enough hours in the day to take the time they really need to do a good job of finishing something.

And so I think it's more important to maybe leave out something and give them the time where they can really take the time to develop what they're working on than it is to just give them little short assignments that they can hurry up and hand in and go on to the next thing.

**Q** Finally, if you could pass on to a beginning teacher one important lesson or strategy you have learned for teaching students to write well, what would you tell her or him?

**A** Well, I think writing is hard to teach, and so when I first started writing, I was really kind of, oh my gosh, how do you teach somebody how to write? I know how to write, but do you explain it to somebody else?

And so I think the one thing that I would tell new teach-

ers is that they need to have their students write *a lot*. They need to write every day, and they need to make it as fun as they can, to where the student and the teacher [are] enjoying the writing.

And sometimes we're so worried about if they did it right that we forget to read what they wrote. And what they say is the best part of teaching, because their little minds are so funny, you know, that they can come up with some really wonderful expressions.

And even, sometimes, my students make up a word. For instance, one of them said, when she was describing her dragon, she said the dragon "swomped" his tail at everyone. And I said, "Mallory, what is this word— "swomped?" Do you mean swept?" "No." I said, "You mean 'swomped?' "Yes." And I said, "That's what he did with his tail, huh?" And she said, "Yes, he swomped it." And so I thought, well, maybe that's as good a word as anything for what a dragon does with his tail. So I have to be able to enjoy my students in teaching them or I wouldn't want to be a teacher.

**Q** So you wouldn't tell her, "That's wrong."

**A** No, no.

**Q** Okay. That's the end of my list of questions. Are there any other questions you wish we had asked that might help us better understand your writing program?

**A** I don't think so. I think you asked some very useful questions. Well, I just think it's really important for kids to be able to express themselves in writing. They fight it, because I think in our time today, kids are so tuned in to TV, telephone, that we don't write letters to grandparents anymore, we call them up. We don't read books, we don't write stories for entertainment very often. And so they have a resistance to doing writing, just because they don't want to spend the time that it takes.

And so I think that if we don't stay with it in the schools, pretty soon maybe nobody will even write anymore.

**Q** Good point. That's it. Thank you very much for assisting in this study. Your name and the identity of your school will not be associated with any part of the study. Do you have any further questions before we end this interview?

**A** No, I don't.

Thank you very much.

### Interview II—Fourth Grade

***Q*** I would like to begin by asking you about your approach to writing instruction. If you had to summarize in a few sentences, how would you describe your overall approach to teaching writing?

***A*** Because my students are transition students, they're coming from Spanish to English for the first time. So when I begin in the beginning of the year, I start by doing a Writer's Workshop program.

The first day, they have to . . . I'll read them a short story and then I storyboard it on the board for them. I draw the pictures of the story. I show them exactly how to do it.

The second day—this is in the beginning of the year, when I first start them with reading . . .

***Q*** Right now what we're looking for basically is just for you to describe the essence of how you approach writing for this particular classroom.

***A*** Okay, then you're not wanting to know the practices.

***Q*** No, I'm going to get those in a second.

***A*** Oh, okay. We write about anything and everything all the time. I just try to get as much writing in as possible. We will write about . . . is this what you were wanting me to talk about? We will write about . . . well, perhaps . . . we just picked out a brand new guinea pig, so they were to watch her for a week and see how she [did]. I try to do a lot of things that they can see in person so that it will make it easier for them when they're doing their writing and their describing of things.

We write about the weather a lot lately because of so many varied changes in the weather. And I just try to get writing out of almost anything that will happen. I try to get writing so that . . . we'll go out to P.E., they'll have a really good game. Then we'll go in and I'll say, "Okay, write your feelings about this game."

***Q*** Okay, so basically you try to get them to write about any happenings in their . . . that are happening with them at that time.

***A*** Yes, just so that they will get writing.

***Q*** Now I'd like to ask you about the writing activities that typically take place in this classroom each week across the school year. If I had the opportunity to spend a week in your classroom, what are four or five writing activities that I would be most likely to see you and your students doing during that week?

***A*** You would be seeing . . . they write in their journals, and that's sometimes assigned topics and sometimes not. It'll sometimes be a spur of the moment thing where I just think this would be a good writing activity, so then we'll do it.

They do a lot of writing in the reading language . . . well, the way we blocked it out, I have reading for an hour and then I have language for an hour. And during the reading time, they will always be doing reading of some sort of a story or something, too, but then I do writing activities during that time also.

Here in language, I do Daily Oral Language where we will put three activities on the board, three sentences. Maybe we're working on punctuation, or maybe we're working on nouns or adverbs or whatever it might be for that time. I do that as a daily process.

**Q** Please take me through a single writing assignment so that I can get a sense of the sequence of activities involved in that one assignment. You decide what kind of assignment you want to think about, then take me through the steps you and your students typically go through from preparing for the assignment all the way through to its completion.

**A** I think I will talk to you about the Writer's Workshop format I start with them in the beginning of the year. It's done on a five-day process. The first day, I will read them a short story. And then I will storyboard the story for the class, and then I reread it to the class.

**Q** What do you mean by "storyboard"?

**A** Storyboard is where I will read the story and then I will make a big rectangle on the board, divide it into four parts. And in the first part I will say to them . . . when I'm introducing it to them, I do it. And so I will describe to them the first part, the first thing that happened in the story, and then we will go to the next thing, and then the third and then the fourth, so that it will teach them there is a beginning, middle, and

end and things that go on in the story.

Then the students will practice the storyboard that I have done for them on the board as an example. Because the part that you have to remember is this is their first experience working in English only, and so we have to do a lot of redo, retell.

Second day, we will read the story again, storyboard for the class—but this time they will work in groups and storyboard . . . each student picks a square and writes their individual paragraph as best as they can by the picture helping them decide what they're going to write.

The third day, the group will edit the story and read their story to the class.

The fourth day, they read the story to the class. They storyboard a story for the class, and they have individual storyboards on their own now, where they're making up how they think it should be done.

And then the fifth day, they conference with me. We edit it. They rewrite and then they read their story to the class—not necessarily always the class, it might just be their group. But

that's kind of how I start the beginning of the year with them.

**Q** So you first start with one story, you storyboard it and then kind of go through the analysis, and then they break up into groups, and then they do an individual story, each group . . . each student does his/her own story?

**A** Yes.

**Q** Then they storyboard it and they develop it and then they read to the class and then kind of explain to the class how . . .

**A** Right.

**Q** Do you and your students follow the same steps as in this example for all assignments and for all kinds of writing? For example, would the steps be different for an assignment that is longer or shorter than the example you just gave?

**A** Well, once they can do this and are feeling comfortable with this, then I don't always have them storyboard; I mean, that's just in the beginning to get them started. Once they understand what's happening though.

**Q** What are some examples of other sequences or steps you might follow for different assignments?

**A** They have a problem understanding topic sentences and working in paragraphs. So this is what I've come up with for . . . There's a fourth-grade teacher that has meetings and she brought this up and I thought it was really a good idea.

And you take the hamburger, because it's something that they are familiar with. And so you take the top bun and that's called the title of it, and that will be the topic sentence.

**Q** I see, so you're constructing a hamburger.

**A** So I'm constructing a hamburger, yes, and I should have had it in the order I want it put before. Okay, the title is called "Paragraph is Like a Hamburger," and so this I put up on the chalkboard. So that's the first thing they will see taped up there. Then I put "topic sentence" on top and tell them that that is like the top bun of your hamburger.

**Q** All right, so I see this is a specific activity that you . . .

**A** I'm just trying to show you how I get them started when I'm trying to teach

them how to write. Because it's very difficult when they're making that transition, and when they walk in my room in the beginnng they are petrified about writing in English. And so I just try to make it so it's simple and they don't think about it.

**Q** Okay, go ahead.

**A** So I just kind of build the hamburger for them as I go. So then I do . . . the good stuff will be the lettuce. Then we have the adjectives, and then from . . . now this is like a beginning to show them what to do, but then they have samples of simple paragraphs that they pick out topic sentences. Then as it goes on, the post-writing that goes on for a long time, is when we bring in adjectives, adverbs—and that will be like the cheese, and then there will be an example showing an adjective. Ask what kind, they often end in "y," and then it's numbers and colors.

So we don't do all this in one day. I mean, this is a long period, drawn-out thing. In fact, it's still going on now. It's just to show them, and they can look at the picture. And, at the beginning, we may just be talking about the first part of it, and maybe only get to the lettuce part,

not even get into adjectives, adverbs or any of the rest of it. But it's just so that they have a visualization of what to see, what to follow and it gives them an idea.

And then, I noticed that as . . . they still will look up to see "Am I doing it right?" even though they know they are.

**Q** Now, before you mentioned that you had some activities, for example, like writing in the journal or writing about a baseball game or some other things like that? What other types of activities, and what would the steps be involved in that, for example?

**A** In a different activity?

**Q** For example, like writing in their journal.

**A** Oh, in their journal?

**Q** And what would the steps be from beginning to end, for example, of an assignment of writing in their journal?

**A** When I do journal writing with them, it doesn't really have any specific steps involved. Journal writing is more of a free-flow where they are able to just write down their opinions. I don't correct, there is not any . . . they are free to just get ideas out. There's no spelling. And

then I will look at their journal and then I will answer back sometimes and sometimes not, it just depends. Sometimes they will want to read it to their friend; sometimes it's just for their own self, personal.

**Q** What about another activity that . . . for example, writing about the football game or something that you mentioned. The baseball game that they were involved in? Does that have different steps where you make an assignment and then carry it through until the very end?

**A** Sometimes yes, sometimes no. If it's something that I'm going to plan about to do with them, I will tell them in advance, "We're going to go out, we're going to play the game. I want you to, even though you're playing the game, I want you to be prepared to come in . . ." I try to get parents involved in homework, so I will say, "I want you to come in and just jot down some notes of what happened during the game and then when you go home tonight, I want you to sit down and write it up, explain to your parents . . . suppose it's a new skill. You're going to explain to them what your skill was, how we learned it, how you felt while you were

doing it so that you are actually going to be teaching that skill to your parents then." So it involves writing, but it also involves talking, and that way it's to ensure that they understood what they did.

**Q** Now, in your writing instruction in general, what kinds of advice or feedback do you give students about their writing? What do you tend to emphasize?

**A** To try and get your ideas down first, to just go with it and jot down your ideas. So like they might be . . . because sometimes when they're starting to write, they get stumped and they stop and they don't know what they're doing. So I will have them just free throw it. I'll also . . . like make a web of what your topic is and then just things that relate to it so that they have a graphic picture for themselves when they are going to start doing their writing.

**Q** What type of feedback do you give them?

**A** I meet with them all the time. And they come and they will start writing something and then I will . . . you know, they bring in a little picture drawing that they've

made. And sometimes I will suggest, "Well, do you think this could fit in here," or I'll say, "Do you think you can find something else that will go with this to make this be a paragraph?"

They're still having such a hard time even now. So many times they do a paragraph and its just idea, idea, idea, idea, without getting just . . . I tell them if they're going to change it, talk about something else, then we need to go to a new paragraph. Getting the meat of it, really, is . . .

**Q** How and when do you convey your advice and evaluations to students?

**A** I work one-on-one. I will give them an assignment and then they will be working with it and then I just pull one over. We always . . . like we'll work together in a group when we're in the beginning of the assignment, but then I have so many varied abilities that I do it at that time. When we're going into another subject, if it's something that they're able to work on by themselves, I will pull kids over and still do this one-on-one so that I can work with them on their writing.

**Q** And do you read and evaluate students' writing at different points or in different ways for different assignments or students? And if so, how?

**A** Well, you know, it's kind of just an ongoing, everyday thing with me. We had to do a big report a while back. They had to do a social studies report and everybody was responsible for it. They did Indians this year. And so they worked in groups and then I would give them their assignment. And maybe one group might be building their part, so that I would have time to go and work with the other ones that were doing their assignment.

And then they had specific . . . well, they had to first of all get three . . . like a book, magazines, whatever— they had to have all these different sources. And some of the sources were written above their ability, so we had to run things off that were more according to their ability. And then it was up to them to go through and find out ideas. So in that we were teaching bibliography and we were teaching the whole thing on making a report.

And with something like that, there's a lot of . . . like

we'll have big, huge charts showing how to do the bibliographies and all the rest of this. And then in the meantime, one student might be doing the artwork on it in the group; another one might be doing the beginning writing. And then they have to edit themselves before they come to me.

And then after they have done the pre-edit within their group, then they will come to me. Then we sit down and start saying, "Okay, now, what about this? And what about this? And where do you think this should go?" So that they're giving me feedback, too, as well as me saying, "Okay, now this is what you need to do for this part, too."

**Q** And how many different times would you say that that evaluation process goes through until they get to the end of the actual piece?

**A** When it's on something that was very long and major like that, we probably had three or four different meetings throughout the . . . that's before they even got to this final stage where they were able to say, "Okay, this is it, this is how we're going to do it."

**Q** And do your students look at or listen to each other's work during class?

**A** Yes. That's a continual thing; we do that a lot.

**Q** When and how is peer response or evaluation done in your class?

**A** Sometimes they will just sit and work in pairs and they will read back and forth to one another and comment. Sometimes we do written comments. Sometimes we will do . . . they don't have the person's name on the paper, and then we'll just pass out a little short writing, like maybe a paragraph, two paragraphs. And then they will evaluate that person's writing and say, "Why don't you try this" or "I like the way this was done." And they're getting to where they're better about doing that. And I have to do it without the name on because if it's their friend, no matter what it is, it's wonderful.

**Q** Good way to eliminate bias, huh? Now, how, if at all, do you have your students use self-assessment or reflection to develop their writing?

**A** Well, they always have to . . . when they finish their paper, before they turn it in

or before whatever they're going to do with it—give it to their group or however they're going to work with it—they have to go through—is this a complete sentence, and look for punctuation, capitalization and figure out what they're doing. And then I also have them think and say, "Is this something that I would like to read when I'm going . . . if I'm reading something or looking at it or whatever?"

**Q** What have you found works best to get all students engaged in writing?

**A** You know, it just depends. Sometimes we'll start writing and they'll just be all jazzed. Like with this guinea pig, they've been real excited about this because they've been observing her and watching her. They had to watch her for five days and see all the things she did because they were going to choose her name. And so they had to like write and say why they thought that this would be a good name for her, and then we chose five names and we voted on them.

They like competition. They like where they're going against each other for things, you know. And then sometimes something will just

happen that will spur a writing thing, and we will write about that.

**Q** Okay, so a little competition seems to really get them going. Okay. What have you found is the best way to teach technical aspects of writing, such as grammar, spelling and vocabulary?

**A** I think by doing the Daily Oral Language. You can bring in whatever, like maybe you want to work on a specific thing like pronouns, or you want to work on verbs or whatever. You can do that by your putting them on the board—and that's another thing, I will put things up there and they will need corrections. And it's whatever I'm going to be choosing, that I'm going to be working on with them that particular day. And then somebody that knows something, they will go up and fix it, and then they will just pass off the marker to the next person, and then they will go up. And they've already written it on their little paper, how they think it should be.

And they're competing within themselves as well as with someone else—and in fact, they call it "the game." They say, "Ohh, let's play the game!" So they don't even

really realize that it's a learning process.

**Q** I know you mentioned the Daily Oral Language before. Could you explain it to me one more time?

**A** Daily Oral Language is a language process, and that's just what it's called, "Daily Oral Language." And they have it for each grade level— and, no, I don't know who puts it out. I don't know, I just use it. But I like it because you will write on the board something that needs to be corrected. Like you'll write a sentence up there and maybe it doesn't have a capital letter, and it doesn't have the ending punctuation. That's how . . . it's in the beginning of the year, that's how you would start. And then it gets progressively more difficult as you're getting into more with your class. And then there's just little short tests that you give once a week. And then that's when they don't have the board work anymore and they don't have their friends, it's just an individual. And so then you can see whether you need to go back and review this or whether they got the concept during the week when we were working on it.

**Q** I see. So during the week you do it, you have something that needs correcting every day, and then at the end of the week they may have like an individualized test of whatever it was that you were working on during the week?

**A** Yes.

**Q** Now, in any given week, approximately how many hours are students engaged in writing activities in class, not including writing they do in the context of other subject areas?

**A** So like not including when they're writing after reading? Just during my language time more or less.

**Q** Right, how many hours?

**A** Probably, I would say maybe two to three hours.

**Q** Okay, two to three hours in any given week?

**A** Yes.

**Q** Now, while we're on the topic of time, do you ever give your students writing assignments to be completed across several days or more?

**A** Yes.

**Q** And approximately how often do you do it?

**A** Probably . . . maybe twice a month.

**Q** Do you ever give your students writing assignments to be completed across more than one week?

**A** When we did that, the major report.

**Q** Okay, and approximately how often would you say that happens?

**A** Probably only a couple times a year.

**Q** Okay, now, please describe in detail an assignment or activity that you have found to be particularly effective with students. And this would probably have been the appropriate time to have that, the hamburger.

**A** Well, see, and that's probably what I would use. So do I do it again, or just revert back?

**Q** No, that's fine. We'll go back and take a look at that. Was there anything else that you wanted to add to that activity that maybe got left out?

**A** Well, the part that I like about that is it's visual and you can just one day say to them, "Okay, you don't

always, you know, have your hamburger all . . . you put one part and then you'll do another. Or maybe you're going to have a fatter part of this or more cheese or something," and then you can work on the adjectives more so, or the adverbs or whatever you're going to do.

**Q** Now, the hamburger, you post it in the classroom?

**A** Right.

**Q** And as you go adding more or talking about the different parts, you add the parts . . .

**A** It depends. When I'm first introducing it to them, I might show them the whole thing just so that they see this is a hamburger, and then tell them that we're going to work today on whatever part that we're going to be working on. And then they just, they build up, and then the whole hamburger's there. And then they check when they're doing their writing that their paragraph has . . . make sure that they can identify their topic sentence and that they are backing it up in their writing.

**Q** Now, just for review, what would you say about this assignment that made it work particularly well?

**A** Because it was exciting for them; because, for one thing, it was food. It was something they could relate to.

**Q** How did you come up with this assignment?

**A** There's a fourth-grade teacher in our district and she does the meetings for fourth grade, and it's once a month and it's a mentor teacher meeting, and so I always attend those. She always comes up the . . . whether it's a language idea or a social studies or some art project or something, so it's well worth it going to.

**Q** Okay, and so she was the one that came up with the . . .

**A** She was the one, yes, and I don't know where she found it. She just showed it and I liked it and it really caught on with my class.

**Q** Now, we have three more sections to go. Apart from this study, do you or your students collect their writing over time in a work folder or portfolio?

**A** Yes.

**Q** And what is the purpose of these collections? Can you tell me briefly how you and your students use them?

**A** We use them . . . actually, I use them. I'll just say, "Put it in your . . ." we always call it in "your folder. Put it in your file." And that way it won't get lost and get messed up in their desk. And so that's for like continuing writing exercise. And then they'll know where it is and they will go and get it. So that's one way we use it.

Another way is we save things for parent conferences to show their parents. And I'll tell them, "You pick something that you want to put in there," and then they put it. And we also send portfolios to the next grade for the following year, and so then they choose at the end of the year. So it just serves three purposes for me.

**Q** You answered one of the other ones I was going to ask you already. Do you use portfolios for grading or assessment purposes?

**A** Yes.

**Q** Do you use portfolios for instructional purposes?

**A** Yes.

**Q** Now, do any of your students write on computers?

**A** No. They would like to.

**Q** Who or what has most influenced the way you teach writing, and how?

**A** Hm, I don't know if I can answer that. I just teach writing all the time and it's something that I enjoy, and I try to encourage them, the class, to appreciate one another's writing. I don't know. I don't have an answer for that.

**Q** Now, how, if at all, have your goals or methods for writing instruction been influenced by the curriculum, standards, or assessments of your school, district, or state?

**A** Well, every year in our district, in the beginning of the year we have three student-free days and we are able to choose different classes to attend. And I always try to choose a writing or a language one. And the one I chose last year was a Writer's Workshop, and it was interesting and I enjoyed that.

*Q* And you found that those have been an influence in . . .

*A* Those ideas have helped, yes.

*Q* For example, like the hamburger thing, that's where you picked it up?

*A* Yes, uh-huh. And the storyboarding idea. And that really helps in the beginning for transition students.

*Q* What is the single most important additional support or resource, such as books, workshops, curriculum supervisor, you would like to have available to you?

*A* I would . . . I don't know, maybe this isn't the right answer, but I think it would be nice if they did have computers to write on. I would like to have a lab.

*Q* And what changes would you like to make in your writing instruction, if any?

*A* More time. It's so hard to get everything in.

*Q* Okay, anything else besides . . . any other changes that you would like in the way that you teach writing?

*A* Not really, because I do it a lot and that part I'm okay with.

*Q* And, finally, if you could pass on to a beginning teacher one important lesson or strategy you have learned for teaching students to write well, what would you tell him or her?

*A* To allow the student to understand that whatever they write is acceptable and we build from that so that when they come, to give them confidence, and just write every day.

*Q* Now, I noticed that on the previous question you said that you would like to have the students have access to computers for writing. How do you think that would improve the writing instruction?

*A* Well, we have keyboards now—they're called Key-board Wizards; it's just to teach them the basic typing skills and the beginning of the computer. And my class has just started doing that just this last month and the kids just absolutely love it. And I think that the idea of enjoying doing it would encourage them to want to do more writing.

*Q* Okay, that's the end of my list of questions. Are there any other questions you wish we had asked that might help us better under-stand your writing program?

*A* No. I just hope I answered them all right for you.

*Q* No, you did a very good job, very good job. And I wanted to thank you very much for assisting in this study. Your name and the identity of you school will not be associated in any part with this study. Your sample assignments may be repro-duced in the published reports of the study, where it would appear anonymously. Do you have any other questions before we end this interview?

*A* No.

Thank you very much.

### Interview III—Eighth Grade

**Q** I would like to begin by asking you about your approach to writing instruction. If you had to summarize it in a few sentences, how would you describe your overall approach to teaching writing?

**A** Well, in our building, for a number of years we've emphasized the process. So we try to have different types of assignments, but a lot of what we do, we start with a pre-writing and then, we know, possibly then choosing *the* topic from a group of topics and deciding on the topic. And then having done some brainstorming, some other brainstorming possibly, organize it, and quite often doing a rough draft and then a final draft.

**Q** The essence is the process approach?

**A** Yes, because we know for real-life situations that the types of writing the students do is going to be so varied that any writing on, say, just literature or something like that isn't going to give them as good a background as they probably need.

**Q** Now I'd like to ask you about the writing activities that typically take place in this class each week across the school year. If I had an opportunity to spend a week in your classroom, what are four or five writing activities I would be most likely to see you and your students doing during that week?

**A** Well, in any given week we may not actually be doing a whole lot of writing if we're not into a specific writing assignment, however, we do some journaling. And we do Daily Oral Language, which is copying a couple of sentences full of errors down from the computer screen—and at our school, now, we have them available on our computers, which is really nice—and then they're supposed to create the corrections, capitalization, run-ons, pretty much the gamut of the kinds of mechanical errors the students make. And we have this in our district for every grade level, too.

And then on any given week, we might be working on anything from narrative writing to basic expository writing, evaluative writing, et cetera.

**Q** Okay, if I were to come to your classroom on a week that you really were into writing, what would I most likely see?

**A** Well, the first day we usually would be doing brainstorming and, depending on the particular assignment, we might be doing it in large groups, small groups or just individual—which, a lot of times, if we do individual brainstorming, we do kind of share ideas and share with the rest of the class or, you know, I might pick out just three, four kids to share some of their lists.

Let's say, if we're making a list of favorite activities after school and so on, because we do encourage piggybacking where you get to look at somebody else's ideas and say, "Oh, I forgot to mention . . . this kid put down water-skiing, I forgot to mention." "I forgot to put down snow-boarding."

**Q** Maybe just to follow up on that, please take me through a single writing assignment so that I can get a sense of the sequence of activities involved. You decide what kind of assignment you want to think about, then take me through

the steps you and your students typically go through from preparing for the assignment all the way through to completion.

**A** Okay, I'm going to give you an example of the first writing assignment we do. We read a story called *The Treasure of Leonard Brown*, where the emphasis is on that each one of us has a treasure. It does not have to be monetarily very valuable, or it may be monetarily worthless—like a picture or an old newspaper clipping.

And so then we have the kids brainstorm different things, both in their past and their present, that were treasures to them that they valued highly, even though they were probably not worth anything—like a teddy bear or a pet would be some of the typical things that kids would put down.

And then they share with each other what they put down. I usually have them do one or two journal writing assignments on a couple of different topics. And they don't just focus on one topic right away. I say like, "Okay, pick out three that you think of as really important to you. Now pick out two of them to write a paragraph on and say why this is something on your list. Why was this so special, and out of thou-

sands of possibilities, you picked this out to put on a list of 15 or 20? And then that's usually the way we get through a topic. Eventually, they looked through that list and picked out one that is their specific topic.

Then I have them brainstorm reasons why. And then to help them organize, what we usually do is pick three to five reasons why this particular thing, this treasure, is important to them. And then, bingo, we've got three, four or five main reasons why this is important to them, which become the three, four main paragraphs of their body. Then each one of those needs to be developed and explained.

And the first time we do this, we have to go through this pretty carefully, because for eighth grade, a five-to-seven-paragraph essay is kind of new for most of them. Some of them have written volumes before, but most of them were writing paragraphs. So this is to get them ready for ninth grade, where they're going to write lots of five-to-seven-paragraph essays, because that's going to be the basis of their writing throughout high school.

And then usually we do write a rough draft so they can just write without . . . just turn it

into paragraphs without worrying about anything other than maybe indenting, and not worry about spelling or anything too much. And then we do the final paragraph where it's nice and neat.

The editing with eighth-graders is tough. Basically, the difference between their rough draft and their final draft is one of editing . . . or one of proofreading, not of editing so much. They very seldom change the content of their paragraphs greatly.

**Q** This editing has actually taken place ahead of that step, hasn't it?

**A** Yeah, kind of. Maybe that's why they don't do more. I'd like to see them do more, but they very seldom do. And sometimes, depending on the particular assignment, we do exchange rough drafts and help with proof-reading but also, hopefully, some editing. I'll ask them to do something like pick out one paragraph that you think needs more specific detail, or just it's confusing, it needs to be rewritten; and then pick out a paragraph that you really like, that you think the other paragraphs . . . this is a model for the other paragraphs, possibly. And that helps somewhat, but they still tend to do very little actual editing.

**Q** Do you and your students follow the same steps as in the previous question for all assignments or for all kinds of writing? For example, would the steps be different for an assignment that is longer or shorter than the example you gave?

**A** Oh, yes, and we have one writing assignment, which was really a narrative, where I joke about that we do three weeks of pre-writing. But, in a sense, we do because I have them write about different topics that they remember—it's called a short story memory piece— and I also have them write . . . I might have them write to music or I might have them write to a video that is just music or a video, no actual plot or action; in other words, kind of creating a mood. And we do a lot of things there that I don't do in any of the other . . . I don't do any of the stuff with any of the other writing assignments. We wouldn't get anything done all year if I did.

And some of the assignments are like "The Dark and Stormy Night" is basically a thesaurus assignments where they just can play around and have fun writing this spooky story. But then they have to go back and change 10–12 words using the thesaurus so that, hopefully, they can get away

from some of the clichéd terms like "dark and stormy night" and end up with something like "it was an ebony and tumultuous evening."

So, no, most of them have variations. But I would say that type of thing, the process that I described first, is the one that we do the most.

**Q** Essentially that's sort of the thread that ties a lot of the writing together?

**A** Because this is the writing that the ninth-grade teachers are going to hope that they have at lease some background in.

**Q** We're going to visit a little bit about the evaluation and instruction strategies. In your writing instruction in general, what kinds of advice or feedback do you give students about their writing? What do you tend to emphasize?

**A** Well, we still tend to emphasize paragraphs a lot, even when we're writing a five-to-six-paragraph, seven-paragraph essay, that there is a topic sentence in each paragraph of the body, and that the supporting detail and examples all relate back to that topic sentence. That's still pretty crucial to emphasize with this age level, because even though they've

been working on this for probably four years, paragraphing is still not totally natural to most of them. I mean, if you just said, "Write something on this," there would be a lot of them would just write one giant paragraph two, three pages long. And they do that with their short-story memory piece sometimes, with their narrative, because it just flows on . . . "and then I did this . . . da-da-da-da-da. And, so they still spend a fair amount of time on that.

Proofreading, I don't know. I'm having a hard time with that yet, getting kids to really look for spelling errors. I mentioned earlier, before we started the tape, that it's really depressing sometimes to find out, when you are actually in a lab where you have computers and you're putting your final draft on computers, how many kids forget to do a spell check.

**Q** Interesting. How and when do you convey your advice and evaluations to students?

**A** Usually in the form of short notes. With the kind of class load we have — it used to be easier when I'd be teaching like maybe one class of senior English, one class of ninth-grade English, and maybe I'd teach two German classes and a

speech class. I could assign more writing. But now I've learned to do what a lot of the pros tell you to do and that's to focus on just a few things on any particular assignment. Like early on, really focus on organization of the body—you have an introduction, a conclusion and the body; the individual body paragraphs are solid with the topic sentence and so on.

Might spend less time looking at, for instance, spelling errors. Matter of fact, even run-on sentences, which is the other biggie that I know the ninth-grade teachers think we never looked at because they still have so many in ninth grade.

**Q** At what juncture in the process of writing do you have that input? While they're doing it or at the end of an assignment?

**A** To some degree, but more at the end. You know, comments on the back. One thing I've gone to . . . why a lot of the copies you got were as clean as they were, on many of the assignments I have a separate grade sheet and I make comments not only on the content of the assignment, but also the mechanics of it. I make the notes right on that sheet, because otherwise . . . I can remember when I first started

teaching I'd just fill those papers up with marks.

And we know from some of the studies that have been done that this is really a turn-off for the kids. Like their "generation" project—a lot of them take them home—you know, they're just full of errors—they'll make two copies for me and one of them will be just all marked up and the one will be full of errors. And rather than really look at a lot of the feedback, they'll look at my general comments, but they won't go back and look to see how many spelling errors and comma splices they have and so on. They'll toss that one away and keep the clean one, which is just full of errors.

**Q** Do you read and evaluate students' writing at different points or in ways for different assignments or students? If so, how?

**A** Most of the time I go over it in large group, and then it's pretty much the squeaky wheels, whoever asks me for help, I look and read. The exception would be the short story memory piece where we spend enough time on that. I usually get a glimpse of almost all the students' rough drafts and make at least a few comments, or at least spot-read a paragraph

or two and give them some feedback.

**Q** Do your students look at or listen to each other's work during class?

**A** Yes, but not as much as I would like.

**Q** When and how is peer response or evaluation done in your class?

**A** On many of their writing assignments at the rough-draft stage and even in the prewriting stage. Partly, like I tell them, you get ideas, you get to borrow ideas from other people. It's piggy-backing, it's not stealing, unless you're actually writing on the same topic exactly and stuff, then that would be plagiarism.

Sometimes we share in the large group. The short story memory pieces, we go to the library and split up into like five or six groups and actually have a reading and they get to hear each other's final drafts and that's always a lot of fun. They actually give bonus points to each other for "best dialogue" and things like that.

**Q** Expand on that a little bit. Does that happen a lot?

**A** Well, at least every year we always do that one. And then with some of the other ones, I try to do that just [in] small groups. Oh, what we do

with the short story memory piece is after we get into smaller groups of like five to six, then they always pick out the best of the group, too. They pick out like "best dialogue," "funniest or most humorous," and "best use of detail." I try to have enough different categories so that if they want, they can pretty much give everybody in the group one award. But then we do pick up "best of the group," and usually then we read the best of the group to the entire class.

**Q** This kind of leads to this next question: how, if at all, do you have your students use self-assessment or reflection to develop their writing?

**A** You know, one of the other things that kind of relates here, too, I do sometimes let them co-write something. I've find that co-writing an essay can be maybe even more valuable than writing it alone sometimes. We do that with our movie evaluations, because we do a Siskel and Ebert-like project, a videotape project. They can actually do a written review of a movie together; the only thing is they usually have to . . . one of them . . . has to write like the first half and one has to write the second half. But they have to come up with a

movie; they have to agree on the process. And that one they usually end up sharing with other groups kind of on the sly when they're doing their rough draft—kind of the "What are you guys doing? You know, and just kind of needing that reassurance that they're on the right track.

And so there is opportunity for that, and I do encourage them a lot of times when we're working on something, the last five or seven minutes I'll say, "Okay, share what you've written so far on your rough draft with at least one other person." And we do that probably three out of four writing activities that we do.

**Q** What have you found works best to get all students engaged in writing?

**A** Actually, as far as just to getting words on the paper, the thing that's been the most effective is writing to music and videos. I have had really good luck with having a non-speaking video—and not a vocal either, but just an instrumental—like a Grand Canyon and then playing *The Grand Canyon Suite* and letting the kids just watch it and then let their minds go. I've got several tapes of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, always works really well.

And sometimes it's just the kids have fun with it and then

we don't do anything else with it. I've had students, though, who really have trouble just thinking of mundane ideas like their tenth birthday or something, or the time they fell and broke their arm—which a lot of kids really love writing about. And some of these kids really get some ideas or feelings to write about using this kind of technique.

**Q** You've addressed this earlier, but what have you found is the best way to teach technical aspects of writing, such as grammar, spelling and vocabulary?

**A** That is a toughie. Our district consultant swears by Daily Oral Language and using that on a regular basis. And I've been pushing it a little bit more each year. I can't tell you whether there's any data to support that my kids are getting better at it or not.

But I started out teaching using the . . . remember my first grammar book was a D.C. Heath one and it was 220 pages long and we covered it from page one to page 220. And I never minded teaching traditional grammar, but having also done work in foreign language, I understand where unless there's a real reason to learn the grammar, a lot of the terminology and a lot of the drills we did and the sentence diagrams were, for a lot of kids, wasted.

My memories of that is that the bright kids who learn everything will learn that well, too. For the kids who needed the help, it didn't really do much. And so doing the Daily Oral Language and then hitting them with little things like certain spelling errors . . . I give spelling tests and I give bonus spelling and I include the words like the "a lot" and the "theres" and the "yours" that kids are always having trouble with—I put those as bonus ones in almost every test.

And then you just hammer away like with the Daily Oral Language on things like run-ons, which I've been a little disappointed over the last five years—it seems like this has become a bigger problem and I haven't been able to really seem to make great inroads with the kids. And I don't know if I'm just going to have to take more time away from something else and spend it on that. Or else, possibly they're not all developmentally ready to handle run-ons and sentence fragments and just let the high school teachers worry about it.

**Q** Let's talk a little bit about the time spent on writing. In any given week, approximately how many hours are students engaged in writing activities in class,

not including writing they do in the context of other subject? About how many hours?

**A** I would say about an hour-and-a-half . . . well, okay, let's put it in class periods. Probably a class period and a half, maybe a little bit less.

**Q** While we're on the topic of time, do you ever give your students writing assignments to be completed across several days or more?

**A** Oh, yeah, quite often. Especially if you're doing process, writing as a process, you're really splitting it up into kind of baby steps to a large degree. I think another thing is . . . that's why it's hard for me to give like how many hours a week, because when we do a writing, we really **do** writing, and then we might do literature without doing any writing for a week or two; or we might be doing a combination of spelling and reading skills and maybe a little journaling and that's it. And then all of a sudden we're doing writing really heavy for two or three weeks again. So . . .

**Q** Approximately how often do you have these longer assignments?

**A** Probably, I would say, what I would consider semi-major assignments, about

eight times a year; about two a quarter, where we actually are doing a big thing. I might be underestimating when I say a period and a half a week because I'm forgetting about things like putting the final drafts on computer down in the computer lab. We do that twice, and we spend seven to eight days on two different writing assignments down in the computer lab. And this is after we've done all the pre-writing, writing the rough draft; and in some cases, I've been making them write the final draft before we put it on the computer.

**Q** Do you ever give your students writing assignments to be completed across more than one week?

**A** Oh, yes. There would be probably four that we do that. And also I'm forgetting, too, that I give the students time, we do interdisciplinary units from time to time and I just remembered I'd forgotten one of the interdisciplinary units we do which involves research. And I'm kind of in charge of part of the doing of research and so on, which involves taking notes, which is part of the writing process and so on.

**Q** Let's talk about some favorite assignment that you may have. Now, please

describe in detail an assignment or an activity that you have found to be particularly effective with students.

*A* Of course, I've got several. I've already described that first one, the "treasure" essay. That's become really a favorite of mine, and that satisfies like a bunch of kind of semi-technical writing things, and yet it's been a fun assignment.

The movie evaluation has been a good one because it's a high-interest one for students, and they get to practice the kind of skills that ninth-grade teachers want.

My favorite one, though, probably, is the one I've alluded to a number of times where we do the short story memory piece, because the final products, I've come to realize, are never going to be, you know, just great because these are eighth-graders. Most of their writing is not *great* compared to the kinds of writing they'll be doing by the time they're juniors and seniors.

*Q* What in this assignment makes it work so well?

*A* Well, we do use a movie there. We call it the SSMP, that stands for "short story memory piece," and this was developed by a professional

writer. And we had like a two-day, in-service plus ongoing sessions with this teacher. We used to come and she used to model teach in the classes. And she did all these activities that kids really have fun with like writing to music; putting a picture that is just kind of a picture that looks interesting, but we have absolutely no idea what the context is. It's kind of like sitting down on a specific street and watching people and making up stories about them as they go by, and things like that. A lot of high-interest pre-writing stuff.

*Q* I think you've kind of answered the question that I'm going to ask now previous to this: how did you come up with this assignment?

*A* Okay, yeah, I did there. And I got the idea . . . I use the movie *A Christmas Story* and I have a list of topics that were generated for me by watching the movie myself. And the kids just have a blast writing to it. I'll stop the movie—we'll watch like maybe three, four, five minutes of the movie and then I'll stop it and I'll say, "Okay, when was a time that you . . . ?" And when we get through watching that movie and having done the writing, a lot of kids will have like

four or five, six pages of memories written down. And then we pick one that we can build on, or we pick a series of ones that they can build around . . . we talk about how the movie is set up where basically it's one thing, about getting that BB gun; but then it's a series of little vignettes all the way through.

*Q* Do you have that assignment written up?

*A* Yeah, I do.

*Q* Is it possible for me to get a copy of that?

*A* If I can find you one, you bet.

*Q* We have just three more sections to go, actually. Apart from this study, do you or your students collect their writing over a time in a work folder or a portfolio? Yes or no?

*A* Yes.

*Q* You do. Now, since you do, what is the purpose of these collections?

*A* Number one is, as I tell the kids, in eighth-grade they do some fun writing, things that they're not ashamed of to look at two years later, or that they might even look at and use, revise it, in high school and rewrite it at a more sophisticated level.

I really like having . . . okay, where did this originate from? We used to do this as a district, and we kept two pieces of writing every year and put it in their folder, and then shipped it on. So when the kid graduated from high school, he had a writing folder with 24 pieces of writing in it.

For administrative reasons and cost reasons, we stopped doing that. But that's what . . . I like the idea of at the end of the year being able to give a kid a pile of writing and they being able to take it home. Also, I find it's been a good touch point with parents at conferences.

*Q* How do you and your students use these portfolios? And then the follow-up question to that is do you use portfolios in parent conferences?

*A* You bet. Matter of fact, one of the nice things is, you know, at conferences sometimes parents get stacked up outside your door if you get a little talky or a parent gets a little talky. So I have them right outside my door so parents can come in, and I have a sign that says, "Please feel free to find your son or daughter's writing folder," and then they can sit and go through it while they're waiting to see me.

They're a little less crabby then and usually they see that we're doing something and I usually get some really positive feedback from them—not necessarily that I'm a great teacher or anything, but just that, "Oh this was an interesting assignment. I heard him say something about this, now I understand why he was kind of into this."

*Q* Do you use the portfolios for instructional purposes?

*A* Not really. You asked me about how we processed and how I evaluated and so on earlier on, I think, and this is where we just tuck them away so that if we want to look at them. This is first essay we do—the "treasure" essay, the organizational thing. It is nice to be able to tell them, "Remember that, if you can't remember that essay we wrote last fall, this essay, this movie evaluation, should be set up the same way, with an introduction, a body, and a conclusion."

*Q* Do any of your students write on computers?

*A* More and more. I don't know if I could say 50 percent.

*Q* About what percentage, I was going to ask?

*A* But I would say it's getting close to 50 percent. And, of course two of these assignments, we go downstairs and everybody pretty much gets it on a computer.

*Q* Since your answer is "yes" for a large percentage of students, or a good percentage of students, how has using computers changed students' writing?

*A* I think they make more mechanical errors, and I wish I had data to prove that. But I really think they do, because their keyboarding skills aren't good enough. And that's why I know some of the parents at the conferences, they say, "Well, gee, he made a lot of mistakes, you know. And you gave him a B+ or an A– anyway?" And I tell them about what the real purpose of the assignment was, and I tell them that, in most cases, I know that when they write it out by hand there are a lot fewer mistakes. Matter of fact, one assignment next year for sure I'm not even going to correct the final, final draft that's on computer. I'm going to make them do a good handwritten draft and correct it, because they tend to have more run-ons and more . . . and they have more spelling errors even though they have a Spell Check.

**Q** That's interesting. Who or what has most influenced the way you teach writing, and how?

**A** Boy, that is a real toughie. I'll tell you, it goes back to . . . probably, one of my professors at Northern State College in Aberdeen, who was a former high school teacher before he moved on to teaching, basically, freshmen and sophomores and juniors at Northern State College. And he and one of the other professors there really got into composition heavy, and I took a workshop from him as a graduate student on writing and the writing process that was really helpful on how to organize and how to teach organization.

And then a lot of this other stuff . . . I've been blessed in our building here with having a lot of in-services, a lot of colleagues who share all the time, just like the woman who was in here before we started. You know, we've always been a sharing faculty and it's like, you know, "You don't have to make up your own test for *Anne Frank*, we have four versions of it floating around this building." And we've had some good in-services where we've had like the professional people come in and give us

different ideas for pre-writing and journaling in this one unit. And about every two or three years, we've gotten together as an English faculty—our English consultant here, bless his soul, has realized that we have a lot to learn from each other and teach each other; we don't need to hire a consultant for five grand and pay air fare to come and tell us how to teach writing.

**Q** Effective collegial atmosphere is what you're describing?

**A** Yeah. And so other than having a person who got me, I think, really started on the right track in my early grad school days, I just feel like I've grown kind of gradually with a lot of this stuff. I know so much more than when the first few years I taught.

**Q** How, if at all, have your goals or methods for writing instruction been influenced by the curriculum, standards, or assessment of your school, district, and state? And I think you were addressing that.

**A** Yeah, to some degree. When I was hired here, I was asked if it bothered me to teach some specific things from the curriculum and

follow a set curriculum. And I said not really, you know, as long as . . . I figured it would have to be a decent curriculum . . . I mean, as large as our district is, if that many teachers agreed on it, it would be decent.

**Q** What is the single most important additional support or resource, such as books, workshops, curriculum supervisor, you would like to have available to you?

**A** We had here English paraprofessionals who did nothing more than support us and did a lot of clerical work for us. We trained them so that they could, for instance, correct the mechanics. They had to correct an English test to become an English paraprofessional, as far as like mechanics. So we could actually use them to correct like the mechanics of a paper. Or we could have them do a focus correcting, say, "Okay, go through and just make sure that the paragraphing seems reasonably well-done, with a topic sentence and supporting detail." And that was so nice because we could do more writing. That was the biggest thing we had and we lost them all. We had four in this building and we went down to zero over a period of eight years.

**Q** Significant. What changes would you like to make in your writing instruction, if any?

**A** I'd like to be able to do more of it, actually; but there, again, you have so many other things you have to teach. We're supposed to be doing more technical reading . . . we're supposed to be doing more technical writing. I have been avoiding that as much as possible, because I think this is not really the place to be doing a whole lot of technical writing, other than teaching writing with organization. I mean, I think the kids need to know how to put together an essay and not just write stories and stuff all the time.

**Q** Finally, if you could pass on to a beginning teacher one important lesson or strategy you have learned from teaching students to write well, what would you tell him or her?

**A** Prewriting. That's something I never did as a beginning teacher because I'd never been taught to do pre-writing. If you teach and help kids do prewriting well, the first draft and the final draft are pretty much a piece of cake. It's getting them to generate enough ideas onto paper that they can pick and choose and have something to . . . it would be like, you know, trying to make a model from scratch, like give a kid a sheet of balsa and say, "Make a model airplane," as opposed to giving them a model where you've got a certain amount of pieces, but they're all pre-cut and so on and then you can assemble it.

**Q** Well, that's the end of my list of questions. Are there any questions you wish we had asked that might help us better understand your writing program?

**A** I'm not sure. I was thinking you should have asked me how much time I spend correcting all these— then I would have probably said something that probably sounded whiny; I'd have probably said something like every Saturday from nine to five or something.

Going back to what the one thing I wish we had, I wish we could have those para-professionals back because it allowed us to do more. I mean, we are human, we do have lives outside of school . . . sometimes. And that's obviously an issue that's a problem in every school.

I'll give you one quick example. When I was teaching in South Dakota, I used to do a lot more writing because I had a varied schedule where in some of my classes, like speech and that, or in German we didn't do any writing, so I had less demands on my time—and I had smaller, much smaller classes. And I remember reading a paper about teaching—and this was doing research for a grad class—and it said something about teachers in these large schools assigning like one big piece of writing, or significant piece of writing, every six weeks or a quarter. And I thought, "No wonder those kids in those big schools can't write if that's all they're doing," and so. And then, you know, all of a sudden I've got a . . . I've had as many as 170 kids in a semester. And there's only so much time in a day.

**Q** I can understand. Well, thank you very much for assisting in this study. Your name and the identity of your school will not be associated with any part of this study. Your sample assignment, if you gave it to us, may be reproduced in a published report of a study, where it could appear anonymously. Do you have any further questions before we end the interview?

**A** No, I don't.

Thank you very much.

## Interview IV—Eighth Grade

**Q** I would like to begin by asking you about your approach to writing instruction. If you had to summarize it in a few sentences, how would you describe your overall approach to teaching writing?

**A** We don't do a lot of writing teaching in the eighth grade. They typically do it in the seventh grade. We spend most of our time in the eighth grade preparing for end-of-grade testing and grammar testing.

The writing that I use in class is basically to enhance their grammar skills maybe. A lot of it is just to get them to write more, that's just one of the main purposes that I have focused on this year. But I haven't worried a lot about spelling. I have tried to stress grammar, you know, proper grammar—but just to get them to actually start to think and to put something on paper.

They do test in the fall—I just went completely blank, I can't think what the test is—where they have to write a response to a selection. And so we try to get them just to actually put something down besides repeating whatever the question was that they were given, the

prompt, which is what they usually get.

**Q** Now I'd like to ask you about writing activities that typically take place in this class each week across the school year. If I had the opportunity to spend a week in your classroom, what are four or five writing activities I'd most likely see you and your students do during that week?

**A** The only writing assignment we do every week would be our "Just Thinking" activities where I give them some type of . . . we either take something from a story that we've read—and it's a written response to either a video; story; we've taken current events, something that's happening in the news; or a big topic in our country— and I ask them to write a response as to how they feel about it or how they would handle the situation or, if they were that person, what would they do? That's about the only one we do every week.

Depending on what week it is—one week we did science fiction stories where they were given a natural disaster and something else and they had to write a short story

about . . . they had to include those two things in the short story. We did that.

They had to choose a code of ethics to live by and we did that. Those may be the only two really extended writing activities that they finally share.

**Q** Please take me through a single writing assignment so that I can get a sense of the sequence of activities involved. You decide what kind of assignment you want to think about, then take me through the steps you and your students typically go through from preparing for the assignment all the way to its completion.

**A** When we did the science fiction stories, let's say, we had been discussing fiction as a genre anyway, and then we started talking about science fiction specifically. We had read in class two or three science fiction stories. I let them watch *The Twilight Zone.* I was trying to find something that we could use.

And what we did was that I instructed them that they were going to write a science fiction story. In order to make sure that all of this . . . we talked about the difference between science

fiction and horror—because lots of them wanted to do horror rather than science fiction.

What I did was that I gave each student . . . in a bowl I put like some type of scientific experiment. Some of them had it. And then in another bowl I put a location. So they had "mountains," "school," "a small town," "on the sea." And then they had things like "an alien invasion," "an epidemic." They had tattoos, because they had talked about tattoos in their science class, all different type of things. They had to pull them out, and they were instructed to write a one-and-a-half-page story, short story, about whatever—but they had to include those two things in there. The way we do it first is that I ask them to write three pages, front side only, in pencil, skipping every other line. And they did that. And then I gave them an evaluation. Then they did that like Monday, maybe, and they had from Monday to Wednesday—time at home, some class time—to work on it.

And then on Wednesday they brought the stories in, which would have been their rough drafts. And what I did was that I paired them up. I base my pairing, really, on ability

level because our classes are very heterogeneously mixed. We serve a lot of EC students in regular classes on our team. So I base my pairing on ability level so that no one would be overly intimidated.

They read each other's stories and they did a checklist, and they checked for things like grammatical errors, spelling errors, if it made sense, did they include everything, did you find it as a reader . . . make sure that you didn't have three pages that were one paragraph, which is very common at this stage of writing.

And then they gave them back to them, and I gave each person a grade for turning in the draft, and they received a grade for checking somebody else's paper. And then the papers were returned back to the students and they, in turn, had to do a final draft, which they turned in on Friday.

**Q** So it's a week's project.

**A** Yes, it was a week project. It didn't take a lot of class time—you know, we were still able to cover other things in class because the writing they did at home or whenever they had extra time at the end of class. So it worked really well.

**Q** Do you and your students follow the same steps as in the previous question for all assignments and for all kinds of writing? For example, would the steps be different for an assignment that is longer or shorter than the example you gave?

**A** The steps would be different.

**Q** In your writing instruction in general, what kinds of advice or feedback do you give students about their writing? What do you tend to emphasize?

**A** Write about something that you know about. That's typically what I tell them. Write about something that you know. As long as you write about something that you know about or that you have strong feelings about, then your writing will be long enough; it will have more detail; it will be clearer.

So whenever I give them writing assignments, I always try to give them something where they don't necessarily have to be knowledgeable of the topic—when we wrote about these they have for current events, I will talk about the event first; the writing assignment will be something that is very general so that they don't have to have seen it on the

news or read it in the paper in order to be able to respond to it, but that they can take it from a personal point of view and go with it is typically what I tell them.

**Q** How and when do you convey your advice and evaluations to the students?

**A** Typically before they begin writing.

**Q** Do you read and evaluate students' writing at different points or in different ways for different assignments or students? If so, how?

**A** Yes. It depends on what they're writing as to . . . like if it's the "Just Thinking" activities, I don't check because I want them to write freely. I don't want them to worry about if everything's spelled right. I am trying to get them more to *think*.

I don't typically grade those for grammatical errors or anything of that nature. I don't even usually go through and mark them as being wrong or right. Check to see if they wrote a half a page, if they addressed the topic, and I just let it go. It's not anything that is formal. And I think that because of that, I get a lot of kids that would not normally write to write, because they didn't have to worry about if I was going to go through and mark it up as

"this word is spelled wrong" or "this is out of place" or "you should have used this." I just said write about . . .

I noticed when they were going through choosing what pieces they liked, they chose the "Just Thinking" activities that they enjoyed the most. So that's typical of the way I handled . . .

**Q** Do your students look at or listen to each other's work during class?

**A** Yes.

**Q** You talked about that. How, if at all, do you have your students use self-assessment or reflection to develop their writing?

**A** I hope that with most things they go back and reread them. A lot of times, if it is something formal, I really tell them I like to read it aloud no matter what it is—read it aloud to yourself and you will typically be able to hear the error, you will hear where you have left words out. If you go back and reread it and you can't figure out what a word is, then it's probably spelled wrong and when you were writing it you knew what word you were spelling, but now when you're looking at it makes no sense—that type of evaluation is typically what I ask of them.

**Q** What have you found works best to get all students engaged in writing?

**A** I allow them to write about a personal experience or just a response. If they don't feel that they . . . if they feel that they're going to be judged only on what they put down—and by that I mean about whether they can convey their thoughts about it as opposed to if it's right or wrong—they typically write better. And I tell them this can't be right or wrong because it's your opinion. Whenever they know that it can't be right or wrong and it's their opinion, then they typically will write. As long as they know that it is not a right or wrong answer, that no matter what they put down, as long as they produce something, then they typically write. I haven't had a big problem getting them not to . . . you know, with them not writing this year.

**Q** What have you found is the best way to teach technical aspects of writing, such as grammar, spelling and vocabulary?

**A** Practice. Show it to them wrong and have them try to . . . we do a lot of where they saw sentences wrong. We do a Daily Oral Language activity where they see things written incorrectly. Now, at this point in

the year—which is at the end of the year—they very quickly pick up on when things aren't correct, much quicker than they did at the beginning of the year. And it's only because we practice it every day. And now they look at sentences and they look to find something wrong. You know, even when I put notes up, they look to find something wrong. So I think it's just a matter of getting into practice of looking for errors.

**Q** Okay, in any given week, approximately how many hours are students engaged in writing activities in class, not including writing they do in the context of other subjects?

**A** Oh, so I probably wouldn't say any more than an hour.

**Q** Do you ever give your students writing assignments to be completed across several days or more?

**A** Yes.

**Q** About how often do you do that?

**A** Maybe a couple times a year, I'd say maybe three or four.

**Q** Do you ever give your students writing assignments

to be completed across more than one week?

**A** No.

**Q** Now, please describe in detail an assignment or activity that you have found to be particularly effective with students.

**A** Other than the "Just Thinking" activities?

**Q** Well, you want to tell about the "Just Thinking" activities?

**A** That's what I've already talked about. That tends to be effective. That tends to be the most effective thing I've found for them to do, and I do have samples of that.

Okay, this year was the thirtieth anniversary of integration of the Little Rock High School in Arkansas. So what we did is that . . . and, actually, what happened was that I just happened to see it on the news that this is what had happened, and it was the thirtieth anniversary of it.

So what I did was I came in that day and told the kids about when integration was . . . we talked about when integration was sent down from the Supreme Court and how long it took for schools to be integrated. And we talked about how

long it took for our county to integrate, which was *years* after it had come down. And we looked at the *Eyes on the Prize* video. And the *Eyes on the Prize* video showed the actual footage of the Little Rock Nine going into the school.

And one of the things that they talked about in the video was that on the first of the school . . . that they decided to do it, they had all decided to just go to school, and then the night before they made the decision to go as a group. All of them found out about it except for one girl—she didn't get the message. Then they showed all of this on the video. So she went to school by herself, and the rest of them were coming as a group.

**Q** Later?

**A** Later. And she was stuck there in the mob with the people screaming and hollering and the racist slurs being thrown—and she went on. She went anyway. And we were able to look at the video and the kids could see that she was terrified. But she didn't waver. You know, they were just amazed that she would still go, and we talked about how she possibly felt, realizing that

nobody else was showing up and not understanding why no one else was there and she was still going on. And the National Guard was there, the police were there and everything.

And after the video, that's really what we talked about. We talked about if you were the only person, would you go to integrate a school? Would you be brave enough to stand up for something because it was right?

And the writing assignment I gave them was "Would you have gone if you were the only student of your race there?" And with me making it that broad, they were able to respond to that. With their own thoughts. They didn't have to worry about, well, I gotta include all this information; they only had to write about would they have been brave enough to go. And we talked about the importance of somebody having to step up or things never changing. So that worked.

**Q** What about the assignment made it work well do you think?

**A** The fact that they were still allowed to be personal with it. Anytime I give them assignments such as that

where they can actually see —that one worked really well because they saw the video and they could actually see it happening, because it was the actual footage.

We did an assignment about . . . in our county they changed the graduation requirements to where the students have to have a C average in the core classes in order to graduate from high school. Well, that's something that was personal for them. So when I came in and I asked them to write about how they felt about the requirement. When they were asked to write about how they felt about it, well, of course, they're in the eighth grade and they're all going to high school next year—they gladly wrote about it. They had very strong feelings about it. So anytime you can make it personal, they tend to respond. Then I get better writing.

**Q** How did you come up with this particular assignment?

**A** With the "Just Thinking" activities? I read a poem this summer . . . I've got a copy of it somewhere . . . and it was called "Just Thinking," and the author went through and he had all types

of just different ideas that he was just thinking about that I thought was really good. And when we started at the beginning of the year, I read that to the kids and we did activities just from the poem—we picked different things.

One day all we did was I allowed them to list things that they were just thinking about, and they had to be very abstract questions. I was going to use those questions for the year, but the problem for me was that a lot of them were like really personal and I thought, oh, okay, I don't know if I really want to . . . They were things like, well, why do your parents start hating each other? And, you know, why do people die unexpectedly when they're healthy? And why do kids get shot when they should still be living?

**Q** That's what they were thinking about.

**A** So I thought, okay, this is a little too deep for us. And I didn't want it to just bum us out and make us really sad, so we'd have to find somewhere else to pull from. So a lot of it that we got at the beginning of the year was that type of thing, so we had to sort of . . .

**Q** Make it a little lighter than that?

**A** Yeah, I've got to make this a little bit lighter if I'm going to survive this school year. So I changed it quite a bit.

**Q** Okay, we have three more sections. Apart from this study, do you or your students collect their writing over a time in a work folder or portfolio?

**A** Yeah, they've collected "Just Thinking" activities for the entire year. They keep them inside . . . they have notebooks in my class and that is just one of the sections of their notebooks, and they keep them in there for the whole year.

I hope that what would happen is that they would see that even when they're just writing and it's not being graded for spelling and grammar, that the more they write, the better they write. That was the main purpose for it.

**Q** What is the purpose of the collections? Can you tell me briefly how you and your students use them?

**A** Just so that they could see, like I said, that their writing improves; that the more they write, the better

the writing would be even if . . . you know, just that you start to just expand more. And I think that for most of the students, they saw that. You know, when I told them they were going to have to write at the beginning of the year, they all just didn't really want to do it. But at this point now, it's very easy for them, you know. They say, now, we're going to have a "Just Thinking" activity this week and I say, "Okay, yes, this is what you need to write about."

And now they feel, I think they also feel freer to just really express themselves by whatever the topic is that we're writing about. And I think that their writing, as far as not being afraid to put something down, has really improved and that they can see that themselves; that they can look at the things that they wrote at the beginning of the year—how short it was, how quick and to the point it was—as opposed to the things that they're writing now.

**Q** Do you use these portfolios in parent conferences?

**A** Some I have, some I haven't.

**Q** What about for grading or assessment purposes?

**A** For grading, it's either you do it or you don't do it. If you do it, I typically give you 100 just for doing it, and if you don't do it, then you don't get a grade.

**Q** What about for instructional purposes?

**A** Depends. Some of it we've been able to fit as part of the curriculum and they can use it. Some things they've taken and rewritten, you know, for grammar or something like that, but that's about it.

**Q** Do any of your students write on computers?

**A** Yes, I do have some that write on computers.

**Q** Approximately what percentage of your students write on computers at least some of the time? Just a percentage about, you think . . .

**A** Just in that class or . . .

**Q** Yeah, just looking at this class.

**A** In that class, I don't have a lot of students that write on computers. I have maybe one or two maybe . . . three—I can think of three right off the top of my head.

Three out of the 27 or 28 I have in there that I can think of that use the computers every now and then.

**Q** Have you noticed that being able to use computers has changed how students write? You probably can't tell with just that.

**A** With just that class I can't. I have students in my other classes, like my EC class, who are very self-conscious of their handwriting. So when I tell them they can turn it in from the computer, then I get a lot . . . I get more computer writing in that class than I do in my other classes.

**Q** Who or what has most influenced you with the way you teach writing, and how? Who or what? College classes or workshops or anything?

**A** The way I teach writing? Oh, gosh, I have no idea. Probably . . . writing . . .

**Q** Well, you were talking about that poet, that that was one influence. Can you think of anything like that?

**A** We had an exceptional student teacher here that worked with me. She helped me to better understand why students write in a particular way. She has helped me a lot with understanding the way that students—particularly

exceptional students—process information: that it's not the same way that I process information. And that even when they read it back, it doesn't always not make sense to them, because they already know ahead . . . because they read so much that doesn't make sense to them, that even when they read some of their own things it *still* doesn't make sense to them. So it's just the way that they process information, and it has changed the way that I present information—not just to my exceptional class, but to all of my students. Because I realize that, even in my other classes, I have students that may not necessarily be identified, but they still need it presented in a different way.

She'd probably be my biggest influence as far as how they write and the way that things are processed for them and that type of thing.

**Q** How, if at all, have your goals or methods for writing instruction been influenced by the curriculum, standards, or assessments of your school, district, or state?

**A** It hasn't. Like I said, now that the writing test is in the seventh grade, we probably don't spend as much time in the eighth grade emphasizing it as we should.

Oh, yeah, in the seventh grade they spend all . . . most of the year preparing, because the test that they take is the writing test. In the eighth grade, we don't take the writing test. They have a grammar test and end-of-grade tests . . . and the other test that they take is . . . I cannot even think of it. We took it at the beginning of the year and I'm completely blank—where they respond to a prompt.

But as far as writing, it's not . . . I don't emphasize it as much as I do, probably, other aspects of the curriculum.

**Q** What is the single most important additional support or resource, such as books, workshops, curriculum advisor, that you would like to have available to you?

**A** For me personally? More books, but I don't know how that would increase writing. I always want more books.

**Q** Books or workshops or curriculum supervisor—any of those?

**A** Books. Honestly, I think as far as writing is concerned, I think that the more you read, the better you do write because you

start seeing good writing. So the more that they read, the more that they start to see writing in its supposedly best form, because it's published, and they will start to copy that type of writing. That's one of the things that I hope, because more books would always benefit me.

**Q** What changes would you like to make in your writing instruction, if any?

**A** Probably more time for response to different things. You know, with things being so set and doing things the way that they *have* to be done, I don't think that we have as much time to write. Like I say, in the eighth grade, I would like for them to write in class.

**Q** Finally, if you could pass on to a beginning teacher one important lesson or strategy you have learned for teaching students to write well, what would you tell him or her?

**A** My biggest shock with the eighth-grade teachers is that their students didn't write on what I thought was eighth-grade level at all. I was surprised at how low the writing was for a lot of students.

Now that I've been doing it for years, I see that the students do write on eighth-grade level, and eighth-grade level is just not a very big step from fifth-grade level or sixth-grade level. I expected these really great writers.

But I think that I would tell a new teacher that although the structure may not be great, if the right buttons are pushed they can really give you some really nice things.

**Q** Okay, that's the end of my list of questions. Are there any questions you wish we had asked that might help us better understand your writing program?

**A** No.

Thank you very much for assisting in this study.

# appendix C
## Sample Writing Topics

These topics present the kinds of assignments that teachers in the study discussed and students submitted for the study. Details about the exact content of the assignments—how the assignment was presented, the length and format of the finished product, and how much time was allowed for completion—were not recorded as part of the study. The presentation of the topics here should not be taken as an endorsement of any of these topics.

### Personal Narrative/Creative Narrative/ Other Creative Exercises

- Personal journals

- Journals recording responses to literature and other readings

- Write in a particular genre (e.g., a detective story; an interview with a famous historical person; autobiographical episodes; an answer to a question in an advice column; various forms of poetry)

- Invent a machine and describe how it works

- Interview a famous historical person

- Write a new ending or an extension to a story you've read (e.g., what would have happened to Anne Frank if she had survived the war; transpose a fairy tale to modern times)

- Write a story from the viewpoint of another person or creature (e.g., a Civil War soldier's journal, a description of life as a 49er; what it feels like to be a tiger)

- Make up and describe a monster

- Write about something that bugs you

- Describe a charity that you would like to run

- Write about an autobiographical episode (e.g., a time you felt proud of yourself; a New Year's resolution and how well you kept it; the most memorable event of your first two years at middle school; a significant memory)

- Write about a piece of advice you've received

- If you could be anything, what would you be?

- Invent a month of celebrations

### Informative/Descriptive

- Select a word, research it, and find references to the word in pictures, poems, and literature

- Write a research paper about a hero

- Select ten things to put in a time capsule and tell why you would include them

- Describe changes that have occurred in the school under a new school administration

- Write letters of invitation to school events (e.g., invite your parents to a parent-teacher conference)

- Write thank-you letters (e.g., thank a person who has made a presentation at your school)

- Write a letter of welcome to the school for new students

- Compare and contrast two characters in a piece of literature

- Compare and contrast characters, settings, or themes from two pieces of literature

- Tell why you would select a certain pet

- Write a résumé as if you were transferring to a new school

- Select a political cartoon and explain what it means

- Describe familiar objects, places or activities (e.g., the inside of your refrigerator, your bedroom, how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich)

- Compare and contrast a week in the summer with a week during the school year

- Select something that you would like to become extinct and tell why

- Write a letter of complaint about a product or service (e.g., a letter to a department store about a defective product)

## Persuasive

- Write a letter to persuade a particular person or audience of a point of view on a school or local community issue (e.g., changing the school starting time, changing the school dress code, putting a certain book in the school library, changing lunchroom policy)

- Write an essay arguing for a particular action on a social issue (e.g., the best way to dispose of chemicals, how to deal with water contamination, whether athletes should be tested for drug use)

# appendix D
## Data Appendix

This appendix contains complete data for all the tables presented in this report, including percentages of classrooms and average scores. In addition, standard errors appear in parentheses next to each estimated percentage and average score. Because the scores and percentages presented in this report are based on samples rather than the entire population(s), the results are subject to a measure of uncertainty reflected in the standard errors of the estimates. It can be said with 95-percent certainty that for each population of interest, the value for the whole population is within plus or minus two standard errors of the estimate for the sample.

## Standard Errors Not Available for Data in Tables 4.3–4.8

Standard errors were provided for the statistics in this appendix through table 4.2. The design of this incorporated a sample of schools that both participated in the 1998 NAEP main assessment and selected to contribute a classroom to the study. The design allows a probabilistic sample of classrooms and students, providing classroom-based writing samples for the study. However, the student overlap (students participating both in the main 1998 NAEP writing assessment and the current study) is not a controlled probabilistic sample of students. Therefore, using the NAEP weights and calculating standard errors for this "overlapping" group for which data are given in text tables 4.3–4.8 could be misleading. Consequently, no standard error tables for text tables 4.3–4.8 appear in this appendix.

**Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on the most
commonly practiced writing activities, grades 4 and 8: 1998**

| *What are four or five writing activities you and your students do during a week?* | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Creative or personal narrative | 52 (6.1) | 39 (5.3) |
| Informative writing | 47 (5.5) | 54 (5.6) |
| Journal writing (responses to literature) | 47 (5.6) | 51 (6.3) |
| Grammar/spelling/vocabulary exercise | 37 (5.8) | 37 (6.0) |
| Freewriting | 20 (4.5) | 13 (4.9) |
| Research reports | 20 (4.2) | 8 (3.2) |
| Brainstorming/webbing/prewriting | 19 (4.6) | 18 (4.8) |
| Poetry | 18 (4.1) | 23 (5.2) |
| Persuasive writing | 15 (4.6) | 28 (4.9) |
| Speech/oral presentation/dramatic presentation | 6 (3.9) | 3 (1.8) |
| Peer review | 5 (1.8) | 5 (2.5) |
| Descriptive writing | 4 (2.1) | 14 (3.7) |

Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because each option is independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

| TABLE **D2.2** | Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on the sequence of activities involved in writing assignments, grades 4 and 8: 1998 |
|---|---|

| Take us through a single writing assignment so that we can get a sense of the sequences of activities involved. | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| ■ *Before drafting:* | | |
| Brainstorming | 88 (3.4) | 73 (4.9) |
| Reviewing models or other samples | 39 (5.4) | 42 (5.4) |
| Reading or being read to as basis for writing activity | 28 (5.4) | 40 (5.7) |
| Researching/gathering information as basis for writing activity | 20 (4.4) | 8 (2.5) |
| Outlining | 17 (4.5) | 24 (3.8) |
| Drawing or other art-related reinforcement | 13 (3.3) | 6 (3.3) |
| Freewriting | 10 (3.5) | 7 (1.8) |
| Creating rubric for assignment | 10 (3.7) | 13 (3.6) |
| "Real-life" exposure as visitors, other stimuli as basis for writing activity | 6 (2.2) | 5 (2.1) |
| Listening/viewing other media as basis for writing activity | 2 (1.4) | 8 (3.1) |
| Prewriting | 1 (0.6) | 3 (2.1) |
| ■ *Drafting and feedback:* | | |
| Students engaged in drafting | 96 (2.2) | 98 (1.3) |
| Teacher giving feedback on draft | 87 (4.1) | 91 (3.1) |
| Student making changes as a result of feedback | 78 (4.9) | 86 (3.8) |
| Teacher conducting one-on-one conferences | 76 (4.5) | 54 (5.4) |
| Teacher giving written comments | 42 (5.5) | 59 (5.5) |
| Teacher giving informal comments to individual students | 32 (4.3) | 38 (6.2) |
| Teacher giving comments to a group or class | 28 (4.8) | 22 (5.3) |
| Teacher giving grade on draft or final product | 27 (5.7) | 50 (6.2) |
| Teacher giving feedback based on rubric or list of requirements | 17 (3.9) | 20 (4.4) |
| First draft is final version | 1 (1.0) | # (1.0) |
| ■ *Publication:* | | |
| Sharing of final or nearly final version | 58 (6.3) | 51 (4.6) |
| Sharing with classmates or other school audience | 54 (6.4) | 47 (4.5) |
| Sharing with outside audience | 3 (1.8) | 4 (2.2) |
| Sharing with unspecified audience | 1 (0.8) | 2 (1.2) |

# Percentage is between 0.0 and 0.5.

Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because each option is independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

<table>
<tr><td>T A B L E<br>**D2.3**</td><td>**Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reported variability in steps in the writing process, grades 4 and 8: 1998**</td></tr>
</table>

| Do you and your students follow the same steps as in the previous question for all assignments and for all kinds of writing? | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Steps in the writing process vary by assignment | 88 (3.5) | 70 (5.5) |
| Steps in the writing process vary by student choice | 44 (6.4) | 46 (5.9) |
| Steps do not vary | 6 (2.3) | 20 (4.6) |

Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because the first two options are not mutually exclusive.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

<table>
<tr><td>T A B L E<br>**D2.4**</td><td>**Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on the kinds of advice or feedback given to students about their writing, grades 4 and 8: 1998**</td></tr>
</table>

| What kinds of advice or feedback do you give students about their writing? What do you tend to emphasize? | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Grammar/mechanics, etc. | 66 (5.6) | 72 (4.7) |
| Details/description/elaboration | 46 (6.8) | 31 (5.5) |
| Content/adequacy of ideas | 41 (5.5) | 39 (6.2) |
| Organization/sequence | 38 (5.7) | 49 (6.8) |
| Provide positive feedback/support | 23 (5.3) | 30 (5.6) |
| Grammar only | 22 (4.7) | 10 (2.8) |
| Vocabulary | 12 (3.9) | 11 (3.5) |
| Clarity | 12 (3.2) | 24 (5.6) |
| Fulfillment of assignment | 8 (2.7) | 12 (3.5) |
| Creativity | 7 (2.5) | 8 (3.5) |
| Voice/style | 3 (1.0) | 12 (4.8) |

Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because each option is independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

| Do you read and evaluate<br>*students' writing at different points?* | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Before drafting/during prewriting | 27 (5.7) | 25 (4.5) |
| During drafting | 80 (4.8) | 87 (4.1) |
| On final product | 31 (4.8) | 47 (5.5) |

Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because the options are not mutually exclusive.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

| T A B L E<br>**D2.6** | **Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on the frequency of teacher feedback to students in the course of a writing assignment, grades 4 and 8: 1998** |
|---|---|

| How and when do you convey your<br>*advice and evaluations to students?* | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| They give feedback one time<br>in the course of a writing assignment | 52 (6.2) | 43 (5.3) |
| They give feedback two times<br>in the course of a writing assignment | 35 (5.9) | 45 (6.3) |
| They give feedback three times<br>in the course of a writing assignment | 5 (2.2) | 9 (3.7) |

Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because some of the interviewed teachers may not have addressed this issue in the course of the interview.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

| **T A B L E**<br>**D2.7** | **Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on whether or not peer feedback is used during class, grades 4 and 8: 1998** |
|---|---|

| *Do your students look at or listen*<br>*to each other's work during class?* | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Yes—there is peer feedback | 100 (0.0) | 96 (2.4) |
| No—there is no peer feedback | 0 (0.0) | 1 (0.7) |

Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because some of the interviewed teachers may not have addressed this issue in the course of the interview.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

| **T A B L E**<br>**D2.8** | **Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on when and how peer feedback is done in class, grades 4 and 8: 1998** |
|---|---|

| *When and how is peer response*<br>*or evaluation done in your class?* | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Paired discussion/exchange of papers | 74 (5.5) | 75 (5.1) |
| Peer review/editing | 72 (5.5) | 61 (5.4) |
| Whole class discussion | 31 (6.4) | 24 (5.2) |
| Small group discussion | 30 (6.3) | 26 (5.3) |
| Feedback from parent/others on any draft | 13 (3.6) | 16 (4.8) |

Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because each option is independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

| TABLE D2.9 | Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on the use of student self-assessment or reflection in writing development, grades 4 and 8: 1998 |
|---|---|

| How, if at all, do you have your students use self-assessment or reflection to develop their writing? | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Yes—students assess their own writing | 81 (4.2) | 82 (4.2) |
| No—students do not assess their own writing | 6 (2.2) | 13 (3.6) |
| | | |
| Student proofreads his/her own work | 47 (5.0) | 51 (5.6) |
| Student uses rubric or list of requirements | 31 (5.9) | 29 (6.2) |
| Student uses reflective writing | 5 (2.3) | 14 (4.1) |

Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because some of the interviewed teachers may not have addressed this issue in the course of the interview.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on collecting student writing in a work folder or portfolio, grades 4 and 8: 1998

| *Part 1—Do you or do your students collect writing over time in a work folder or portfolio?* | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 94 (2.8) | 89 (4.5) |
| No | 4 (2.4) | 11 (4.4) |
| *Part 2—What is the purpose of these collections?* | | |
| For parent conferences | 76 (5.8) | 64 (6.4) |
| To see growth or improvement | 64 (5.7) | 60 (6.0) |
| For assessment | 64 (6.1) | 35 (5.8) |
| For instruction | 56 (5.9) | 46 (5.1) |
| Students take work home to show parents | 26 (6.6) | 8 (2.9) |
| To pass on to future teachers/become part of student's file | 22 (5.7) | 23 (5.1) |
| Student selects pieces | 22 (4.9) | 22 (4.3) |
| Student reflection/self-assessment | 13 (3.7) | 16 (3.2) |
| Teacher or school accountability | 10 (2.9) | 10 (3.5) |
| Student revises earlier work | 6 (2.5) | 13 (4.3) |
| For storage only | 3 (2.0) | 3 (1.5) |

Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because some teachers may not have addressed this issue in the course of the interview in Part 1. In Part 2, more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

**Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on techniques used to get all students engaged in writing, grades 4 and 8: 1998**

| *What have you found works best to get all students engaged in writing?* | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Allowing student choice based on interest | 36 (4.7) | 41 (5.2) |
| Engaging students with stimuli (audio/visual, pictures) | 31 (4.8) | 28 (5.3) |
| Encouraging student knowledge and experience | 29 (5.2) | 35 (5.2) |
| Encouraging imagination and creativity | 23 (4.8) | 19 (4.8) |
| Showing models of what is expected | 19 (4.3) | 8 (3.2) |
| Displaying/sharing/publishing (students' pride) | 17 (4.4) | 15 (4.7) |
| Providing structure/system/series of steps for writing | 15 (4.1) | 9 (3.4) |
| Having students work in groups | 13 (4.4) | 17 (4.7) |
| Presenting clear criteria | 11 (3.2) | 7 (3.5) |
| Showing teacher enthusiasm | 8 (2.8) | 8 (2.9) |
| Positive feedback (communicating worth of student ideas) | 6 (3.1) | 1 (0.9) |
| Application to other writing | 5 (2.2) | 1 (0.7) |
| Individualizing instruction (based on differing abilities) | 3 (2.0) | 1 (1.1) |
| Communicating importance of passing high-stakes tests | 1 (0.9) | 1 (0.8) |
| High expectations | 0 (0.0) | 1 (0.7) |

Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because each option is independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

**Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on sources of effective writing assignments for students, grades 4 and 8: 1998**

| How did you come up with a particularly effective assignment? | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Own experiences/ideas | 42 (6.1) | 51 (5.8) |
| Other teachers/administrators | 21 (3.7) | 14 (3.2) |
| Books, articles, textbooks, Internet | 18 (3.8) | 23 (4.9) |
| Workshop or conference | 8 (3.2) | 1 (1.2) |
| School, district, or state curriculum materials | 6 (2.4) | 8 (2.9) |
| Students | 2 (1.9) | # (1.9) |

\# Percentage is between 0.0 and 0.5.
Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because some of the interviewed teachers may not have addressed this issue in the course of the interview.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

**Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on different ways of teaching the technical aspects of writing, grades 4 and 8: 1998**

| *What is the best way to teach the technical aspects of writing (approaches to teaching grammar, spelling, and vocabulary)?* | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Spelling lessons and quizzes | 30 (4.6) | 28 (6.2) |
| Use of grammar book | 24 (4.4) | 16 (4.2) |
| Mini lessons | 19 (4.6) | 21 (4.8) |
| Vocabulary quizzes/lists | 16 (4.1) | 22 (5.3) |
| Daily Oral Language | 16 (4.1) | 14 (4.3) |
| Teacher commentary on student work | 8 (2.6) | 15 (4.4) |
| Daily sentence correction | 6 (2.6) | 3 (1.6) |
| Extended assignments based on grammar | 4 (2.1) | 7 (3.5) |
| Peer commentary on student work | 4 (1.7) | 4 (2.4) |
| Modeling | 3 (2.0) | 7 (3.3) |
| Spellcheck on computer | 3 (1.9) | 5 (2.1) |
| De-emphasis on grammar in early assignments | 0 (0.0) | 2 (1.6) |
| Diagramming | 0 (0.0) | 2 (2.4) |

Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because each option is independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

**Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on the amount of time students are engaged in writing activities in class, grades 4 and 8: 1998**

| In any given week, approximately how many hours are students engaged in writing activities in class, not including writing they do in the context of other subject areas? | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Less than 1 hour | 2 (1.7) | 6 (2.6) |
| 1–2 7/8 hours | 42 (4.9) | 66 (4.9) |
| 3–4 7/8 hours | 36 (5.3) | 20 (4.3) |
| 5 hours or greater | 19 (3.5) | 4 (1.8) |
| Blank | 1 (0.8) | 5 (2.8) |

Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

**Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on students' use of computers for writing, grades 4 and 8: 1998**

*Do any of your students write on computers? Have you noticed that being able to use computers has changed how students write? How do your students use computers?*

| | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| *Students write on computers* | | |
| Yes | 90 (3.0) | 97 (1.5) |
| No | 8 (2.4) | 1 (1.1) |
| | | |
| **Students writing changed because of computers** | | |
| Yes | 70 (5.2) | 68 (5.8) |
| No (or neutral—not much effect) | 14 (4.4) | 22 (4.9) |
| | | |
| *Teachers' observations on the effect of computer use* | | |
| Increases student motivation | 39 (5.6) | 47 (6.0) |
| Helps students with spelling/grammar | 27 (5.6) | 31 (6.1) |
| Improves appearance of writing | 19 (4.7) | 26 (5.1) |
| Easier for students who have difficulty with handwriting | 16 (4.7) | 9 (3.1) |
| Harder, slower for students who have trouble typing | 4 (2.6) | 5 (2.6) |
| Poorer spelling/grammar | 2 (1.5) | 6 (2.6) |
| Students plagiarize more | 2 (1.8) | 1 (0.7) |
| Students focus excessively on appearance | 1 (0.9) | 2 (1.5) |
| Less human interaction | 0 (0.0) | 0 (0.0) |
| | | |
| *What students do on computers* | | |
| Type and print out/publish final copy | 68 (5.6) | 71 (5.9) |
| Draft/revise | 29 (5.8) | 47 (5.4) |
| Use spell check/grammar check | 29 (5.9) | 32 (5.6) |
| Other | 18 (3.7) | 12 (3.8) |
| Do research using Internet or other computer-based resources | 5 (1.5) | 5 (2.0) |
| Use e-mail | 0 (0.0) | 0 (0.0) |

Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because some of the interviewed teachers may not have addressed this issue in the course of the interview. Some of the options are independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

**Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on more than one use of computers for writing, grades 4 and 8: 1998**

| What students do on computers:<br>(e.g., draft/revise, use Internet resources,<br>use spell check/grammar check) | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| Two uses | 26 (5.4) | 42 (6.0) |
| Three uses | 18 (5.3) | 20 (4.6) |
| Four uses | 3 (1.6) | # (0.1) |

# Percentage is between 0.0 and 0.5.
Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because some of the interviewed teachers may not have addressed this issue in the course of the interview.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

**Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on the influence of curriculum, standards, or assessments on writing instruction, grades 4 and 8: 1998**

| *How, if at all, have your goals or methods for writing instruction been influenced by the curriculum, standards, or assessments of your school, district, or state?* | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| *Source of influence* | | |
| *Standards* | 35 (4.8) | 37 (6.0) |
| State | 21 (4.2) | 25 (5.2) |
| District/school | 9 (2.8) | 14 (4.2) |
| Other | 7 (3.9) | 6 (2.8) |
| *Curriculum* | 43 (5.6) | 39 (5.9) |
| State | 13 (3.8) | 10 (3.6) |
| District/school/department | 31 (4.8) | 22 (4.6) |
| Other | 36 (2.4) | 39 (3.6) |
| *Testing* | 34 (6.0) | 41 (6.0) |
| State | 29 (5.6) | 32 (5.7) |
| District/school | 3 (1.6) | 5 (2.3) |
| Other | 4 (1.9) | 5 (3.1) |
| | | |
| *Positive influence* | | |
| Provides specific goals or direction | 30 (5.7) | 29 (5.8) |
| Increases awareness of/emphasis on writing | 14 (4.1) | 9 (3.2) |
| Raises standards for students/teachers | 8 (3.3) | 6 (2.5) |
| Offers helpful rubrics for writing | 1 (1.0) | 1 (0.8) |
| Provides resources | 0 (0.0) | 3 (1.3) |
| | | |
| *Negative influence* | | |
| Creates excessive demands | 4 (2.6) | 5 (2.6) |
| Does not match curriculum/narrows view of writing | 2 (1.5) | 6 (2.6) |
| Restricts teacher's freedom | 2 (1.8) | 1 (0.7) |
| Insufficient funding/resources | 1 (0.9) | 2 (1.5) |
| Encourages too much teaching to test | 0 (0.0) | 0 (0.0) |
| Guaranteed failure for some students | 0 (0.0) | 0 (0.0) |
| | | |
| *Neutral or no real influence* | 26 (5.4) | 28 (4.6) |

Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because each option is independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

**Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on who or what has influenced the way they teach writing, grades 4 and 8: 1998**

| *Who or what has most influenced the way you teach writing?* | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| *Teacher's background of training* | | |
| Personal experience with writing | 25 (4.4) | 21 (4.2) |
| College or graduate school class/teacher | 22 (4.8) | 26 (4.9) |
| K–12 class/teacher | 18 (5.0) | 17 (5.4) |
| | | |
| *Professional resources* | | |
| Professional workshops | 25 (4.7) | 26 (4.5) |
| Book on writing | 11 (4.0) | 21 (5.2) |
| Writing consultant | 1 (1.1) | 1 (1.2) |
| Professional organization membership | 0 (0.0) | 1 (0.7) |
| | | |
| *School colleagues* | | |
| Teacher who is peer or colleague | 33 (4.8) | 21 (4.9) |
| School principal | 7 (3.3) | 1 (0.9) |
| Curriculum supervisor | 2 (1.8) | # (1.8) |
| Teacher's aide | 0 (0.0) | 0 (0.0) |
| Student teacher | 0 (0.0) | 0 (0.0) |

# Percentage is between 0.0 and 0.5.
Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because each option is independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

**Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on the most important resource they would like to have available, grades 4 and 8: 1998**

| *What is the single most important additional support or resource (such as books, workshops, curriculum supervisor) you would like to have available to you?* | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| *Classroom contexts* | | |
| More training in writing instruction | 37 (5.2) | 27 (4.8) |
| Written resources | 21 (4.3) | 21 (5.3) |
| More time | 9 (3.9) | 17 (4.5) |
| More or better curriculum materials | 8 (3.6) | 2 (1.4) |
| More time for consultation with other teachers | 4 (2.7) | 4 (2.2) |
| Smaller classes/fewer students | 3 (1.1) | 5 (2.3) |
| More time for writing instruction/for students to write | 2 (1.4) | 2 (1.3) |
| More time for conferencing with students | 2 (1.4) | 2 (1.5) |
| More training in assessing writing | 2 (1.8) | # (1.8) |
| Integration of writing across curriculum | 1 (0.7) | # (0.7) |
| More time for providing feedback on writing to students | 0 (0.0) | 1 (0.7) |
| | | |
| *Technology* | | |
| Computers | 18 (4.3) | 22 (4.4) |
| Software programs | 8 (3.0) | 3 (1.6) |
| Training on how to use computers | 4 (2.5) | 3 (2.0) |
| Technical assistance | 1 (0.5) | 1 (0.6) |
| | | |
| *Access to personnel* | | |
| Another teacher or aide in classroom | 10 (3.2) | 8 (3.1) |
| Curriculum supervisor | 6 (3.1) | 8 (3.8) |
| Outside writing consultant | 2 (1.3) | 2 (2.0) |
| Professional writer/author | 2 (1.8) | 3 (2.2) |

# Percentage is between 0.0 and 0.5..
Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because each option is independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

**Percentage of classrooms by teachers' reports on changes they would like to make in their writing instruction, grades 4 and 8: 1998**

| What changes would you like to make in your writing instruction, if any? | 4th grade | 8th grade |
|---|---|---|
| *Time* | | |
| More time | 39 (5.7) | 39 (5.5) |
| For writing instruction | 19 (4.5) | 13 (4.4) |
| For other purposes | 14 (4.1) | 9 (3.9) |
| To conference with students | 12 (4.1) | 9 (2.7) |
| Rearrange time | 3 (1.9) | 3 (2.3) |
| To provide feedback | 1 (0.9) | 10 (3.1) |
| Consult with other teachers | 0 (0.0) | 0 (0.0) |
| | | |
| *Approaches* | | |
| Assign more writing | 6 (3.3) | 4 (2.6) |
| Utilize greater variety of assignments | 5 (3.3) | 6 (3.0) |
| Motivate students | 4 (2.0) | 5 (2.7) |
| Focus more on basics as grammar | 3 (1.1) | 2 (1.5) |
| Encourage creativity | 1 (0.9) | 1 (0.7) |
| Better integrate grammar and mechanics with writing assignments | 0 (0.0) | 6 (3.9) |
| Focus more on writing process | 0 (0.0) | 1 (0.5) |
| Assign more homework | 0 (0.0) | 0 (0.0) |
| | | |
| **Testing concerns** | | |
| Focus less on a test | 3 (1.6) | 5 (2.6) |
| | | |
| **Technology** | | |
| Learn to use technology | 2 (1.2) | 4 (2.3) |

Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

NOTE: Percentages do not add to 100 because each option is independent and more than one option may have been mentioned by any given teacher.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

**Number of writing pieces, weighted percentage, and average score by type of writing submitted by students for the Writing in the Nation's Classrooms study, grades 4 and 8: 1998**

| | 4th grade | | | 8th grade | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number of pieces | Weighted percentage of pieces submitted | Average score | Number of pieces | Weighted percentage of pieces submitted | Average score |
| **All pieces** | **4,459** | **100** | **3.0 (0.0)** | **4,410** | **100** | **2.9 (0.1)** |
| Poetry | 297 | 7 (1.4) | 2.9 (0.1) | 416 | 10 (1.8) | 3.0 (0.1) |
| Essays/reports | 1,218 | 29 (2.5) | 3.0 (0.1) | 1,188 | 25 (2.6) | 3.0 (0.1) |
| Narrative | 2,398 | 52 (2.7) | 3.0 (0.0) | 2,035 | 48 (3.2) | 2.9 (0.1) |
| Persuasive | 228 | 5 (1.1) | 2.9 (0.1) | 599 | 14 (1.9) | 2.9 (0.1) |
| Letters | 318 | 7 (1.5) | 2.9 (0.1) | 172 | 3 (0.6) | 2.7 (0.2) |

Standard errors of the estimated percentages and average scores appear in parentheses.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.

Percentage of writing pieces receiving each level of scoring by type of writing submitted by students for the Writing in the Nation's Classrooms study, grades 4 and 8: 1998

| All pieces | Percentage of pieces | |
|---|---|---|
| Score | 4th grade | 8th grade |
| 1 | 3 (0.5) | 3 (0.5) |
| 2 | 20 (1.2) | 26 (2.0) |
| 3 | 52 (1.4) | 44 (1.3) |
| 4 | 25 (1.9) | 26 (2.3) |
| *Poetry* | | |
| 1 | 5 (1.4) | 3 (0.8) |
| 2 | 25 (3.2) | 25 (3.0) |
| 3 | 50 (4.0) | 44 (4.2) |
| 4 | 21 (4.3) | 28 (4.7) |
| *Essays/reports* | | |
| 1 | 4 (1.0) | 3 (0.7) |
| 2 | 16 (2.1) | 25 (3.0) |
| 3 | 52 (2.4) | 45 (2.0) |
| 4 | 28 (2.7) | 27 (3.1) |
| *Narratives* | | |
| 1 | 3 (0.6) | 3 (0.6) |
| 2 | 21 (1.6) | 27 (2.4) |
| 3 | 51 (1.5) | 44 (1.8) |
| 4 | 25 (2.1) | 26 (2.6) |
| *Persuasive* | | |
| 1 | 1 (0.9) | 3 (0.8) |
| 2 | 23 (4.8) | 28 (2.9) |
| 3 | 58 (4.1) | 43 (2.1) |
| 4 | 19 (3.7) | 27 (3.8) |
| *Letters* | | |
| 1 | 3 (1.1) | 8 (2.9) |
| 2 | 19 (2.7) | 35 (6.2) |
| 3 | 59 (3.8) | 40 (6.5) |
| 4 | 20 (3.0) | 17 (6.0) |

Standard errors of the estimated percentages appear in parentheses.

NOTE: Scores are based on the four-point scale in the scoring rubric developed for the study (see figure 4.1).

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1998 writing assessment.