Teachers’ Curricular Enactments in Writing Instruction

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Status of Literacy in US

- No Child Left Behind (2001)
  - Adequate Yearly Progress: testing in reading & math (beginning at grade 3)
  - Publishers developed, districts adopted scripted curriculum
  - Teachers followed (sometimes blindly)
  - Critiques of narrowed curriculum (no recess, social studies and science dropped in some schools)
  - Teachers’ loss of autonomy and professionalism
Lack of Attention to Writing

- My critique (McCarthey, 2008, Written Communication)
- Emphasis on reading due to tests had the consequence of limiting time spent writing
- Low-income schools spent less time on writing than high income schools
- Instruction
  - low-income tended to be grammar, punctuation, lots of correcting
  - high-income focused more on process, providing feedback, allowing students to choose topics
Trends in Writing Instruction


- Anticipating the Common Core Standards (adopted in 2010)
  - Focus on writing in specific genres
  - Publishers start producing materials including writing

- Illinois schools: Districts adopt curriculum to meet state Standards now Common Core, administrators have power to monitor implementation
Curriculum

- Formal curricula (e.g., official documents, standards, and specific materials)
- Planned: lesson plans
- Enacted curriculum (e.g., the assignments, routines, lessons, and daily experiences of the teachers and students)
- (Walker, 2003).
Factors Affecting Curricular Enactment

- Policies
- Teacher Orientations
- Professional Development
- Materials

Context such as teacher and student characteristics, school leadership, policy environment
Research Questions

How did teachers enact writing curricula in their schools?

What factors influenced teachers’ enactment of writing curriculum?

How did teachers navigate policy contexts in their schools, professional development opportunities, and personal factors?
METHODS

- Participants
  - 20 primary teachers (grades K-6) from 4 districts

- Data Collection
  - Interviews: 3 of each teacher
  - 3 Observations of Writing Instruction (fall, winter, spring)
  - Writing Samples (3 students from each classroom)
ANALYSIS

- Interviews
  - Teachers (Curriculum, Student Work, & Professional Development)

- Observations
  - Room environment
  - Use of materials
  - Teacher-student interaction
  - Tasks & genres
District 1

- Small, urban district (16 primary/elementary schools)
- Racially, ethnically, socio-economically diverse
- Teachers had access to high quality professional development
  - National Writing Project
  - University Curriculum Specialists
  - Summer Academy
  - Literacy coaches in buildings
Calkins: Units of Study

Small Moments: Personal Narrative Writing
District 2

- Small, urban community
- 6 elementary schools
- Diverse ethnically, racially, economically, English language learners
- Some teachers had access to high quality professional development
  - National Writing Project
  - University Curriculum Specialists
  - Summer Academy
  - Literacy coaches in buildings
Write Traits

Great Source Write Traits: Student Edition Traitbook
by GREAT SOURCE (Author)

Paperback

$3.01 - $5.78

Other Sellers
from $3.01

Buy used

Buy new

Only 1 left in stock (more on the way).
Ships from and sold by Amazon.com. Gift wrap available.

Want it tomorrow, Feb. 10? Order within 7 hrs and 48 min.
Districts 3 & 4

- Small districts
- Rural
- White students: over 95%
- No access to high quality professional development
- 1 had coach but did not find her valuable
- One-shot workshops on reading curriculum
Flexible enough to meet a wide range of teaching and learning needs, the program is bound by theme with easy-to-follow daily and weekly lesson plans. Stored in a slipcase for convenience, these comprehensive materials feature lessons for Houghton Mifflin Leveled Readers and additional test-taking suggestions and a Reading-Writing Integration component. This component is also included in...
Trophies Writer’s Companion

Writer’s Companion
Support and Practice for Writing
FINDINGS: CONTINUUM

Faithfully Following
- Jocelyn (D1)
- Natasha (D2)
- Melanie (D2)
- Rebecca (D3)

Adapting
- Beth (D4)
- Cora (D4)
- Elana (D2)
- Dana (D1)
- Jackson (D1)
- Tara (D1)
- Mandy (D1)
- Ellen (D1)
- Vicky (D1)
- Wanda (D1)

Rejecting
- Mike (D1)
- Tamara (D1)
- Amber (D2)
- Kerry (D3)
- Katie (D4)
- Kendra (D4)
Faithfully Following

- 4 teachers (of 20)
- Followed the curricula in order and made few adaptations
- Type of instruction offered varied depending on underlying assumptions of the curriculum
- Teachers did not express lack of autonomy—valued the curriculum
- New writing curriculum as beneficial—better than what they had previously—no writing curriculum
Influential Factors

- Were inexperienced or uncomfortable teaching writing
- Had positive attitudes towards the curriculum
- Had little access to intensive professional development, such as a UCS or coach
Adaptors

- Jackson (D1, 5th) skipped around in units and picked out the more meaningful lessons
- Dana (D1, K) believed the expectations were unrealistic for kindergarteners
  - added her own literature
  - introduced journals
  - added performances of writing
- Tamara (D1, 5th) “broke out of the Units of Study to go with [our] maps and globes unit.”
  - Students wrote travel stories
  - Added newspaper unit (had been a journalism major)
Influential Factors

- Identified the problematic aspects of the Units of Study
- Had support systems within their school contexts that helped them navigate the curriculum
- Personal factors such as confidence in teaching writing and experiences as writers
Characteristics of Instruction

- Lessons built upon one another
- Coherent set of activities
- Supported by an underlying philosophy
- Students knew the routines and expectations around writing
- Teachers articulated the changes based on philosophies and experiences
Rejecting Curriculum

- Four teachers did not use the curriculum, specifically rejecting it after a brief trial or “doing their own thing.”

- Amber: “I came up with my own. . .I thought aliens would be fun.” Transition words; stories from Harris Burdick. “I check out the web.”

- Kerry: deviated from basal; wrote friendly letters, celebrated National Poetry month

- Dissonance between the adopted curriculum and their beliefs about writing, relied on past experiences or resources.
Influential Factors

- Lack of experience teaching writing (except Katie)
- Few opportunities to participate in sustained professional development
Characteristics of Instruction

- Interesting but isolated lessons
- Fell back on skills
- Lessons had no scope or sequence
- Lacked coherence over year
- No clear underlying principles
DISCUSSION

School context
- Tests and curriculum policy did not “force” or pressure teachers to conform; felt had some autonomy

Access to Professional Development
- Urban districts provided high quality PD through specialists who modeled writing, UIWP, coaches
- Rural districts did not provide; teachers on their own

Personal Characteristics
- Comfort with writing
- Experience teaching writing
CONCLUSION

- Some teachers comply, others resist or adapt district-adopted writing curriculum
- Writing did not count towards AYP for compliance with NCLB, not have been the reliance on scripted curriculum and testing reading.
- Materials matter: underlying assumptions, activities, texts, questions
- More flexibility for teachers to adapt in writing?
IMPLICATIONS

- Take advantage of fewer restrictions in writing
- Professional Development is important
  - Bring teachers together to discuss, critique, modify
- Personal factors
  - Build on experiences teachers bring
  - Instruction reflects values
  - Allow teachers to have input on selecting and modifying curriculum
APPLICATIONS FOR ECE & HONG KONG CONTEXTS

Yew Chung International School

- Philosophy across programmes
- Embrace best of Eastern and Western traditions and practices
- Inquiry
- Developmentally appropriate for each age level
- Rooted in a bilingual model and goal
- Co-Teaching model with Chinese and western teachers.
Writing Curriculum

- Analyze Writing Curriculum Together
  - What are goals? Expectations? Are there underlying assumptions in curriculum? (for example, do they embrace a “process model” or a genre-focused model? Activities? Materials?)

- Adapt to students’ language backgrounds, developmental levels, and interests

- Communicate with colleagues—what is working with these students and why.