Writing Ideology and Writing Instruction: Five Elementary Teachers Describe Their Practice

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Special Major Honors Thesis
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Prepared 4.28.2010
Acknowledgments

My advisers David Harrison and Diane Anderson provided significant direct assistance throughout this project. David Harrison in linguistics is a relatively new acquaintance, and I wish I had had more collaboration with him before my final year. Diane Anderson has worked with me since 2006, and I thank her for four years of support, advice, and friendship.

A summer of work for this study was funded by a Joel Dean Fellowship. I am grateful for the support of this program, to its coordinators, and to Eugene Lang.

My interviewees gave graciously of their time and their passion for teaching. Without their assistance, this project would have been impossible. Without their thoughtful engagement in their practice, this project would have been boring. I benefited from their help tremendously as a researcher and as a pre-service teacher.

I have greatly appreciated the support of the Educational Studies department, where I have spent a large amount of time since entering Swarthmore and which has been a continuously nurturing place, from Introduction to Education to student teaching. I thank Elaine Allard ’01, Diane Anderson, Frank Grossman, Cheryl Jones-Walker, Kae Kalwaic, Ann Renninger, and Lisa Smulyan, all of whom played a part in how much I enjoyed my time in the department.

Relevant extra thanks as well to Ann Renninger, who gave me work as a researcher before I ever imagined I could be one.

I thank friends Kathy Bean, Bob Bean, Maryanne Kelemen, Jim Kelemen, Sandy Cascone, Eileen Salamone, Karen Pozefsky, and Hal Tucker, all of whom have supported me from afar at various times in the last four years. I will not forget their help.

I am grateful for the models provided by former graduating seniors Mark Dlugash ’08, Susannah Gund ’08, Marina Isakowitz ’09, Beth Krone ’09, Sarah Peterson ’09, and Scott Storm ’08. All have figured prominently in my understandings of what it means to do a thesis, do Honors, and end a career at Swarthmore. April and May are just not the same without them.

Some of those seniors who wrote theses were kind enough to acknowledge me in their acknowledgements. As a young student I was thrilled, and I am happy to do the same for Noah Marks ’11, Sam Griggs ’11, and Zack Wiener ’12. I am grateful to them for sharing their work, their ideas, and their enthusiasm over the last years.

Many people (in addition to my advisers) read draft material and provided helpful suggestions. I have appreciated the help of Lauren Hafer, James Robinson ’10, and Sam Griggs ’11. I appreciate the work done by Anjali Jaiman ’10 and Susan (MP) to assist in preparing the text. I would also like to thank Rose Morris-Wright ’13 for reminding me
at a critical time that swamps are better than deserts. Very special thanks to Susannah Gund '08, who provided feedback from another continent.

I would never have gotten to writing my thesis if I hadn't made it out of student teaching alive, a state for which I thank the students of Room 203, Joe Alberti '06, Robin Bronkema '89, Ann Renninger, Marc Engel '09, Kathryn Riley '10, Lisa Riddle '09, Tabatha Sabatino '09, and Stefanie Wong '07.

The seed of this project began one year ago, and in its early stages it was supported by the nurturing and stimulating Literacies Research Seminar. I benefited enormously from the class, which was always the highlight of my week, and from the class and my classmates emerged many helpful ideas, suggestions, and perspectives. I thank Diane Anderson, Leigh Elko '10, Simone Fried '10, Sam Griggs '11, Gina Grubb '10, Beth Krone '09, Jasmine Narang '09, Nicole Singer '10, and Sarah Peterson '09 for their contributions to the class.

As usual Emma Otheguy '09 defies categories, but she certainly belongs here somewhere. Thanks, Emma!

RAs need RAs, too. I thank Lucy Warrington '10 and Maria Kelly '10 for their friendship and support this year.

Sue Scheufele, Dave Lewis, Dan Lewis, and Rose Lewis share responsibility for the dedication, wonder, and sense of fun that I bring to this project and to everything else.

Many present and future thanks are due to my dear friends Claire Galpern '10, Sarah Apt '10, and James Robinson '10. Historically they have been among the most willing to listen to me talk at (long) length about my work and life, and over the last four years all of them have supported me intellectually, emotionally, personally, and in ways that blur the lines between those. To this particular project they contributed many small insights and clarities, though they might not have known it at the time.

For the last four school years, Lauren Hafer's support has been a testament to the power of the telephone. I thank her for her wisdom, humor, and encouragement, and I am sure I will continue to do so in many acknowledgments to come.
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1. Introduction
Danielle Steele publishes another novel. A city youth tags a subway car. An eight year old composes a knock knock joke, tells it to her friends, and it spreads through the whole third grade. A grocery list: eggs, apples, the yogurt that Joe likes. Post-it note: Quote this! A napkin on the dining hall bulletinboard: Could you use the pasta bar sauce with the chicken parm noodles please? Thanks! A three year old sits next to Mom at her work desk, scribbling.

What is writing? Who is a writer? What does good writing look like? All members of writing societies create and receive answers to these questions. These answers, whatever they are, are vitally relevant to the life, work, and study of many. Consider some more specific questions that invoke ideas about writing. Can a police officer who has trouble with grammar and punctuation in their reports still be effective at their job? Can people with autism learn to write as well as people who are neurotypical? Can people writing stories about romances between Kirk and Spock be considered true writers? I would be surprised to meet someone in a writing society without ready answers to these and many other questions, perhaps even instinctive, visceral answers.

These answers come from somewhere. Ideologies move through people, practices, and institutions. In the case of writing, schools are arguably the most important way that these answers are spread, especially at the elementary level, which most people say is the place we learn to write. Within schools, the beliefs and practices of teachers must also play an important role. Curious about how teachers might express and spread particular ideologies about writing, I interviewed five elementary teachers about writing and writing instruction.
1.0 The Study
This study presents insights on data gathered through topical, semi-structured interviews with five elementary school teachers. My work addressed the following research questions:

1. In what ways are teachers’ ideologies of writing shaped by the broader context (federal, state, district, school, community, prior pre-service and professional development) of their pedagogy?
2. How do teachers negotiate public ideologies (“common sense”) around children’s competence in language and writing?
3. How do teachers’ writing ideologies incorporate, reject, or otherwise respond to other ideologies and discourses relevant to children?

I argue that my interviews with teachers contain numerous acts of applying and connecting discourses “outside” of the teachers’ discourses that they used in conversation with me to explain and state their ideas. I saw these explanations in terms of the partial but declarative “answer-ideas” that they provided, conceptions of what writing and writing instruction were and could be. I developed the concept of “answer-idea” as preferable to “belief” because it better captured the partial and dynamic nature of the ways in which teachers’ writing ideologies unfolded. Faced with the range and depth of answer-ideas expressed by the teachers, I came to think of my process of analysis as a little bit like the game Jeopardy! I had many, many answers staring at me through the data—but what were the Questions? What central concerns and issues was capturing the teachers’ attentions?

I will argue that I could capture almost all of the answer-ideas implicitly proposed by the teachers with two questions:

1. Who is a good writer, and what should we do about it?
2. What do people use writing for?

The two Big Questions were the organizing structure around which teachers appeared to have formed their writing ideologies. The affordances, blindspots, and tensions of these two questions, as well as the analytical concepts that support them, have many implications for research and
1.1 Why Writing? Why Elementary School?
Because modern elementary education has been expanded to cover an ever-wider selection of subjects, focusing on writing instruction means I am choosing not to focus on quite a lot of a typical child's school day and school year. I became specifically interested in writing in the education system through my personal experiences and my academic study because I saw so many complexities and contradictions in what was said, done, and believed by teachers of writing, students of writing, and writers. I was intrigued by two common ideas about writing: only a few things really count as writing (it is a single activity), and only certain people do writing (it is a select activity).

These are popular ideas that have a broad impact in schools and elsewhere, but they are far from self-evident. The idea that writing is a single activity seems baldly inaccurate, given that people who write do it in many different ways for many different purposes, from comics to graffiti, from blogs to news reports, from poems to prayers. All these purposes have different conventions, forms, genres, and followings. Yet writing is often used to mean a very limited set of practices. The idea of writing as a single activity is related to its status as a select activity—something only a few people are truly good at. To identify as a writer is a rare and somewhat high-stakes act. It's certainly true that only a small number of people are widely considered "writers" (again an unqualified term), but it is also true that writing is something that most people do almost every day. The number of people who are "writers" is dwarfed by the pervasiveness of doing writing.

I choose to focus on writing because I am fascinated and somewhat alarmed by
fundamental contradictions between the world of social activity and the dominant ways of
describing that world. If common ideologies of writing are called into question by many sources
of evidence, then why do they persist? Research and perspectives from critical social theory
suggests that the persistence of such ideologies—“common sense” that does not seem so
sensible—is linked to the preservation of certain power structures and the status quo in general.
Bourdieu (1999) describes this kind of dominance and the way that these ideologies “tend to
appear as necessary, even natural, since they are the basis of the schemes of perception and
appreciation through which they are apprehended” (108). (This tradition will be explored in more
depth in Chapter 2). Thus the investigation of writing ideologies may also lead to the
investigation of institutional and cultural power in contemporary society. Writing is powerfully
pervasive, and writing ideologies acting in broad, public ways have the potential to greatly limit
or expand a person’s possibilities.

It is not much of a stretch to imagine that schools, especially elementary schools, are
involved in the maintenance of these ideas about writing. Youth in the United States spend their
time in many different ways. Several thousand hours of this time is spent doing something
schools call learning to write. Within school walls, students are constantly subject to evaluations
that can shape their self-concept and social possibilities as writers. The question of “Why study
schools?” is largely answered by the question of “Why study writing?”

Schools are one of many influential institutions that shape the lives of people who share
the same social world as schools. Along with prisons, hospitals, churches, publishing houses,
libraries, and the IRS, schools are major features in the landscape of a society that includes them.
Schools are so important today that they can easily seem like a true landscape—permanent,
natural, immovable fixtures. As a pre-service teacher, a student, and an academic, I believe we should remember that, over the course of history, schools’ purposes and practices have changed dramatically. Schools can be and have been liberating or oppressive. They have a long but particular history, a history of particular times, places, influences and choices. Everything about them might have been different, so nothing about them should get a free pass. There is much that might be investigated about schools and the ways that they structure society, but in focusing on writing, this study still manages to capture a piece of this structuring that has deep relevance to elementary schooling.

1.2 Overview
In this chapter, I introduced my study and some of the major goals that inform my research questions. In Chapter 2, I review past research relevant to my questions and argue for the importance of teachers in the lifecycle of writing ideologies. In Chapter 3, I describe the qualitative, semi-ethnographic methods I used to gather and analyze data. In Chapter 4, I present my findings and analyses of the teachers’ interviews, as well as some immediate implications of the findings. In Chapter 5, I conclude the work and discuss broader implications for theory, practice, and research.
2. Literature Review
My investigation of teacher writing ideologies is based in a theoretical foundation that combines educational theory, critical social theory, and anthropological linguistics. In this chapter, I describe the progression of ideas that justify my research questions. First, I argue that beliefs are not simply internal mental constructions. Instead, beliefs are better understood grouped together in larger units of ideology, which involves patterns of social reproduction as well as ties to power, culture, and institutions. To interpret the teacher interviews and understand their ideologies of writing and writing instruction, I would also need to understand how these ideologies could operate in society. Studies into language ideologies, part of a robust if underappreciated research tradition, were the most directly relevant to ideologies of writing. Language ideology scholarship sees belief sets about language as a major aspect of human social worlds. The main themes that emerge from language ideology research are: questioning normativity; linking beliefs, practices, and society; and showing intersections between language ideologies and other ideologies. All of these themes are relevant to my research questions, and language ideology scholarship was very influential to the development of my study. In order to focus specifically on writing, rather than language as a whole, I also considered particular public ideologies of writing that my interviewees may have been influenced by. Drawing from sociological and educational research, I also describe the ways in which schools are major sites where writing ideologies are made and re-made. Teachers, as important actors within schools, are highly involved in these processes. Writing ideologies, whether reproduced or challenged, are deeply relevant to teachers’ practice of writing instruction, as well as the very creation and normalization of writing instruction itself.
2.1 From Beliefs to Ideologies
Beliefs are not just internal mental constructions, they also have important relationships to the larger world of social relations. These relationships involve not only practices and institutions, but also the ways in which beliefs are reproduced. Individual beliefs (e.g., Democracy is good, peanut butter and jelly go well together) are tied up in larger clumps of beliefs called ideologies, which involve larger concepts (e.g., governance, food). The most important property of ideologies, as a concept, is their largeness. The main problem with strictly mental/psychological explanations of beliefs is that beliefs are imagined to be small enough to fit in someone’s head, when actually beliefs (as well as other “mental states,” even, arguably, emotions) are inextricably connected to the wider social world, filled to the brim with various social practices, sprawling institutions and structures, and other people (Gee, 1992).

Broad sociological claims like these can easily sound daunting, so here’s an example. You wake up one day and believe something, call it X. X can be about anything: art, love, cooking, snakes, whatever. Whatever X is, it is not just itself. When you believe X, you are mentally participating in a much larger system of beliefs related to X, beliefs which all came from somebody or something else, at least partially. Not only that, but chances are very good that you also participate in some kind of activity out in the world (a social practice) that relates to X in someway. Finally, you probably have social relationships with other people to which X is relevant or even crucial.

Maybe X is about cooking—you believe cooking is an act of love, an idea that is influenced by the importance you place on having everyone around the table for dinner. This X is strongly connected to particular beliefs and practices around families and the ways people’s activities work together. Maybe X is about poison snakes—you think they’re really cool, which is why you got a Ph.D. in snake-ology. This X is directly related to a whole range of relationships
and structures around research funding, intellectual labor, and pharmaceutical companies being interested in making anti-venom, not to mention the fact that way before you were born, somebody figured out a way to do something with snakes other than get out of their way.

This understanding of beliefs, which strongly framed my analysis of the teachers’ interviews, is not just a sociologically flavored game of six degrees of separation. The point is not that the meaning of things is interrelated, that you can jump, associatively, from snakes to snake-ology to graduate schools. The point is that the links are always there, that no belief, practice, or relationship exists in isolation. Beliefs and practices connected to X are not secondary to X—they help create the meaning of X, and the reverse is true. Using the term ideology is partially about signaling the social grounding of all beliefs. The term ideology has been used in many contexts in a small but drastic variety of ways, some dismissively pejorative (as in the related term “ideologue”), some explicitly negative (as in using ideology as a theoretical frame to discuss or describe racism, but not, for example, libraries), and some highly technical and narrow (see Woolard [1998] for an extensive review). However, my own usage will be, unless otherwise noted, a neither negative nor positive sense, denoting “a set of cohesive beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge” with the understanding that these beliefs, attitudes and knowledge have connections and expressions in associated practices, relationships, and institutions. I am approaching topic of writing ideologies as part of “social turn” (Gee, 2000), which is affecting diverse fields, not just linguistics, and represents a shift in understanding where meaning is located, from in the head to between heads.

The concept of ideology also signals a relationship with social reproduction. I have already discussed how beliefs are interconnected with other beliefs, practices, institutions, and relationships now. Social reproduction describes how these connections exist over time, to the
past and to the future. In other words, social reproduction refers to the ways that social arrangements, relationships, and practices remain relatively consistent, as well as the ways that social changes that do occur are strongly shaped by the pre-existing social environment. Social reproduction theory describes how ideologies are generally persistent over time. The concept of social reproduction is essential to understanding how language ideologies are connected with people, spaces, time, and power. The relationship between ideologies and social reproduction is strongly bidirectional. Particular ideologies (remember, this could be anything: libraries, ice cream, sexism) get reproduced along with their associated practices and institutions, and at the same time, ideologies involving what is normal, right, and sensible are major supports for reproductive processes.

The focus of this study is writing ideology, which depends on the more-researched concept of language ideology for its theoretical grounding. Because language plays such a crucial role in social life, language ideologies are one of the most universally significant kinds of ideologies. The next section is a review of scholarship into language ideology specifically. Like the examples discussed in this section, particular language ideologies have strong ties to particular practices, relationships, and institutions. Scholarship in language ideology is partially about documenting and uncovering these connections.

2.2 Language Ideologies
The term language ideology can refer to many different kinds of beliefs, from aesthetic judgments to metaphors of what a language is, and not all researchers of language and society uses the term the same way, or at all. Some of the traditions included by the term are the study of “language attitudes,” language planning and policy, language revitalization, anti-prejudice work, and critical linguistics. Within these various traditions, however, there are some major themes. In
this section I will describe how language ideology scholarship involves: questioning normativity; linking beliefs, practices, and society; and finding intersections between ideologies. Language ideology scholarship gives a good background to the ways in which beliefs about language forms are socially situated, and for this project it influenced questions and issues I focused on in my analysis of teachers’ statements about writing. My review of language ideology scholarship also gives a foundation to my concentration on writing ideology, which will be more fully described in the next section.

In the previous section, I discussed how individual beliefs should not be analyzed in isolation, because they necessarily embodied strong connections with other beliefs, practices, relationships, and institutions. This is a crucial point in the analysis of language ideologies, which must be imagined as something more than simply a set of beliefs, because language ideologies are also enacted outside the head (Woolard, 1998). “Set of beliefs about language” is a good shorthand definition for “language ideology,” but one must remember that beliefs are not just mental constructions.

2.2.1 Questioning normativity
Because language ideologies, wherever they are, are often wrapped in the invisible protection of common sense, one of the contributions language ideology scholarship has made is to disrupt faith in dominant language ideologies by questioning normativity (things that are normative). Normativity is a term that describes things that are normal while highlighting the constructed, socially situated nature of what counts as normal—quote unquote normal or “normal” mean roughly the same thing as normative, but those alternate terms do not usually find themselves in normative literature and research on language ideology. Several scholars have documented language ideologies of socially or politically marginalized groups, ideologies that are quite
different from mainstream ideologies. These efforts do not seek to exotify or gawk at these non-mainstream ideologies, but rather they challenge the notion that major language ideologies are incontrovertible common sense and illustrate the variation among language ideologies globally. In fact, both dominant and non-dominant language ideologies can be regarded as common sense in different spaces. The point is that all language ideologies are contextual, situated, and anything but plain truth.

Research often indicates, very pointedly, the ways that language ideologies can influence a person’s view of the social world. Kulick (1998) found that the Gapun of Papua New Guinea had an understanding of language very different from the “referentialist” ideas of Western societies, which generally hold that language refers fairly directly to thoughts, feelings, and things in the world. Instead, “villagers in Gapun interpret speakers’ words neither as a reflection of their inner state nor as an accurate representation of their opinions on the matter.” Kulick goes on, “In fact, the general assumption is that language ‘hides’ (haitim/ambu-) meanings that the speaker either cannot or will not state openly” (Kulick, 1998, 90). The implications of variation on this ideological point are considerable. So many linguistic practices in the US and other Western states depend on the idea that language can clearly and directly represent the world. Yet even this belief is not universal.

Language ideology scholarship has also revealed cases where ideologies of two groups are in conflict more directly. Meek (2004) documents language ideology aspects of movements in among Yukon First Nations communities and discusses the ways in which local ideologies were sometimes quite different from the government’s. In general, Meek describes ways in which “dominant ideologies and state control can be transformed through the inclusion of aboriginal voices.” (26). Shaw (2001) comes from a very similar research effort and also
documented ways that local language ideologies differed from the state's. Both Meek and Shaw highlight ways in which "language" had very strong ties to "identity" and "land" for First Nations groups. Heavy-Runner, et al. (2004) discussed how language revitalization efforts among Blackfoot communities were often tied to religious traditionalism, and they highlight the special connections between language and ceremony that are in the forefront of Blackfoot ideologies. To all three scholars who studied Canadian First Nations groups, identifying the existence of multiple common senses was essential to their frames and projects. These are just some examples that show the non-universality of typical dominant European/Western language ideologies, which have been derided for reducing languages to economic value (Heller, 2002) and for their self-serving contempt for "small" or local languages (Dorian, 1998). Studies like these tell valuable stories about ideological conflicts and collisions that marginalize already vulnerable communities. However, studies about ideological differences on a large scale (Meek, 2004; Shaw, 2001; Heavy-Runner, et al., 2004; Henze and Vanett, 1993; King, 2003; England, 2003) tend to essentialize language ideologies and ignore their habitual, inertial, and constructed nature. These studies have helped to suggest what kinds of issues might arise in my conversations with teachers, and I have benefited from the insights of finding multiple common senses, but I do not employ the same theoretical frames as these works in language ideology.

Another major kind of language ideology that scholars tend to target are ideologies of standards and ideologies of right language. Investigation into these ideologies tends recognize them as more distributed and more constructed than the investigations of language-in-itself ideologies discussed above. These efforts often have much to do with social reproduction, as favored language varieties are typically linked with powerful social groups. Lippi-Green (1997) described the American ideology of a standard language and how it is reproduced over time. She
defines the standard language ideology (SLI) as:

a bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogenous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class (64).

In her analysis and description of the SLI, Lippi-Green combines accounts of Disney films, the court system, schools, and the information industry. She focuses on phonetic features of speech and accents, of both native and non-native English speakers, but does not deny that linguistic dominance functions in other areas of language as well. Lippi-Green commits her work to uncovering the ways that pervasive ideologies act to disguise themselves at the same time that they preserve power relationships. This uncovering is key to the larger tradition of language ideology research.

What makes language ideology scholarship particularly powerful is the way it can be adapted to very large and very small scales. Mertz (1998) identified patterns of linguistic and social reproduction in law school classrooms. She described ways that professors pushed very directly towards specific language forms, sometimes putting entire paragraphs into students’ mouths. This local classroom practice is part of larger systems of the exclusive and erudite practice of law. In Mertz’s analysis, we see the early seeds of beliefs and practices about the linguistic complexity of law (“legalese”). By the time the general public encounters the legal system, the practice of legalese and its associated common sense have been well-established. By examining law classrooms, Mertz helps show how common sense is manufactured. At the time, we should remember that these law classrooms studied by Mertz exist in a world where the larger ideologies already existed, so the law classroom practices are a result as well as a source of the larger ideologies. This co-structuring relationship is a common theme in descriptions of ideology and social reproduction. For example, Lippi-Green (1997) does a good job of showing how common beliefs about language are transformed into common sense when they are writ
large in major media such as newspapers (133-135). There are many paths by which an idea becomes constructed as normal.

By questioning normativity, language ideology scholarship not only gives insights into the life of language, it also shows how ideologies act to hide their own origins. Language ideologies and writing ideologies are no exception.

2.2.2. Linking beliefs, practices, and society
Language ideologies are always acting on the world, whether they are embodied in people, practices, or institutions. Even our perceptions of the world can be affected by our language ideologies. In many strands of sociology, it is a basic truism that we do not all see the world the same way, and in linguistic matters, language ideologies can be responsible for this variation.

For example, consider a linguistic act that should conceivably be quite objective: a child’s first word. Many parents in the Western world hear their child’s first word as something relating to the family or to household objects. In the Gapun community studied by Kulick (1998), “a child’s first word is generally held to be /oki/, which is a vernacular word meaning, approximately, ‘I’m getting out of here’” (92). Ochs (1993) describes a similar pattern in Western Samoa, where a child’s first word was universally described as tae, “a fragment of an expression that literally means ‘eat shit.’” Ochs goes on, “That is, in this community, children’s earliest meaningful sounds were interpreted and ratified as a particular social act, namely a conventional curse” (293). The significance of linguistic beliefs and practices like these goes deeper than simple auditory perception, however. Ochs’ analysis of the Samoans hearing tae argues that “there is a sociocultural concept of the Samoan child as wild and cheeky by nature that underlies this interpretation of the child’s first word as a curse. But the point of import here is that this concept of child as cursor is jointly constructed, maintained and socialized through on-the-
ground social interactions” (294). I am told that my first word was /gaga/, which my mother
interpreted as my attempt to say “read to me.” Ochs’ argument for the interconnection between
social identity and language socialization, which applies to me as well as it does to Western
Samoans, shows a way in which beliefs about the linguistic world are translated into perceptions
and practices.

The relationship between language ideology and language use is another recurring theme
in language ideology scholarship, though this is only one aspect of the larger connections
between ideology and society. Irvine (1998) used studies of honorifics of Javanese, Wolof, Zulu,
and ChiBemba to argue that in order to do accurate documentation of sociolinguistic practices,
an astute fieldworker should be prepared to find practices that contradict speakers’ accounts of
those practices. In Irvine’s studies, honorifics were not observed being used in exactly the ways
all Irvine’s informants told Irvine. At the same time, turning a language ideological lens towards
linguistics itself, Irvine warns against conflating registers across languages and assuming that
they are “isosemantic” (mean the same thing). This criticism seems directed more broadly at the
idea that all languages are mostly or entirely variations on some basic set of universal structures.
Irvine’s work here gives another key insight into the concerns of language ideology scholarship,
namely that its questions can be directed anywhere, even toward linguistics itself.

Connections between language ideology and society are strong, and so examples of these
connections are diverse. Hill (2008) describes how specific language ideologies are deeply
employed and implicated in the perpetuation of white racism. The language ideologies analyzed
by Hill act through silencing or dismissing objections to racist talk. These include the belief that
a speaker’s “intent” matters far more than how someone feels after they hear something, which
Hill argues has excused many episodes of racist language, under the explanation that the people
who felt outraged were taking it “too seriously.” In a completely different context, Spitulnik (1998) used similar analytical stances and tools to investigate Zambian radio broadcasting. Spitulnik found radio to be a major site of contention around language ideology, contention rooted in allocations of airtime to different shows and language groups. In Spitulnik’s analysis, radio represented both “a source and a result of language evaluation.” (175) This highlights the reciprocal duality of ideologies and social reproduction in general, as well as the links between beliefs, practices, and society. As Spitulnik also highlights in the case of Zambian radio, looking for an original source of an ideology is both impossible and irrelevant. In the Zambian case, particular language ideologies “do not originate in radio, but they are key language ideologies that are continuously reproduced in radio” (182). Spitulnik and Hill are focused on very different instances of language ideologies, but both scholars find ways in which certain language ideologies are involved in other institutions and practices that, at first glance, do not seem to involve language.

Even when an issue does not involve language, and actors around that issue do not invoke language, the very absence of language politics can evoke it. Ó Tuathaigh (2003) analyzed language ideology from a standpoint of political science and noted the ways in which particular movements for Irish independence (of which there is a long history) did or did not tap into the Irish language and Irish language revitalization efforts. For these various movements, language politics were inseparable from land and power politics. Even in independence movements that used only English (in posters, meetings, mailings, etc.), Irish had a kind of present absence. Language, and therefore language ideology, has an inescapable quality to it.

Because many of the questions of language ideology scholarship can sometimes be addressed in a way that ignores ideology, it is important to highlight perspectives on language
that might seem similar but that language ideology scholarship actually typically strongly avoids. While language ideology scholarship attends to people’s beliefs about language, it certainly does not see them as unconnected attitudes that could be changed if people were presented with adequate evidence. Language ideology scholars argue that there are few beliefs about language that are simply the novel result of observation of language use. Instead, beliefs are mostly formed through contact with pervasive linguistic practices and institutions. I am belaboring this distinction somewhat because this naïve theory of beliefs and attitudes is employed by a significant strand of linguistic scholarship, especially scholarship directed toward the public or the novice linguist. The public is often implicitly expected to abandon their incorrect beliefs when presented with the appropriate linguistic evidence.

This expectation can be seen in a variety of contexts. At the beginning of many general linguistics textbooks, there is usually some statement about how, though we all have ideas about how language works, many will turn out to be wrong in the progression of the course (or the textbook). This tone is expressed not only in textbooks, but also through the research and publication tradition of “myth education.” Some linguistic scholarship, influenced perhaps by Labov’s (1982) proposal of a generally guiding “principle of error correction” is published with the explicit goal of “correcting” such popular misconceptions (e.g., Zaidema, 2005, Bauer and Trudgill, 1998, Pullum, 2001, Labov, 1972, the PBS series Do you speak American?)¹. Of course, in their stance on what linguistic research indicates, the myth educators are being quite fair. People who believe that TV is making people speak more similarly or that the quality of the English language is eroding are likely to feel their beliefs contradicted or at least challenged in Linguistics 101. But how often do people actually change their mind?

¹ These efforts are a good reminder of the possibility of ideologies to be quite positive: the linguists who do anti-bias work have particular language ideologies too—fairness, respect for others’ language background, rights to express oneself in a chosen language—ideologies that hardly seem very reproachable.
As an example case, there is a very popular and widely used anti-bias argument that focuses on so-called “double negatives.” Mainstream ideology holds that a sentence like “Lonna didn’t go nowhere,” to mean that Lonna stayed in one place, is illogical, uneducated, lazy, or all of these. The confusion results from overlooking registers and varieties mutually intelligible with English (most notably AAVE, but others as well), varieties which enforce a grammatical characteristic called “negative concord,” (Labov, 1972) in which all negatable elements in a negative sentence must be negated, rather than “negative polarity,” in which only the first negatable element in a negative sentence must be negated. Linguistic arguments for the non-inherentness of the unfavorable evaluation typically cite standardized or high-status varieties of other languages (such as Spanish) that also enforce negative concord.

It is easy to argue that “double negatives” are perfectly natural, but it is hard to make that argument stick. Linguists have been making this and similar arguments for quite a while, but linguistic prejudice has not evaporated. Why not? We could blame it on bad public relations, but I think the problem goes deeper than that. Language ideology scholarship highlights the limits of imagining that the idea of double negatives as improper involves only inaccurate knowledge about language. Instead, critical linguists would argue that the idea that double negatives are improper simultaneously sustains the status quo of racial and economic hierarchy. This link between a grammatical variation and a social order is a good example of how language ideologies can be interest-laden and tied to power, even if they seem to focus on seemingly minor issues. Unfortunately, this implies that myth education approaches are not likely to be very effective. Lippi-Green (1997) highlights this crucial aspect of ideology well:

[I]deology is most effective when its working are least visible [...] Thus the most factual stand – every language is in fact completely viable and functional, therefore we do not need and should not attempt standardization – is doomed, at the present time. A realistic goal must be a much smaller one: to make people aware of the process of language subordination. To draw their attention to the
misinformation, to expose false reasoning and empty promises to hard questions (242).

Whether or not we agree with Lippi-Green's dim prognosis, her reference to the invisibility of ideology is important. For language ideology, invisibility is connected to its pervasiveness.

By showing the interconnections between beliefs, practices, institutions, and relationships, language ideology scholarship highlights the powerful difference between common beliefs and common sense. This difference is part of what makes the term ideology useful in the first place, and in the case of language, it is crucial to any understanding of powerful institutions acting through and on language.

2.2.3. Ideological Intersections
Research in language ideology highlights the intersections within ideologies between beliefs, practices, relationships, and institutions, but it also gives extensive evidence for the intersections between language ideologies and other ideologies. This finding is strongly suggested by others already summarized, so this section is not as extensive as previous ones, but introducing ways in which research directly establishes ideological intersections is useful to a full understanding of language ideology scholarship.

Kulick's (1998) study of kros (semi-formulaic displays of anger) and oratories in Gapun revealed ways in which "discourses of gender, affect, and language are mutually reinforcing and sustained through specific linguistic practices...." (89). Other scholarship already cited has described how language ideologies can intersect with ideologies of identity, land, history, religion, children, and others. There is really nothing that language ideology could not be connected to. Kulick (1998) said it well: "language ideologies seem never to be solely about language." (100). Because language ideology scholarship has a strong critical bent to it, many scholars focus on how language ideology is connected with racism, sexism, and other ideologies.
of domination. These intersections can be higher stakes than others. Particular language 

ideologies can be a strong support for social inequity. As Lippi-Green states,

The process of language subordination targets not all variation, not all language 

varieties, but only those which are emblematic of differences in race, ethnicity, 

homeland, or other social allegiances which have been found to be less than good 

enough. Dedicated practitioners of language subordination do not complain about 

most of the variation which is active in US English (240, 1997)

This quote is specifically about how language ideologies that hold contempt for variation in 

language are selective in targeting variation associated with groups already targeted by other 

oppressive structures. There are many kinds of variation in US English and most of it escapes 

negative evaluation, or even noticing. In general, linguistic prejudice or discrimination is not 

very difficult to find (Preston, 2002; Purnell, Idsardi, and Baugh, 1999; Rubin, 1992). This 

unfortunate reality speaks to the significance language has in the social landscape, as well as how 

interconnected ideologies of language are.

Da Silva, Mclaughlin, and Richards (2007) discuss the ways in which European 

ideologies of homogenous and bounded languages are tied very strongly (in both directions) with 

ideologies of nationhood and peoplehood, alongside the reality that European languages are not 

homogenous and strictly bounded. For example, recognizable patterns language contact and 

language change have resulted in mutual intelligibility around some borders (e.g., Dutch-

German) and generally anything but bounded homogeneity. However, Da Silva et al. argue that 

ideologies of nationhood help to sustain (and are sustained by) these oddly inaccurate language 

ideologies. They describe the influence of ideologies that frames multilingualism in economic 

terms, where using more than one language is valuable in its usefulness by and for corporations. 

Baker (2006) tracked the different ways that governments have responded to bilingualism in their 

borders, which is globally common. He shows how bilingualism can be seen as a problem, a 

resource, or a right, all of which have very different implications for bilinguals as well as
whatever powerful interests pervade a particular state or locality. Blommaert and Verschueren (1998) examined newspaper editorials on topics relating to nationalist movements and international relations and showed how these texts consistently called upon particular ideologies of language, person, and place that strongly tied particular groups to a single language and a single place. This frame does not account very well for diasporas, transnationalism, and other aspects of an increasingly globalized world.

Whether language ideologies are about specific language use (e.g., Kulick, 1998; Lippi-Green, 1997) or about the place and effect of language in society (Da Silva, et al. (2007), Baker (2006), Blommaert and Vershueren (1998), they are constructed with and by other ideologies of social life. The intersections of language ideologies and other ideologies is well-established, and any full account of the way that language ideologies act in the world must include these intersections.

2.2.4. Implications of language ideology scholarship
As a guide to developing an account of writing ideologies, language ideology scholarship offers valuable perspectives on how people conceive of language. Language ideology scholarship has helped to uncover and question “common sense” about language, to link beliefs, practices, and society, and to show how ideologies of language intersect with other ideologies as well. Language ideology scholarship shows how ideas, practices, institutions relevant to language are intertwined with each other and the larger social world. It is important for me to clarify one major way in which my use of language ideology frames differs from the mainstream tradition. As in Mertz’s (1998) previously mentioned study of linguistic patterns in law school classrooms, language ideology can be studied in terms of its role in “the structure and practice of speaking” (151). This is a fascinating and robust area of inquiry, but it is not how I am using language
ideology. If I were studying writing ideology in this way, instead of interviewing teachers and focusing on their teaching, I would be interviewing people and focusing on their writing. I use language ideology as a guide to developing a frame of writing ideology, but my use is not an exact match to previous work. I directed my interview questions at writing specifically. In my analysis, I examined what the interviews suggested about the teachers’ ideologies of writing. Language ideology scholarship suggests that these writing ideologies would have normative aspects, would involve beliefs, actions, and larger society, and would intersect with other ideologies.

2.3 Ideologies of Writing
Pervasive, public writing ideologies are powerful, but they are not all the same. The same is true of major ideologies that are more academically situated. Whether one looks to conflicting public notions or academic debates, there is clearly contention and variety among writing ideologies. The nature of writing is far from a simple issue, and while only a small number of people find themselves in situations where they might explicitly discuss or compare particular writing ideologies, the variety exists nonetheless. This makes an investigation of teachers’ writing ideologies all the more interesting, since their stances are so much more complicated than simply picking a side. Even a small review of major popular or scholarly descriptions of writing indicates that an individual’s stance on writing must be a complex process. This section does not describe all the academic or otherwise public ideologies that might be relevant to teachers’ writing ideologies, but it does demonstrate that the nature and importance of writing is not at all a settled matter or an uncontroversial issue. This unsettledness provides part of the justification for my project, because if there were universal agreement among writing ideologies, the research would be far less interesting!
Scholarly work that documents how public ideologies of writing affect teachers is rare, and while these public ideologies are relevant to this study, a full exploration of them is outside its scope. As Shannon (1990) demonstrates, debates between different approaches to the education of reading and writing are quite old, and have been drawn along many of the same lines as the contemporary but now fading "great debate" of whole language vs. phonics. In a history of progressive reading instruction in the US, Shannon charts the ways in which literacy in schools has long been seized on by groups interested in affecting some kind of change in broader society or otherwise interested in securing power and wealth. In a later work with a similar focus, Shannon (2008) gives a history of the ways in which literacy instruction has been mechanized and reduced to testable skills by educational corporations and their allies. Shannon's work makes clear that language arts instruction and its associated writing ideologies, like other areas of education, is rife with competing ideals and visions.

The range of perspectives surveyed here is limited. A complete account of perspectives on writing would be impossible in this space. Notable traditions I do not address include cognitive science, psycholinguistics, and new media studies. The large number of developed perspectives on writing is an initial indication of the complexity of any one teacher's stance on writing, because all these perspectives may be a part of the background ideologies that teachers encounter. Because I do not restrict this section to identifiable traditions of scholarship, evidence for my descriptions of some of the ideas presented here can be somewhat speculative and oblique. This is not inappropriate to the scope of the section, and it also reflects the diffuse and distributed nature of ideologies that do not have a specific source.

2.3.1. The intrinsic value of writing
I have previously described the ways that writing is an important force in social life, describing
this importance as related to the pervasiveness of writing as an activity. However, sometimes when writing is described as important, this refers to an intrinsic value. This intrinsic value can be connected to ideas of writing as artistic work, with associated ideas of high culture, literature, and the classics.

The ideologies that assign intrinsic value to writing have no particular name or scholarly tradition associated with them, though their echoes are found in literary criticism histories of books and writing (e.g., DeShazer, 2005; Gaur, 1984; Powell, 2009; Burns, 1989). This perspective has served a variety of purposes, and it should not be understood as simple or consistent. Fiction writer and critic Joanna Russ (1983) employs the intrinsic value and near sacredness of writing as a premise in her history of the suppression of women’s writing. Her work looks very different from others that share this premise, but this only shows the breadth of the premise’s applicability. Lowe (2003) presents research in the chronicles of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian nuns. Lowe argues that their writing, as imaginative/intellectual work, was a way to make sense of their lives and engage with and construct accounts of the past. Klopp (1999) documented the writing of political prisoners in Italy and found thematic trends in common across the 1530’s and the 1970’s. In his analysis, writing was an act of self-definition, political and otherwise, as well as a way for the writers to create a place in history that contested state narratives of their lives and actions. Klopp and Lowe sometimes seem to be part of a much larger pattern of strongly associating the uses of writing with the form of writing. A similar association can be seen in this description from the Swarthmore College Writing Center website:

At Swarthmore, writing is an integral part of the learning experience. Whether you are studying chemistry or art history, engineering or English, the ability to craft cogent, coherent, and intellectually rigorous prose contributes to the development of your critical thinking. Writing assignments allow you to engage with course readings, to conduct research, to use effective time management skills and to develop critical thinking in a collaborative scholastic setting.

You are not alone in the development of your writing. Through numerous
interactions with faculty members and peers, you will learn how to evaluate and revise your writing, improving both the product and process—and your confidence as a writer. You will write often and in a variety of settings. You may write expository papers, lab reports, problem sets, seminar presentations, a thesis, or critiques of your peers’ writing. You may also write as part of a research project with a team or a professor and as part of your extracurricular activities, internships, or campus jobs.

Writing occurs throughout the curriculum and throughout the college. As one student put it in a recent survey about why we should include writing in the curriculum:

“Writing is the culmination of understanding. You have learned about something when you can write about it. Nothing is more rewarding than producing your own work.”

We hope all students experience the satisfaction of wrestling with course material to create their own understanding and writing. (writing.swarthmore.edu, accessed 4/22/10)

This description is not at all unusual. This description (and other perspectives on writing that share its premises) is notable for the way it appears to imagine writing as a singly activity. Different uses of writing are certainly mentioned and included in this idea, but writing itself appears to be an unchanging object that pre-exists these uses.

As we will see, although assigning intrinsic value to writing is common, it is not uncontroversial. The intrinsic value idea is certainly the most diffuse perspective described in this section, as well as perhaps the set most accessible to people other than scholars and teachers. It is probably universally familiar to people in writing societies, though not at all universally agreed upon. This perspective serves as a useful introduction to the variety and contention that exists between writing ideologies, because there are well-established perspectives on writing with quite different emphasis. Its interest in writing itself, as single activity, puts this perspective at odds with New Literacy Studies, to be described in the next section. It is also perhaps indirectly opposed to the ideas of many formal linguists, who view writing as merely recorded language, a premise which might lead to placing much more value in the writer than writing.
2.3.2. Writing as social activity: New Literacy Studies

New Literacy Studies (NLS) is a body of work that conceptualizes writing under the broader umbrella of literacy practices. NLS sees writing as a socially situated practice, with all the connections to ideology, power, and institutions that this implies. Much of the origins of NLS grows out of a frustration with other models of writing and literacy. NLS repudiates structural linguistics and its associates (e.g., Halliday, 1989; Smith, 1982; Saussere, 1959), models of anthropology that suggest a linear transition from one kind or stage of society to another, especially from oral to literate (e.g., Goody, 1977; Ong, 1982), and perspectives surveyed in the previous section that posit an intrinsic value to writing.

Because of this history, NLS’s earliest and perhaps most central argument is a counterargument: writing and speech are not so different as has been supposed. On the issue of the value of writing, NLS argues that writing has been historically overvalued in comparison to speech because of its ties to powerful classes and groups. Though NLS work does not often directly engage in questions of value, it would be most accurate to describe the tradition as seeing potential value in all human social products, of which writing and speech are just two examples much more similar than different. NLS argues that the division between writing and speech is not only unfounded but also rooted in particular structures of power and practices, such as the elevation of the schooling-based practices and peoples over others. When both writing and speech are examined as social practices, the differences between them seem exaggerated. Street (1993, 1995) and others convincingly argue for the presence of paralinguistic features in written text, and opposed an “autonomous” view of writing and literacy that considers both to be a contextless matter of “just the words on the page.” One of Street’s most repeated criticisms of the idea of a “continuum” between writing and speech is that by conceding some “oral-like” features in writing and some “literate-like” features in speech, scholars like Halliday are engaging in
circular reasoning, as this analysis presupposes the categories it is looking for. Street argues against categorizing certain practices by their communicative channel in the first place (1993: 5).

People who follow from or with the NLS perspective easily turn up ways in which literacy practices seamlessly blend “orality” and “writing.” Fishman (1991) documented ways in which literacy practices among the Amish look radically different from the world of their “English” neighbors, with quite different kinds of ties to identity and power. Camitta (1993) questions many common sense notions about literacy by showing how Philadelphia high school writers work cooperatively and collaboratively in a way that blends composition, critique, conversation, and correspondence and makes the distinction between talk and text seem alien to the situation. Even orthography, which might seem to be a very straightforward collection of graphic symbols, has been analyzed as a profoundly social practice, as well as hotbed of ideological contention (Sebba, 2008; Schieffelin and Charlier Doucet, 1998; Bender, 2002). NLS’s emphasis on demonstrating the similarities between writing and speech may seem overdone, but this emphasis seems largely the result of the pervasive reach of opposing ideologies. A common theme in NLS research is arguing specifically against ideologies that describe writing as not only different than speech but also better. NLS research argues such hierarchal ideologies are not only inaccurate but also serve to support dominance of privileged groups over others.

NLS or its variants are for the most part currently ascendant in many educational and anthropological circles. It has, for example, been taken up by Grenoble and Whaley (2006) in a comprehensive volume on language revitalization. NLS also has partners in some philosophers of language who argue against “monologist” perspectives that analyze writing and speech
without an account of the audience and listener (e.g., Voloshinov, 1973; Bakhtin, 1986). There is also some resemblance to Moffett (1968), a noted creator of language arts curricula who despised the idea that one could “write writing.” Literary critic (and later, linguist) Jakobson ([1919]/1973) examined how the Russian poet Khlebnikov engaged in a deliberate kind of playfulness in which the edges of the form of writing were broken, bent, and uncovered. Jakobson described a broad possibility of writers using syntax, morphology, and even phonetics as a playground for expressive effect. Historian Walter Mignolo (1995) makes ideologies of literacy central in his account of how European sign systems were used in the colonization of Central America by Castilian colonizers. All these scholarly works, whether or not they identify explicitly with NLS, share a common understanding of writing as situated deeply in its social context and as one communicative practice among many.

Something missing from some NLS research is, unfortunately, an account of language ideology, at least from the perspective of its users. NLS argues against one of the most significant language ideologies: speech and writing are separate. However, it is probably underappreciative of how people’s own writing ideologies are a part of the landscape of literacy practices. We may be convinced by Street’s arguments sociocultural and situated aspects of writing and literacy, but because “autonomous” views of writing and literacy are so common, we can also acknowledge the place they have in an individual’s expression of their writing ideology. On a local scale, autonomous views of writing might profoundly affect literacy practices, including writing instruction, and on this scale, autonomous views of literacy do not have nearly the moral dubiousness of the patently racist anthropological theories that Street argues against.

I raise NLS and its associate perspectives here not as an example of a correct or factual

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2 Those publication dates are slightly misleading. Voloshinov and Bakhtin were both Soviet writers, and the English translations cited here were published decades after the original texts were written. Additionally, while both are historical figures, some argue that the text attributed (and cited) to Voloshinov was written by Bakhtin.
account of writing. I am not interested in comparing teachers’ ideas to scholarly investigations as a check on the teachers’ validity. It should be borne in mind that some NLS sources, especially Street, are arguing against “large scale” theoretical opponents, on the order of once well-regarded academic traditions, or NGOs. It might be inappropriate to use NLS as a lens on an individual’s perspective. NLS is raised because it is an example of a substantial possible stance on writing, and the interviewed teachers may or may not draw on aspects of this stance. In general, it is unclear how much NLS might affect my case teachers and US teachers as a whole. It probably influences or is concordant with the philosophy of some curricula, but curricula are not usually the type of text that specifically cites its theoretical influences. It is notable, however, that several of the sources cited in this subsection (as well as several other NLS texts) are currently required reading in Swarthmore College education courses, in which four of my five case teachers were trained.

2.3.3. Writing and its irrelevance: Linguistics

With a long history, significant methodological variation, and debates about the foundation of the field, linguistics is far from a coherent and static academic tradition. On the issue of writing, some fissures are clearly visible. While NLS has many ties with sociolinguistics and anthropological linguistics, more classical or formal linguistics does not always take a very social view of writing. But while formal linguistics is quite different from NLS, this does not mean it share much in common with ideologies that assign writing intrinsic value. Formal linguistics has a relatively unelaborated conception of writing, primarily because many formal linguists see writing as a topic outside the scope of their field. Thus, for a linguist the question of writing’s value might be considered a totally subjective description at odds with writing’s function as a mere record of language. The conflicts between the three perspectives discussed so
far in this section demonstrate that there are no two identifiable sides to a debate about writing, no simple map of various ideologies. It will become increasingly clear that when teachers take stances on writing and express aspects of their own writing ideology, they do so in a landscape rich with pre-existing ideas.

In linguistics, seeing writing as incidental to language has a long history. Bloomfield (1933) described writing as “not language, but merely a way of recording language by means of visible marks. (21, qtd. in Mesthrie, et al., 2000, p. 27). Saussure (1959) says language and writing “are two distinct systems of signs; the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first” (23, qtd. in Mesthrie, et al., 2000, p. 27). In one textbook, the entirety of the section on “writing and language” consists of a description of various scripts and their symbolic properties, whether a writing system represents individual sounds (alphabetic), words (logographic), or syllables (syllabary/abjad). It defines writing as “the symbolic representation of language by graphic signs or symbols” and notes that “spoken language is acquired without specific formal instruction, whereas writing must be taught and learned through deliberate effort” (O’Grady, et al., 2001). Clearly this is a different view than NLS, but unlike the “great divide” anthropological school (Goody, 1977; Ong, 1982) that NLS responds in part to, formal linguistics has some concrete and very non-ethnocentric reasons for wanting to separate writing and speech.

Differences between linguistics and the intrinsic value

In general, overviews of linguistics commonly assert that speech is “primary” over writing, because we learn speech “naturally,” or because all people can speak and not all people can write, or because writing does not involve two-way communication. (These statements are not uncontroversial inside or outside linguistics.) Following these assertions, there is usually little exploration of the actual meaning that this “primariness” and “secondariness” has for
people’s lives, sometimes not even acknowledging the possibility of exploring this. There is a note of circularity to these accounts, as if the definitions are a breadth away from “writing is stuff that’s written down.” Also, it is not uncommon to find statements that echo the ethnocentrism so decried by NLS, like “If speaking makes us human, then writing makes us civilized” in linguistics texts (Algeo and Pyles, 1993, p. 9). However, there are not two simple sides to debates about writing, and the mainstream view of linguistics is generally quite distinct from the “great divide” anthropological models.

One reason that linguists can become frustrated with connecting speech and writing, and I suspect a very important reason, is the way that writing can encourage an unfounded analysis (or be misleading in the analysis) of speech. Phonology, the study of how human speech sounds pattern together, is full of good examples. I have seen many linguists get frustrated (and been a frustrated linguist) by people referring to spelling to make a point about how something should be properly pronounced (invoking the kinds of ideologically-steeped arguments described in section 2). For example, take the case of “dropping the g” in words that end in [-ing]. People who insist on the [-ing] pronunciation and decry the [-in’] pronunciation look to spelling to make their point. However, any phonology student, indeed any introduction to linguistics student could explain that there is, in fact, no /g/ in [ing], and that the two pronunciations simply swap a alveolar nasal for a velar nasal, from /-in/ to /-iŋ/. In general, cases like these, where members of the public draw on writing as the primary source of rules and standards, establish another way in which writing ideologies pack some major importance in language ideologies. More specifically to linguistics, they seem bothersome enough by themselves to cause some linguists to hesitate to engage writing and speech as overlapping channels.

Interestingly, Lippi-Green’s (1997) work, which has already been cited for its revealing
analysis of oppressive ideologies of standard and correct spoken language, is surprisingly restrictive in her understanding of writing, going beyond the level exhibited by the linguistic perspectives just summarized. In her introductory chapter laying out “the linguistic facts of life,” she ignores or denies even basic aspects of writing’s variation and its social situatedness. Unsubstantiated and somewhat bizarre generalizations abound, such as, “We write things that tax our ability to remember, or to project our thoughts through space. We speak everything else” (21). She calls writing a “skill” “carried out as a solitary pursuit” with a “contextless” message. Finally, Lippi-Green claims that writing as a form “actively suppresses and discourages variation of all kinds.” (20). Only speech “is variable on every level, language- internally (structurally) and externally (socially),” and only speech “exploits variation to pass on information in addition to that of the surface message.” Akshually, exploitin variashun in riting iz not sooooo hard 2 do, az it turnz 0ut—Pwned! (see Sebba, 2008).

The purpose here is not to bash Lippi-Green for being insufficiently hip to NLS, but rather to reinforce that (1) linguistics, like all disciplines, is not free from ideology, and (2) ideologies can be combined in many ways—there is no concrete “if you believe this you obviously believe that” to writing ideology. Here is a another good example from Lippi-Green in particular (though I emphasize again, this is not just about her), especially of (2): After citing and critiquing some language arts curricula for drawing too heavily on trivial standards of writing and invoking notions of “right language,” she says:

The most striking feature of these excerpts, and of many other schooling-related incidents around language, is an inability or perhaps even an unwillingness to keep separate the written and spoken languages. This is a problem which persists at all educational levels. Clarity of thought is linked directly to the clarity of written language. (107).

At the same time that she problematizes over-exacting standards of proper language, which she has already established do much to marginalize speakers of non-mainstream English, she is also
recapitulating a division between spoken and written that does its own kind of marginalizing. But the reason she argues for this division is because a particular union of writing and speaking, different from how NLS unifies them, is being used in marginalizing way too. The case of Lippi-Green’s analysis of writing does a lot to show how ideological debates and tensions can exist in parallel. Lippi-Green, many formal linguists, and NLS theorists all encounter the same question of the difference between speech and writing, but that does not mean they are all having the same conversation.

Like NLS, formal linguistic lenses on writing have an uncertain level of influence on the beliefs of teachers. Insofar as linguists separate speech and writing, they have much in common with the public. The distinction between “naturally learned speech” and “intentionally learned writing” is a major one, and it likely carries over into how schools see their purpose in teaching literacy.

2.3.4. Closing
A review of scholarly and other sources on writing shows some of the variety and breadth of the background ideologies that the case teachers likely encounter. The purpose of the section was not to outline what view of writing I personally take, nor was it a foundation from which to confirm or reject the ideas that the subject teachers expressed. Drawing on ethnographic methodology, it was important for me to document the meaning-making that my subjects did for themselves, without evaluating that meaning-making as true or false.

2.4 Schools and Writing Ideologies
Many kinds of institutions—from the IRS to the NFL—affect our lives in major ways. Powerful institutions tend to reproduce powerful ideologies. Nothing outpaces schools in the reproduction
of writing ideologies. This section describes some of the numerous ways in which schools function as sites of the reproduction of writing ideologies. Schools have long been recognized as important sites for reproduction in other ways, notably class structures and ideologies of work (Anyon, 1980) as well as cultural practices of all kinds, both national and local (Valenzuela 1999; Apple 1979; Levinson and Holland 1996). The factors influencing these other kinds of reproductions may often overlap with the factors involved in the reproduction of writing ideologies, but I do not compare them here for reasons of focus and space.

In the course of American history, institutions of schooling have gradually been constructed as the proper place for youth to learn the “right” skills and dispositions that would make them into economically productive and loyal citizens. Essential to this constructed role of schools is the idea that teachers, the people who most embody schools, have access to knowledge that students need to acquire, a model of learning that has been challenged by many (Friere, 1970, Lave and Wenger, 1991). Schooling’s intellectual authority has been recognized as especially relevant in the case of writing. Collins (1995) explicitly links schooling, academic literacy, and the rise of state power. Few other institutions or groups come close to claiming the amount authority that schools do. One bit of evidence for this is the frequency with which good writing is equated with a good education, a process described by Bourdieu (1986) as the conversion of cultural capital into symbolic and social capital. The only other major source of authority probably comes from dictionaries, style guides, and the like, though they themselves tend to claim to be a part of the broadly educational establishment. If schools are seen as the only or best way to learn about writing, then it follows that whatever is commonly communicated by them about writing is seen as normal. Critical social theorists (CITES NEEDED HERE) have long argued that whatever social conditions are considered normal under a given system

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necessarily support the current distribution of power, wealth, and other immaterial and material resources in that system. In the case of schools, which hold most of the interpretive authority over formal writing, the claim to authority on standards of good writing functions as justification of their access to and power over the literate lives of children. *Good* writing is usually synonymous with *school-approved*.

A big part of schooling's authority to teach writing is the responsibility to *assess* writing. This responsibility for assessment means that schools control the standards for good or appropriate writing. The practice of parents calling a school to "see how my child is doing" might be seen as reflecting the responsibility to evaluate that schools are given—it is one of their functions to give grades and evaluate student work. Control of these standards can function at a large scale, legal level, as in state-mandated rubrics, or at a more local level, between a teacher and a student. Of course, these two levels do influence each other, albeit unequally. It is worth reflecting on the sheer range of aspects of writing that schools assess, from letter formation and spelling to aesthetic "sounds good" concerns to strength of argument and "reasoning." The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) rubric, for example, holds sway over style, content, focus, organization, and conventions.

A school's judgment on these standards can be communicated in many ways, but most common today are grades and standardized test scores. Much criticism has been made of school's privileged position in evaluating students. A huge proportion of critiques of the school system on "social justice" grounds involve standards in some way. For example, schools have been critiqued for imposing culturally irrelevant standards (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1995), having low expectations for students and low standards for achievement (e.g., Delpit, 1986), forming standards around culturally unfamiliar discourses and practices at the expense of drawing on

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students’ own “funds of knowledge” (e.g., Gonsález, Moll, and Amanti, 2005; Heath, 1981),
overemphasizing dull or decontextualized standards through high-stakes testing (e.g., Kohn, 2000). The implicit threat of an inferior grade represents a form of *symbolic violence* according to Bourdieu (1991), a term that refers to the ability of powerful institutions and people to harm others through symbols, signs, and texts. In general, school’s control of assessment standards are one of their defining features, and a source of their authority.

It is worth noting that standards in a particular form of expression (such as writing), are, in themselves, somewhat unavoidable, and not necessarily negative. The arena of modern experimental science, for example, has rigorous standards of evidence and reasoning, standards that are enforced by peer communities of scientists as well as semi-formal institutions such as journals and conference committees. However, a key difference between the positive and productive standards of an area like science on the one hand, and literacy work in schools on the other, is where the control of the standards is located. In scientific realms, science is defined by scientists. In the realm of writing in elementary classrooms, however, the dominant standards of good writing are not typically controlled or developed by the young learners who are subject to them. This arrangement is highly normalized (think of how many people would find first graders assessing their own writing strange), though occasionally contested (e.g., Aukerman’s (2008) shared evaluation pedagogy, Vasquez’s (2004) critical literacy with preschoolers). Whether we feel this control is appropriate or not is probably another issue entirely, and it is very possible, indeed common, for justice-minded critiques such as the ones mentioned above to conclude with the need for better standards that are still school-approved. But whatever we think about school control of interpretative standards, it should be clear that this control creates conditions of ideological reproduction.
Notions of formality, which can apply to any kind of linguistic practice, are related to standards, and they deserve some attention in any discussion of schooling’s authority over language use. Formality, after all, is commonly invoked in discussions or descriptions of writing. The fact that formal registers do exist and hold a importance for many people (or everyone) is a part of how schools are major sites of ideological reproduction. In the view of linguists, formality is a system of social evaluation, nothing more and nothing less. According to mainstream linguistic theory, no variation or variable in speech, language, or sign is inherently better or intrinsically indicative of intelligence, respectfulness, or sophistication. However, many people share an idea of what the right language looks and sounds like, and appeals to formality can be a major part of this idea. Recall the work in language ideology scholarship summarized above that argued that particular ideologies and social systems enforce and enact particular evaluations of particular variables. Designations of formality and propriety often fall on lines of linguistic dominance. What is called “formal” is sometimes merely the common speech of a more privileged group, and what is called “informal” is sometimes merely the common speech of a less privileged group. Such designations are a primary mechanism by which economic or social privilege is expanded, solidified, or justified (e.g., “How do they expect to get anywhere if they insist on talking like that?”).

However, that “sometimes” is important. Formality is always social evaluation, but it is not always tied to systems of privilege. There are gradients of formality within any individual dialect or speech variety. Voloshinov (1973) argues that any linguistic meaning or theme arises from judgment (evaluation) of that meaning in a social context, and we could say that notions of formality also arise from this every-present “evaluative purview.” Among English speakers in the US, varieties which would never find a place on major broadcasting or in government (both
highly formal spaces) nevertheless can be used for formal purposes of its own (religious speech, respectful speech to elders, etc.). The opposite would be quite a strange claim—that some low overt prestige variety speaking community had no formal contexts. When formality is invoked in discussions of good writing, it is usually invoked as if there were only one formality. In practice, the right kind of formality for one context is not always appropriate for others. There is not a single formality, but many formalities. Dominant language ideologies do work to make this variety invisible and maintain that there is really only one.

Cementing social/political dominance through linguistic valuation is deplorable and all too common. But it’s not likely for there to be a time or place when formal contexts signified by speech do not exist. Formal spaces are not necessarily exclusionary. For example, wedding ceremonies commonly include a large amount of formal and uncommon language (“I now thee wed,” “speak now or forever hold your peace” “we are gathered together today”). Sometimes, making something (such as a wedding) linguistically formal is a way of denoting seriousness and importance. In these cases it’s not very much about discrimination or valuation of one speech variety over another for political purposes. So formality “in itself” is not the sole feeder of linguistic dominance. However, given the probably universal ideology of there is a formal way to speak and you must do so when appropriate, controlling interpretive authority over what constitutes formality is a prize asset for structures that are supported by the subordination of social groups with shared linguistic characteristics.

Capitalizing on its authority, exercising its prerogative to evaluate, and invoking the defense of formality—these are some of the ways schools function as sites that reproduce writing ideologies. Schools have a fundamental interest in reproducing the language and writing ideologies that support them, because the rhetoric of their existence and their importance
depends on it. Here I should re-emphasize the incremental and largely passive nature of social reproduction. When I say that schools have an interest in reproducing certain writing ideologies, I am not suggesting the existence of a secret cabal, hiding in a back room, plotting to control everyone’s use of commas. Social reproduction is much more inertial, much more habitual than that. Still, these increments add up, and they do sustain powerful ideologies and institutions.

2.5 Writing Ideologies and Teachers
Schools play a role in the reproduction and maintenance of writing ideologies, but schools and teachers are not the same thing. In this section, I turn to theorizing the impact of teachers themselves. I have introduced the concepts of language ideology and writing ideology, as well as shown how schools serve as major sites for the reproduction of these ideologies. Speaking of schooling as a broad institution is one thing, but as individual actors within school, teachers require a bit of a different analysis. If I have made the case for schools being sites where language and writing ideologies are reproduced, then it should be clear why I am interested in teachers. Teachers are obviously major actors within schools. All the aspects of school that make them relevant to writing ideologies as institutions—authority, evaluation, and formality—involve teachers in their expression.

I chose to focus on teachers instead of, for example, principals, school boards, paraprofessionals, or state or district regulations on curricula. This choice had many reasons, some of which are very practical and others of which are more theoretical. First of all, because I obtained elementary teacher certification at Swarthmore College, I had a professional interest in further investigating issues of practice. But as a student of language ideology, I thought that teachers would also make an especially interesting focus due to their particular position in the hierarchy of school officials. Like anyone working in an institution, teachers are under various
demands and supervision of those demands. But teachers in particular are also sometimes able to create self-directed spaces within or despite those demands. “Just shut your door and keep teaching” is a refrain I have heard from many teachers when they describe how they deal with outside pressures, or when they advise me on how I should do so. While any school supervises teachers through various means, teachers may still be isolated during the day. This means that teachers might retain some ideological distance from the school as an institution while still being clearly subject to it.

Many of the major studies of classroom practice I encountered as an education student paid serious and significant attention to “the classroom” and the student-learners there, but teachers in these research contexts can fall to the status of background scenery or props. Still other research treats schools and schooling as a whole and teachers play an even smaller role (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 1979; others). These areas of research are certainly valuable, and they have shaped the teacher I will be. They all point to the importance and power of individual teachers, but they simply emphasize other areas. My research therefore breaks from these sorts of studies in focus, but not in the premise that all aspects of schooling warrant deeper understanding, in order to advance the practice of education.

2.6 Conclusion
Again, there is no single directly related body of research from which I could have derived a single “background” to my study. My interests in classrooms, literacy, linguistics, and teaching predated the beginning of this study, as did my familiarity with some of the research in these areas. This chapter covers research done after my data collection as well as research and perspectives encountered as part of introductory courses in both my departments.

The research presented here points to the complexity of any investigation of language

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ideology, the contention among various writing ideologies, and the important place teachers have in the distribution and reproduction of writing ideologies. My study used topical, semi-structured interviews to shed light on how individual teachers expressed their writing ideologies through interaction with dominant discourses and common sense about writing.
3. Methods

To investigate the writing ideologies of and around elementary school teachers, I conducted five topical, semi-structured interviews (Rubin and Rubin, 1995) with teachers in a snowball convenience sample. My research questions were developed and modified under principles of ethnographic-like qualitative research (Strauss and Corbin, 2008; Clough and Nutbrown, 2002). I analyzed the transcribed interviews with the iterative, cyclical process of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1999). In analysis I drew on the work of other language researchers, and I viewed the teachers’ talk as situated in aspects of their context, especially linguistic (Bourdieu, 1991; Bakhtin, 1986; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), social (Gee, 1992; Heath and Street, 2008; Enciso, 2007), and political (Bourdieu, 1999; Blommaert and Verschueren 1998; Hill, 2008). In this chapter, I describe in greater detail the process of undertaking this study and analyzing the data I collected. I also discuss some of the experiences, frames, and biases to the study, which affect any study.

These methods allowed me to learn as much as I could from my case teachers as respectfully as I could learn it. This project has required me to listen deeply, long before I speak or write with my own ideas, more than any other academic work I have completed as an undergraduate. Qualitative and ethnographic-like methods gave me a rigorous but open structure and procedure from which to investigate the ideas and beliefs of five professional, committed educators.

3.1 Research Questions

As is expected in grounded, qualitative studies, my research questions changed with data collection and preliminary analysis. In a way, adjustments in my research questions were some of my first substantial findings: large, surprising patterns in the data that moved the study in ways I

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3 If you are reading my thesis because you are writing your own and looking for guidance, be sure to look at the presented poster in Appendix E, which includes some specific advice.
did not expect. Charting the path of my research questions is a productive way to illustrate my initial interests and the full thinking behind the final analysis. My original research questions were:

1) What is the relationship between teachers’ ideologies about writing and their teaching practices? In what ways are teachers’ ideologies of writing reflected (or not) in their instructional practices? How are their practices reflected (or not) in their ideology?

2) In what ways are teachers’ ideologies of writing shaped by the broader context (federal, state, district, school, community, prior pre-service and professional development) of their pedagogy?

3) How do teachers negotiate public ideologies (i.e., “common sense”) around children’s competence in language and writing?

4) How are teacher’s beliefs about children’s writing competencies and readiness for particular genres shaped by their views of children as gendered, raced, classed, and/or culturally-produced persons?

These questions represented my curiosities in Spring 2009 and what I expected might come up in conversations with teachers about writing. Over the course of data collection and analysis, my research questions changed to reflect emergent unexpected patterns, as well as research constraints.

My first research question did not ultimately remain relevant to my data or my project. I asked teachers many questions about their classroom practices, and they spoke about them extensively, but like many discourse analysts, I found myself more interested in their implicit frames of reference for these discussions rather than the precise details of their practices. In the interviews, the teachers seemed more expressive about their larger concerns than with their classroom or practical particulars.

In a related way, my second question changed in ways I did not expect. I began the project thinking that the particulars of each teacher’s school (and how the individual school interacted with larger educational structures such as NCLB) might have a lot of influence on how they spoke about writing. After analysis, however, their individual schools seemed much less important than the wider world of ideas about writing. The interviews hinted at a larger but
common field of ideas about writing and children that all the teachers were navigating. In other words, when it came to ideas about writing, the context of 2010 America became more relevant than their particular schools.

Accordingly, it was my third question that grew to take up a larger slice of my analytical focus. During my analysis, I sensed a common pool of ideas on writing and children that the teachers were all adopting from or rejecting or otherwise reacting to. There is no possible direct view to this common pool, and instead it is only suggested and hinted at by the overlapping perspectives of individuals. Findings in this area relate to the ways in which teachers mix and switch and bend various discourses to their own situations and purposes.

Finally, my fourth question remains interesting, but it was not often invoked by the teachers and quickly fell outside the scope of my study. Nevertheless, teachers’ non-talk on these issues is notable in its own way. Some implications of this are discussed briefly in chapter 6.

Faced with unexpected but fascinating patterns in the interview data, my research questions were adjusted to follow up on the extensive and dynamic interdiscursivity shown by the teachers. My final research questions were:

1. In what ways are teachers’ ideologies of writing shaped by the broader context (federal, state, district, school, community, prior pre-service and professional development) of their pedagogy?
2. How do teachers negotiate public ideologies (i.e., “common sense”) around children’s competence in language and writing?
3. How do teachers’ writing ideologies incorporate, reject, or otherwise respond to other ideologies and discourses relevant to children?

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 The Teachers
In the summer of 2009, I interviewed five teachers who taught writing to students in the elementary grades.
Although some form of writing instruction obviously takes place in all of K-12 schooling, as well as in other contexts, I chose to focus on elementary grades for two reasons: First, as a researcher and a teacher, I saw this project as an opportunity not only to develop answers to my specific research questions, but also to develop my own knowledge of elementary teaching, for which I will receive certification at Swarthmore College. Second, I thought that my theoretical interests in the connection between practice and ideology would be most productive if directed towards an age range where “the basics” of writing are most imagined to reside. In other words, I expected elementary grades to be years where ideologies around writing instruction would be the most salient to the teachers themselves who had them, even though all teachers and non-teachers alike carry and enact writing ideologies.

Through a sample of convenience (described below), I ended up with two 2nd grade teachers, one 3rd grade teacher, one 3rd-4th grade teacher, and one teacher working with 11-13

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4 For ease of reference, if I am talking collectively about the age groups that the teachers are responsible for, I will use the word “grades,” even though this term does not specifically apply to N.
year olds at elementary writing levels. This range worked well for the study. All my case teachers firmly associated themselves and their practice with the grade that they taught. They also all clearly identified themselves as “people who teach writing.”

The teachers I selected came from a variety of school contexts, in terms of region, demographics, type, and mission. When finding teachers to work with, I intentionally sought this variability because I wanted to study how teachers negotiated public ideologies, common sense, and locally institutional mandates about writing instruction, and all three of these things might vary by context. Ultimately, their local contexts seemed less important than I originally supposed, but only through an initially varied sample would this have been evident. However, at no time in the course of the study was my goal to compare teachers based on just these social and other differences. Even among, for example, teachers in urban schools, I did not necessarily expect to see consistency in the contexts that the teachers were situated in. On the other hand, I do not pretend that by finding teachers from suburban, rural, and urban schools I have somehow captured all the variability there is in elementary schools. Another researcher pursuing similar questions might productively concentrate on other kinds of variability. My goal in initial selection of these 5 diverse teachers was not to present a generalizable group, but rather to work with enough individuals that I would be able find major patterns of where ideologies of writing instruction clustered, or what issues many teachers tended to address in our conversations.

These teachers were selected in a snowball sample and located in several different ways, some personal relationships from previous fieldwork, others through relationships with one of my thesis advisers. Potential interviewees were contacted with details about the project and what their participation would entail (see Appendix C), and informed consent was acquired (see Appendix D). Clearly there was a strong effect of convenience in my sample. Four of the five
case teachers also had attended and graduated from Swarthmore College. I knew two of the teachers personally, one of whom was my co-operating teacher for student teaching. Two of the graduates are involved in a Persuasive Writing Project with a professor we all share in common and who is also one of my thesis advisers. Localized, personally rooted samples are not uncommon in research, but some of the limitations of my sample are considered in section 3.4 below.

3.2.2 The Interviews
The interviews I conducted with the five teachers were *topical* and *semi-structured* (Rubin and Rubin 1995). Gathering qualitative interview data in topical, semi-structured interviews allowed me to direct the large-scale focus of the interview while being open to the particular concerns and interests of my interviewees. I had a plan coming into the interviews, but once I was there, my stance became a mainly listening one, putting aside conclusions of my own for the time being and focusing on fully exploring and hearing the ideas of the interviewees. Coming into the interviews, I had specific topical interests in mind, as well as a list of specific questions. A semi-structured format worked best for me because my research interests focused on only a specific and small fraction of the thinking and doing involved in teaching. My case teachers were extremely generous with their time. Each interview took approximately 90 minutes, and I arrived with about 25 questions. (see Appendix A) These questions included:

- Where do you teach? How would you describe your school?
- How do you use writing? What is the place of writing in your life?
- What are some characteristics of good writing?
- Would you say you have a specific philosophy of teaching writing? What is it?
- In your years of teaching, has there ever been a student writer who really surprised you in some way, or a student who you learned a lot from?
- Is there any question you wish I had asked? If you were interviewing people about writing in their classrooms, what would you want to know?

Drawing from linguistic scholarship on language ideology was informative in setting out
interview questions, because a review of this literature provided a starting expectation about where ideologies might cluster and what questions about writing the ideologies might address. In a short review of some linguistic scholarship relevant to classrooms (completed for a class junior year), I suggested that language ideology scholarship tended to cluster around one of four different aspects: (1) mechanic aspects or beliefs about the structure and “facts” of language; (2) aesthetic aspects or beliefs about language as pleasant or unpleasant; (3) metaphorical aspects or beliefs about what language was, fundamentally; and (4) political aspects, or beliefs about how language ought to be treated by policy-making entities. These basic categories gave me a good starting point for the different kinds of beliefs I might expect from the teachers, as well as what kinds of questions I might productively ask. They provided a beginning reference only, however, and I did not return to them in my analysis of the interviews, nor were all my interview questions related to them.

The interview questions were meant to approach the teachers’ ideologies of writing from a variety of entry points, because I did not imagine writing ideology to be a static or completely consistent set of ideas. Rather, I anticipate ideology to be expressed differently in response to different contexts (and questions), as well as to contain contradictions and tensions. In order to best document the full complexity of ideology, I had to approach it from as many standpoints as was efficiently possible. This redundancy allowed for triangulation within the interview data as well as ample opportunity for teachers to introduce topics and stories I would not have expected to be raised. I strived to ask questions that, although topical, did not limit the explanations of the teachers in any way. I did not pose questions that involved a set of pre-defined answers, were yes/no, or otherwise imposed “a set of answer categories” (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 6). The form of semi-structured interview meant that I had a good idea of what I wanted to talk about, but it
also meant I needed to be able to let go of some of that idea if the interviewee was going in very different directions.

I had my set of prepared questions in front of me when I conducted interviews, but questions were added, eliminated, and adapted in response to the content of the interview itself. When necessary, I also asked for clarification of certain ideas and terms used by the teachers. In Appendix B, a full interview, readers can see how the actual progress of an interview could be different than the protocol, which is necessarily a rough plan. Some interviewees requested to see the interview protocol before the interview, and their request was granted. In general, I wanted to make the relationship as collaborative as possible. I was not looking for any mismatches or gotchas in my study, there was no trick to it, and there was no reason not to share the questions and goals of my research with participants beforehand. This is a departure from some research traditions of documenting linguistic prejudice or discrimination, research that falls within the broader field of language ideology research that influenced my work. These studies correctly presume the presence of negative or restrictive attitudes towards the language of particular others, and design their research to evoke and capture these attitudes (Preston, 2002; Purnell, Idsardi, and Baugh, 1999; Rubin, 1992). In other words, these researchers were specifically trying to document expressions of pervasive patterns of oppressive language attitudes. As stated before, I am approaching the writing ideologies of and around the interviewees without ascribing frameworks of correct/incorrect, right/wrong, progressive/oppressive.

In my transcription of the interviews, I transcribed the entirety of each interview, excluding only pleasantries and post-interview conversations not a part of the study. I chose not to represent most silences or false starts. These aspects of speech were not relevant to my research questions (though they are relevant to other kinds of research), and eliminating them
made the transcripts easier to read. Throughout the transcripts and in some quoted sections, I insert “paragraph” breaks that reference topical shifts and make reading the transcripts easier.

Another of my methodological and analytical choices has to do with the way I present interview data. I follow similarly interview-heavy research (e.g. Martin, 2000; Weis and Fine, 1996) and present sometimes large stretches of talk by interviewees. I chose to do this in order to better represent the talk-context of the interviewee’s words and to foreground their words, stories, and idea. In this way, my reader is invited to “work through” the interviewee’s points, as well as mine (Weis and Fine, 1996, p. 497, qtd. in Martin, 2000: 7). Additionally, by seeing more of the transcripts, I hope that readers will be as excited by the richness of the teachers’ talk as I was.

3.3 Data Analysis
The work of Strauss and Corbin (2008) provided an iterative, grounded process of poring over data and being open to patterns, concepts and themes that were thickened as well as complicated through successive passes through data. As part of this grounded theory making, I adopted some of the attentions and stances of ethnographers, critical discourse analysts, and interactional sociolinguists. The careful and considered listening to the data revealed not only significant consistencies within one teacher’s interview, but also relevant patterns that reached across all five interviews. It is impossible to approach data without curiosities and questions, but in the process of making grounded theories about data, I was prepared to adjust some parts of my research questions to better fit the emergence of unexpected patterns in these data. For the most part, it was during analysis that my research questions were modified, as described above.

3.3.1 The Methodology of ideology
In chapter 2, I described the concepts of ideology and language ideology in the ways that they
informed the design and genesis of the research project. As methodologically relevant concepts, they necessitated certain choices in the process of analyzing the interview data. Specific past scholarship on (language) ideology did not exactly give a firm starting point for designing and framing my study, perhaps because it is quite a broad frame. Some past work on language ideologies has taken a somewhat narrow lens on the full and rich set of beliefs and values that people hold as users of language. When I investigated teachers' ideologies about teaching writing, I was considering the interaction between individuals and their ideologies, whereas previous work has often taken such a broad view of ideologies that individuals and their local contexts are not included.

It is not at all controversial to claim that teachers hold beliefs about language, but the simplicity of these assumptions and hypotheses did not mean that the investigation will be simple, because language ideologies are not always held consciously nor are they intentionally manifested. In this research, I imagined ideology to mean, at the most basic level, cohesive sets of beliefs and values, though the cohesion of ideologies can contain both tensions and apparent contradictions. Ideologies are both historical and in flux, shared and individualized, socially shaped and subject to agency.

Making ideologies the focus of research shares similarities with ethnographic methods as laid out by Heath and Street (2008), who described ethnography as deeply involved in “making meaning-making the object of study.” Writing ideologies are indeed ways of making meaning of a person’s surroundings. For teachers, ideologies enacted in practice and towards students function as a kind of sense-making tool, because of their ability to give explanations to what people observe. For example, if a teacher sees a second grader struggling with persuasive writing, they might employ a particular ideology that favors strict developmental explanations
and conclude that that particular child was not sufficiently cognitively developed to do the work involved in persuasive writing. That conclusion represents a particular moment of particular writing ideology in use. That example involves only one major discourse being applied—development. I assumed as a frame that the teachers in this study (and people in general) would have much more complex ideologies at hand, and that they might draw from multiple ideologies at once (hence tensions and apparent contradictions). In this way, writing ideologies are “cultural patterns” in the way that Heath and Street described:

From pronouncing vowels to shaping stories, every speaker reflects habits, loyalties, and ideologies of language forged in cultural patterns that existed before they were born. From the moment an infant emerges from the womb until death, these cultural patterns, shifting and cumulative as they are, provide the bases through which every human creates, explores, sustains, and tests social relationships while developing a sense of agency. (2008, p. 6)

In showing how particular teachers enact particular ideologies, I took care to avoid ascribing these ideologies only to the teachers. Writing ideologies (and language ideologies) are “cultural patterns” in that they precede an individual, both temporally and discursively. Bourdieu’s (1999) notion of *habitus* is valuable here as well (and quite similar to what Heath and Street described in the above quote), and under a Bourdieusian lens, I saw writing ideologies as both structured (already present) and structuring (affecting teachers individually in their talk). Writing ideologies, then, would only be present as they were stated to me in an interview, in small moments that reflected much larger patterns encompassing and affecting many structures and people, not just the case teachers.

Scholars such as Hill (2008) write of language ideologies as inherently bound to economic and social interests. Barthes (1975) considers the term “dominant ideology” to be redundant (32). Research that attends only to dominant ideologies has produced important work, but the methods of such studies, or frames like Barthes’, do not map on well to mine. If I saw
ideologies as cultural patterns, structuring but not defining individuals, I could not assume that whatever writing ideologies documented would be closely tied to social and economic interests, although I was open to finding that particular ideologies were reproductive of certain structures and practices. These connections did not appear in the data very strongly or directly. Unlike Hill, who mostly studied institutions, I was working with individuals. I was therefore responsible to understand the words and ideas of my interviewees as always partially mediated by their ideological context. My goal was to understand how teachers made sense of writing and writing instruction in their classrooms, not catch teachers in statements that would seem insensitive to inequality or otherwise too soft on current oppressive power structures. As I discussed in the section on forming my interview questions, such a predatory, “gotcha” approach would not only be theoretically unproductive but simply disrespectful to my interviewees, not to mention underappreciative of the ways in which we all can and do act and talk in ways that reproduce the status quo.

I sought to understand the wider world of ideas that teachers were working in. My general approach to investigating writing ideology is well summarized by Blommaert and Verschueren (1998), who conducted a study of language ideologies implicated in European newspaper editorials. About their own study, they wrote, “more weight is attached to the implicit frame of reference, the supposedly common world of beliefs in which the reports are anchored... This approach is crucial for the investigation of widely shared ideologies” (191). Like them, I imagined coherence in the data as being “manifested either as recurrence or as systematic absence” (119). Noting systemic recurrence probably is patently sensible, though the importance of systemic absence is just as crucial. Systemic discursive absence is nearly analogous to Enciso’s (2007) notion of prolepsis, the endemic assumptions of a common reference frame.
Framed as a research stance, I was practicing what Clough and Nutbrown (2002) call *radical listening*, a kind of listening that involves not only the what, but the how, why, and to whom.

3.3.2 The nitty-gritty: Analyzing 8 hours of talk
As I worked through the data, I was pulled farther away from the notion of discrete beliefs and more towards thinking about the teachers’ statements of their ideas as practice-oriented answers. This shift in thinking about writing ideologies from ideas to statements of ideas was important to maintaining a responsible research stance that accepted and foregrounded the limitations of my study and methods. Thinking in terms of statements prevents me, rightfully, from making definite conclusions about what my case teachers believe “in general.” Instead, I focused on analyzing the data in front of me, and restricting my conclusions to the teachers’ discursive work within the interviews. Broader implications of this work, which would be relevant to their larger practice and patterns of thinking, are discussed only speculatively. In my analysis of how teachers stated and implied their ideologies of writing, I was supported by methods and perspectives from critical discourse analysis (CDA) and interactional sociolinguistics, both of which were a part of building a *grounded theory*, a methodology described by Strauss and Corbin (1999).

CDA helped me see how teachers signaled and dialogically interacted with larger discourses of learning, development, children, and education. CDA sees all language use as ideologically situated, in that it constantly reflects, constructs, and possibly deconstructs the ideologies of its particular context of use (Fairclough, 2004, Rogers, 2004a, Rogers, 2004b, Gee, 2004, Wagner-Pacifici, 1994). As teachers used language to talk about teaching writing, they were necessarily drawing on and reacting to a bounded set of discourses around children’s writing. Thus in my analysis and coding of the interviews, guided by CDA, I did not simply
assume that their comments were directly reflective of their internal and mental beliefs, rather I saw them as reflective of a site of contention and interaction between their own preferences teaching writing, their understandings of their practices teaching writing, and what they hear and see from already structured discourses about teaching writing.

I also drew on interactional sociolinguistic tools of analysis, paying attention to how teachers used positioning, framing, omission, and other discursive tools to explain their ideas about writing. In other words, how the teachers said what they said was very much a part of the content of the interview, a principle echoed by many sociolinguistic theorists. From a CDA and sociolinguistic standpoint analyzing the interview transcripts, in addition to my main research questions, I was constantly thoughtful of the following questions: How is the teacher invoking or responding to some outside discourse about writing? How do they position themselves in relationship to what they say about writing (Tannen, 1993)? What kind of selves are they creating (Wortham, 2001)? How do they establish frames and commonplaces as natural or unquestioned? What Discourses (Gee, 2004) do they enter into—did their descriptions of writing interact dialogically with other areas that might have seemed off-topic, such as schooling, merit, race, class, gender, learning, and children? How did all of these discursive moves reproduce or challenge relationships of power regarding the teaching of writing? Such tools and questions are not necessarily designed specifically for use in analyzing topical semi-structured interviews. Some of the guiding questions involved in interactional sociolinguistics and critical discourse analysis were very similar to my research questions, and others were more like general concerns I wished to be mindful of, but which were not always directly relevant to my work.

Strauss and Corbin’s (1999) notion of grounded theory was useful to me as a model of how to process my data. I had never worked with so much data before, and the open but
structured process made sense not only for my research questions and type of data, but also for my development as a researcher. A *grounded theory* is one developed in conversation with data, not tested against data as in a positivist, hypothesis driven paradigm. With a step-by-step and iterative stance on engaging with data, I approached the data by looking for emergent patterns. At this stage, I noticed the large variety of relevant discourses and topics that the teachers invoked in their discussions. As I began, as a second pass, to chart connections between these discourses, I saw how they tended to cluster in certain topical groups, some of which were notably not connected. Once I had identified the discourses that the teachers were invoking, using, or implicitly rejecting, the task became to develop a theory that explained why teachers made these particular discursive moves and connections and not others.

### 3.4 Limitations of the study

Like any study, mine has limitations. Some limitations result from the kind of analysis I conduct: although qualitative methods are empirical, data heavy, and valid (Heath and Street, 2008), there is always an unavoidable note of speculation to my conclusions. As described above, I myself am a part of my data—my analyses are susceptible to my frames, stances, and values. I cannot eliminate their influence, I can only make them explicit.

Other limitations are more concrete. The size and content of my sample of teachers is most relevant to the limitations. More interviewees than five might make me more sure of my conclusions. On the other hand, even if I had 100 interviewees, nothing would change about the limitations coming from the only partial knowing that any analysis provides. Besides, how I found my interviewees is of greater methodological concern than the number of interviewees. Four of the five were educated and trained as teachers at the college I now attend. The precise limitations arising from this common trait are unclear. It is certainly possible that the common
experience of the same program (though one that has changed over the years) made the teaching values of the four Swarthmore alums more similar than four teachers with different pre-service contexts would have been. While I acknowledge this limitation, based in my familiarity with both the Swarthmore education department and the sum of my data, I did not recognize any blatant echoes of the Swarthmore program in the interviews. However, given the importance the interviewees placed on the grades that they taught, ultimately I would rather have had four teachers from the same college than four teachers who taught the same grade at the same school, in which case the teachers would be directly working towards a common plan. The common background of the teachers is a noteworthy concern, but not so much that it compromises the conclusions or findings of the study. In the final chapter of this work, when I consider implications of my analysis and findings, I discuss other ways that my study is limited in scope.

3.5 My position and frames as a researcher
I conducted this study as a continuation of interests in teacher practice and the structure and use of language. I have wanted to be a practicing teacher since I was 15 or so, and while the difference between voiced and unvoiced sounds no longer fascinates me as it once did, I have been enthusiastic about linguistics for years. As a student of both education and linguistics, I have given much thought to how my beliefs about language would affect my future practice.

Like all members of writing societies and schooling societies, I have my own ideologies of writing and teaching, many pre-existing orientations and frames towards teaching practices and linguistic practices. At this point in the description of the study, immediately before my analysis of the teachers’ talk is presented in detail, I am speaking specifically to the theoretical frames I brought to the project. As I mentioned before, all researchers have frames that are relevant to their research. I am reviewing mine as part of my responsibility to present my study.
as honestly as possible. This review might also serve as a valuable summary of some of the major concepts involved in the analysis of ideology.

3.5.1 Society/Ideology/Language/Literacy/Schools
We are social. We are social when we act, social when we talk, and social when we think. This socialness is composed of the customs and institutions that shape and outlast us, the ways we learn from and model each other, and our constant interaction through talk, text, and experience. This socialness comes with ideology. While this study is about writing ideology specifically, I understand ideology in general as a major force in our lives. Ideology, a concept as complicated as it is simple, is the way we learn to be who we are. In its most meaningful uses, the term ideology is neutral, encompassing the full range of human moral potential. Through ideology, some people learn to help children lost in department stores find their family. Through ideology, some people learn to join the Ku Klux Klan. Ideology can also be much more dull, and not tinged with ethical implications. Why salt and pepper at every restaurant table, and why not “pepper and salt”? Ideology. Why is the color blue sad? Ideology. Why eggs usually at breakfast? Ideology.

The things we believe and do with language and literacy are also ideological. Our mutual socialness is present in our talk, our text, and our everything in between. Like the examples above, our linguistic ideologies can involve ethical and sociopolitical stances (This is America—Speak English!) or be rather dull (salt and pepper, not pepper and salt). Some language ideologies are dominant, shared by many and constructed as the norm, and others are more covert, in conflict with the dominant.

Some dominant language ideologies are fairly uncontentious. For example, few people would take issue with the idea that the English language should be written with the English
alphabet, rather than Cyrillic. However, other dominant ideas are far more controversial. Many people believe or would state explicitly that good writing is only done by “educated” people. But access to “education” is restricted, and not all learning is seen to count as “education.” In this light, the idea that only educated people write well is clearly and simply oppressive. Oppressive because it restricts possibilities and breaks bonds. It is fundamentally unkind, and in ethical terms borrowed from Martin Buber, it degrades a fellow Thou into a dominated It. Ideologies can and do enshrine dominance and preserve inequality. Unfortunately, schools are often sites where oppressive ideologies are put into practice. The stakes are high.

Are teachers the bad guys? Certainly not, not exactly. Ideologies are too distributed for there to be bad guys and good guys. But schools and classrooms are sites where major ideologies are relevant. They are indeed sites of reproduction, and so too were the places and spaces in which teachers learned to be teachers. Like everyone else, and especially others in institutional roles, teachers might variously perpetuate or challenge the very systems and ideologies that produced them, and in which they reside.

Today’s schools, as well as yesterday’s, do not support all students. Tomorrow’s schools might, or might not. Against the ideologies that restrain and restrict linguistic possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986), teachers can make differences. This is one of the goals I set for my own teaching, and so it is clearly present in the frames that I bring to this study. Linguistic and other ideologies pervade all societies, and they can be pernicious, so I take seriously the goal to enhance possibilities for students to be skilled talkers and text-makers.

This section represents some of my own ideology of teaching, writing, and social life. My stances here have certainly affected this project from conception to reporting. They will be echoed especially in the final chapter, in which I discuss the implications of my findings. My
stances are present in the next chapter as well, in which I present my analysis of the teacher interviews in detail. In my analysis, when considering the teachers themselves, I do not neglect to view them in a larger context of individuals-in-institutions and -in-society. My conclusions are directed toward the discursive and institutional context of the teachers, and I do not pretend I can make definitive claims about the teachers in isolation. I also do not evaluate the merit of any particular part of a language ideology, which would not only be disrespectful but also theoretically unsound.

3.6 Conclusion
The methods used in this study were designed and theorized as ways to effectively and responsibly make sense of data with patterns and themes that would not be known to a researcher ahead of time. Qualitative research techniques work best when understood as a rough guideline to analysis, like a map with no names. Grounded theory, ethnography, critical discourse analysis, and interactional sociolinguistics all directed me to particular paths and areas of importance that had been previously explored by other researchers, even though their data might have been quite different.

These methods, along with my own frames, led me to the analysis that I present in the next chapter. As I continually emphasize, the analysis is rigorous but also partial. I propose a particular explanation for how the case teachers structure their explicit and implicit statements of their ideologies of writing. This explanation represents serious and extensive work with the data, but I do not claim to have a complete understanding of the teachers’ ideologies, nor would such a claim be possible. The combination of rigor and partiality sidesteps positivist concerns of generalizability, and instead describes work that is best understood to be as complicated, partial, and situated as the data it presents.
4. Analysis

4.0 Introduction and Research Questions
For this study, I interviewed five teachers with different teaching experiences and different
teaching placements about writing, writing education, and writing in their classroom. In my
investigation, I was influenced by scholarship in sociolinguistics, sociocultural models of
literacy, pedagogy, sociology, and language ideology. I thought that I might find sets of ideas that
I could frame as a “writing ideology,” a set of cohesive ideas about writing. Early in my analysis,
my understanding of the data changed in two important ways.

First, I was not dealing with “ideas.” I was dealing with statements of ideas. The
difference between these two things was explored in detail in the previous chapter, but suffice to
say that I was compelled to question the divisions between what the teachers said and how they
said it. In my methodological stance, which was influenced by interactional sociolinguistics and
discourse analysis, this how included what kinds of frames and stances the teachers adopted as
they discussed their ideas. The ideas can only be understood with, and probably only as, the
frames and stances. My analysis here is somewhat of a break with other studies of language
ideology, which often imagine their subject as a set of ideas. The more common stance is useful
for the more common research goal: investigating language ideology and its connection to
language use. However, I am not investigating writing ideology to illuminate how the case
teachers use writing. The difference in the approach is partially driven by the kind of data I had.
An interviewer is not a mindreader. I cannot claim knowledge about what the interviewees were
thinking, only what they were saying.

Second, I was not dealing with diverse individuals in diverse environments with
interestingly divergent perspectives. I was dealing with diverse individuals in diverse
environments with interestingly convergent perspectives. I was expecting major influences on
ideas and frames from the teachers' particular schools and experiences. Now I suspect that the
shared milieu of teaching and writing in 2010 America was more important. As described in the
previous chapter, I began the study with research questions that involved the influences of
particular contexts, but I ended the study with research questions that are much more about how
teachers apply and arrange available discourses on writing, writing education, and (young)
writers.

As a review, my research questions evolved to be:

1. In what ways are teachers' ideologies of writing shaped by the broader context (federal,
state, district, school, community, prior pre-service and professional development) of
their pedagogy?
2. How do teachers negotiate public ideologies (i.e., "common sense") around children's
competence in language and writing?
3. How do teachers' writing ideologies incorporate, reject, or otherwise respond to other
ideologies and discourses relevant to children?

The teachers I interviewed responded to my particular questions, but they also spoke freely and
at length on other topics that were related to their classrooms and relevant to their discussion of
writing. I was soon fixated on the topics and discourses that the teachers brought with them into
our conversation. Some, like age and development, I could have expected. Others, like
expression and thought, were surprises. In either case, I had not predicted the dynamic selectivity
with which teachers employed these discourses. I began to focus on how the use of these
discourses comprised partial but declarative "answers" to issues related to classroom practice.
Teachers' statements of their beliefs about writing / writing ideologies were structured by and
constructed with a particular set of relevant discourses. The "answers" were what was being
constructed by the teachers' discursive work. Oddly, and a little like the game of Jeopardy!, I
encountered the teachers' answers before I knew for sure what the teachers' questions were. As I
looked for more answer-ideas, the questions became clearer. Throughout the interviews, teachers
applied or connected particular relevant discourses, and this work amounted to identifiable

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answer-ideas that almost exclusively respond to only one of two Big Questions:

1. Who is a good writer and what do we do about it?
2. What do people use writing for?

The remainder of this chapter will follow my research process and describe the concepts that form the basis for those Big Questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts</th>
<th>Examples and definitions</th>
<th>Section</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Throughout the interviews, teachers applied</td>
<td>The use of one discourse, for example: adopted, rejected, modified, challenged, responded to</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or connected</td>
<td>The use of more than one discourse, for example: combined, contrasted, compared, used one in explicit preference over another</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>particular relevant discourses,</td>
<td>A discourse here is topical set of ideas and frames. Relevant means plausibly related to writing and writing instruction, for example: ability, testing, genre, audience, power; but not: ice cream, road safety, animal husbandry.</td>
<td>4.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>and this work amounted to identifiable answer-ideas</td>
<td>Partial but declarative statements of a larger writing ideology, for example: There are differences in writing ability between students; Rubrics assess non-holistic characteristics of writing; Writing is one-way communication to an audience.</td>
<td>4.3, 4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that almost exclusively respond to only one of two Big Questions.</td>
<td>1. Who is a good writer, and what do we do about it? 2. What do people use writing for?</td>
<td>4.5, 4.6</td>
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4.1 Discursive applications and discursive connections
Teachers used relevant discourses in their talk either by applying them in some way to what they were discussing or by connecting more than one discourse and applying that connection to what they were discussing. The concept of a discourse application is not so complicated, but it is important to remember that “applying” could mean adopting, rejecting, modifying, challenging, or another kind of response. Using discourses is a consistent and universal practice of talk and text. As philosopher of language Mikhail Bakhtin (1986) writes, “If speech genres did not exist and we had not mastered them, if we had to originate them during the speech process and construct each utterance at will for the first time, speech communication would be almost
impossible” (79). My use of the word *discourse* here to mean roughly a topical set of ideas and frames is not exactly analogous to Bakhtin’s notion of speech genres, but they do share the property just highlighted.

Connections between discourses are more complex than mere application. In this section, I give an instructive example of a discursive connection found in the interview data, one that was interesting but not related to my major findings. This is intended to clarify the concept of a discursive connection without discussing all the findings and analyses in detail.

Responding to an open prompt towards the end of his interview, Andrew said: “And you try to get that across to kids in the way that none of us are perfect, our stories are going to have flaws in them and that’s okay” (22).

We could say that there are two major discourses at play here. One is a particular take on writing assessment, “our stories are going to have flaws in them.” Another is human imperfection, “none of us are perfect.” Certainly, neither of these discourses was invented on the spot. Perhaps Andrew has encountered their combination before, and perhaps not. Andrew is accessing them and actively arranging them in somewhat of a novel way. The key illustrative point here is that we can easily imagine the discourses being separate, even usually unrelated. Yet Andrew makes a connection between them to serve his communicative purpose. The open take on writing assessment probably comes from a variety of traditions in education that include an allowance of mistakes and a model of learning as a long-term process of growth and reflection. Human imperfection plausibly comes from a more identifiable source—Western/American religious traditions that include doctrines of original sin or a Fall from grace. Certainly, we are not used to thinking of original sin and writing assessment being related, but Andrew clearly has access to both discourses. Because both are fairly public (one might also say dominant)
discourses, Andrew would have access to these discourses whether or not he were a member of
communities usually associated with them (some religions, educators).

This example of a discursive connection is meant to illustrate the fundamental aspects of
the concept. A discursive connection involves two or more discourses that we could recognize as
independent but are combined in a moment by a speaker. Connections can be an
alignment/combination of discourses as above, but it might also be contrastive (as in the form
"some people believe X, but in my experience I have seen Y instead"). The discursive
connections made by the teachers in the interviews were flexible, and in the course of the long
interviews they sometimes changed, as new situations were discussed. As noted in the above
example, it is possible that teachers are re-expressing a combination that they have already heard,
rather than semi-spontaneously combining two mostly previously separate discourses. This is a
point that will be explored further later, but in general, I interpret teachers’ discursive
connections as more intentional, deliberate, and selective than not, mostly because of the large
number of possibilities for connections as well as the subtlety with which teachers engaged in
their connections.

4.2 Relevant Discourses
In early stages of data analysis, I noticed that the five case teachers all employed a particular
bounded set of discourses and topics to express themselves clearly and explain their ideas. The
discourses I heard included were:

ability, motivation, preference, difference in learners, hierarchy of skills, age,
grade level, development, schools, assessment, testing, children’s future, power,
genre, audience, expression, communication, process, thought.

These discourses were variously applied by the teachers by being rejected, accepted, challenged,
modified, or otherwise responded to. Sometimes a teacher adopted a discourse only to adopt a
contrasting one a few moments later. Sometimes a teacher implicitly distanced themselves from
one in favor of another. Sometimes a teacher combined or mixed discourses in ways I would have previously said were conceptually impossible. I had 8 hours of interviews—67,000 words of transcript—that were filled with discursive work around writing, writers, and writing instruction. As I said, these discourses they brought into the conversations were all relevant to writing, but could also conceivably have been left out of the conversation. The teachers’ use of relevant discourse became the dominant theme in how I saw the data. Throughout this chapter, “relevant discourses” will refer to the above set and exclude, for example, a discourse of a well-balanced diet or what it means to be a good driver.

When I say “discourse,” I do not mean a set of tropes, commonplaces, and ways of talking related to a specific topic. In the context of this study, teachers’ use of any of those discourses X means talking about “writing and X” or otherwise applying their ideas about X to the specific instance or situation of writing. Also, although I refer to the discourses with a word that summarizes the main topic, that word should be read as a stand in for many statements, tensions, and ideas that cohere together. For example, a discourse of “genre” might be encompassed by the following:

There is such a thing as genre. Genres involve palpable differences between texts. These differences can involve theme, tropes, or audience, to name a few things. Some examples of genres are mysteries, science fiction, persuasive letters, literature.

Note that this is a possible summation of a discourse of genre. One might enter into the discourse for a variety of purposes, adopting, rejecting, or mixing it in many possible ways. One could, for example, enter or adopt a discourse in order to criticize it. Even a thing like genre is not uncontroversial. It is not hard to find opinions that genres in fiction are largely illusory, or overblown, or explainable as corporate marketing tools. All this complexity, just about a discourse of genre, and without going too deep! The point is that all the discourses applied by the
case teachers are complex, dynamic, and negotiated. They only take a more definite shape when they emerge in an actual application. Recall the example from Andrew's interview above. Human imperfection and writing assessment are both rich discourses, filled with their own histories, complications, and possible connections to other discourses. But we would not get very clear conclusions out of armchair considerations of their mysteries. Instead, they are better brought to light when we consider how Andrew applied them as a speaker and a thinker. Thus, throughout the data presented here, we can see how the teachers' discursive connections and applications reveal much about the ideological landscape of writing and writing instruction.

Compared with all the things there are to talk about in the world, this set of relevant discourses is already interesting in its restriction. With few exceptions (to be discussed later), all the teachers somehow applied all of the above set of relevant discourses, and with few exceptions (human imperfection in the case of Andrew is one of them), they did not use discourse outside the set.

4.3 Discourses as Answers
As described in more detail in the previous chapter, I interpreted much of the teachers' talk as statements of ideas. More specifically, their uses of relevant discourses were declarations of ideas and beliefs about writing. The writing ideologies of the case teachers took the form of moves to apply and connect discourses relevant to young writers and writing instruction. In this way, I see the teachers' individual uses of discourses as answers, but I do not mean just answers to my interview questions. In fact, as is evident from Appendix A (a sample interview) and common across all interviews, teachers responded with talk that was relevant to my questions, but they were also clearly creating their own boundaries of relevance, telling classroom stories, working through and explaining ideas, "thinking out loud," and generally talking freely and at
I imagine their individual uses of discourses as answers because much of their talk took the form of statements or implications of guiding principles relevant to their classroom practice. For example, consider this section of Lonna’s interview:

I will admit I am not good on poetry. It’s not one of my favorite things, I don’t usually hear the—and I’ll explain that to kids, I do not hear the pattern in things, I have a hard time sometimes listening to the rhythm and patterns of things following. I’ll do much better with something that’s more simple like a limerick or something. So I’ll explain to them we each have different things we like, we each have different things that we want to try. (Lonna, 14, emphasis in original)

Several relevant discourses are applied here: genre, ability, preference, difference. Lonna discusses the genre of poetry as something meaningfully different in terms of ability, because there will be some genres that people (including both teachers and, by implication, students) will not be as good at using or writing. Lonna relates this combined discourse of genre-ability to a discourse of preference, saying not only that genres are things that someone may or may not be good at, but also that genres are things that someone may or may not like. Lastly, Lonna is also framing these ideas in the concept of “difference,” which is quite a complicated nest of ideas that will be explored further later. To summarize, Lonna would probably agree with someone who said It’s important to remember that kids will have different strengths and preferences in different genres of writing. This answer-idea has clear connections to the quoted section, but notably would not answer the interview question Lonna spoke after. The question I asked was about if certain genres were more important than others for kids to learn. In her full response, I would certainly say she answered my interview question, but I am much more interested in how she (and the other teachers) provide those more general answer-ideas that reveal their writing ideologies.

Throughout analysis of the teachers’ interviews, I will discuss particular answer-ideas
embedded in their talk, as well as the relationships between answer-ideas. I represent the answer ideas in declarative sentences in bold type, as above, sometimes offset in block type. It is important to remember that these are my summations and my phrasings, attempts to capture and express premises either stated or implied in the interviews. I certainly try to represent the implications as closely as possible, but I would caution readers to avoid making conclusions about the case teachers based on minor wordings in my descriptions of answer-ideas in the talk.

As an additional note, at no time will I summarize all answer-ideas expressed by particular teachers. This would require an exhaustive presentation of interview data, which space and scope do not permit. Additionally, I do not wish to claim to have a complete account of a particular teacher's ideology. I choose instead to keep a running account of answer-ideas expressed by teachers in all the interview selections that I present, a decision better suited to seeing the teachers as revealing more about the national context of writing teachers in elementary schools than their particular schools or histories.

4.4 Jeopardy!: Finding the Teachers' Focus
Teachers were making discursive connections left and right, and all five explored common ideological ground. All this activity added up to providing what I am calling “answer-ideas” that partially reveal their writing ideologies. But what was the broader relevance of all these answers? Describing the connections between all the emergent answer-ideas was a little like playing “Jeopardy!” I knew their answers—what was their question? After I took this stance of looking for the Big Questions that the teachers were answering, I was again struck by the convergence among the teachers. All of their fancy discursive footwork was very focused on only two questions, specific but enormous:

1. **Who is a good writer, and what do we do about it?**
2. **What do people use writing for?**
All the relevant discourses on writing, writers, and writing instruction were building blocks of partial answers to one of those questions (and usually not both). Teachers’ arrangements and rearrangements of those discourses were the “answer-ideas” that partially revealed their writing ideologies.

When I charted the relevant discourses that teachers incorporated into their talk in the interview, I found that they tended to clump in specific topical groups:

- **ABILITY**: ability, motivation, preference, difference in learners, hierarchy of skills
- **DEVELOPMENT**: age, grade level, development,
- **SCHOOL**: the school, classroom instruction, assessment, testing.
- **SOCIETY**: children’s future, power
- **DISCOURSE**: genre, audience, expression, communication, process, thought

[To distinguish them from single relevant discourses and other terms, the names of topical groups will continue to be represented in ALLCAPS]

In general, these groups were tied only to one Big Question. The groups **ABILITY**, **DEVELOPMENT**, and **SCHOOL** were tied to question 1, and the groups **SOCIETY** and **DISCOURSE** were tied to question 2. (You could also imagine the other way around, with the questions being comprised of specific sub-topics, although in the process of my analysis I noticed the topical groups before formulating the Big Questions.) These topical groups help to specify the content of the two Big Questions. Recalling the section on discursive connections above, the cohesion of the topical groups is also expressed by the tendency for discursive connections to be made only within one of the Questions and not between them.

There are two possible “directions” in which to read this analysis. If those Big Questions already made sense, then you can read this research as an exploration of how complex and internally contentious those questions are. On the other hand, if the importance of the relevant discourses brought up by the teachers already made sense, then you can read this research as an exploration of a way in which all those relevant discourses can be considered all a part of one superordinate structure. Either direction starts with an idea that rings true and extends that idea...
into more complexity. Hopefully, like other good theories I have learned from, the analysis I present here is a good story about what really happens. This is not an analysis that excludes all others, and other conclusions and foci might be drawn from the rich data I collected. These Big Questions serve one way of understanding the organization of teacher writing ideologies generally, with implications for students, teachers, and writers.

In the remainder of this chapter, I showcase interview data in evidence for these two questions as a plausible summation of the primary concerns of my case teachers, and probably many other teachers of young writers. I also consider some issues related to the immediate implications of the analysis as well as scope of the questions. I end by considering some disconfirming evidence. In the next and final chapter, I consider some of the broader implications of these two questions.

4.5 Question 1: Ability, Development, Schools
The focus of Question 1 was expressed primarily in terms of the following relevant discourses:

ability, motivation, preference, difference in learners, hierarchy of skills, age, grade level, development, schools, assessment, testing

This section will give examples of the kinds of discursive combinations that form answer-ideas relevant to Question 1, “Who is a good writer and what do we do about it?” All these examples together will form a kind of conversation, or at least a giving of interconnected answers. As I progress through the examples, I will keep note of the answer-ideas that bubble up from this conversation, and by the end of the section, the set of answer-ideas that suggested Question 1 will be clear. I will not be able to describe instances of all the discourses involved in Question 1 in full detail, for obvious reasons of space, but there is room enough to demonstrate the consistency of the teachers’ discursive organization of their talk.

Because the discourse and “answers” involved in Question 1 (as well as Question 2) are
not connected hierarchically, there is no natural place to start illustrating Question 1. I choose to start by discussing how teachers expressed answers related to ability, because ability discourses are some of the most commonly invoked and commonly combined with other discourses. Here is an opening example of Lonna drawing on discourses on ability and disability:

One of the requirements is they have to do a biography on a famous American and present it. Now the one child I had who was autistic who barely spoke, okay. This is not something that’s going to be—it’s just not going to happen to the level that everybody else is, and there’s no point in him spending as much time trying to research this information and put it into his little report. So what we did with him was a lot more art and drawing and finding things that matched that went with the different things, because he really was on a very low level. So when he goes to present it, they just kind of accepted that well, his wasn’t the same as theirs. And I do have one kid who’s a bucketmouth who’d always say “Well, how come he’s not [doing what the rest of us are doing]!” And I go, “Because everybody’s different, and this is the way he’s doing it.” (Lonna, 21)

Lonna presents a compelling story, based in an inclusive classroom, where particular children need some differentiation or some alternative from the mainstream plan. Her description of the writing-based activity (the report and presentation) is linked to discourses of writing as something that is based on levels. But it seems to be a different kind of level than, for example, developmental stages, which nearly everyone will supposedly move through eventually. The level that the autistic student is at, in contrast, seems like a level from which he is not necessarily expected to leave. However, when telling me how this is explained to another student, Lonna uses a discourse of universal difference instead of a discourse of levels. These two discourses have some tension between them, but that does not prevent Lonna from employing both of them at different times, and we should not expect her to be unable to do this. Teachers were consistently dynamic in their combinations and use of discourses, and we should not read this dynamicness as duplicity. From this quoted section, we can plausibly distill the following answer-ideas related to Question 1:

Writing ability is a meaningful concept.
Writing ability can be assessed, sometimes easily.
Some writing ability is not transitional; it cannot change.
Some writing ability is transitional, it can change.
There are differences in writing ability between students.

Some form of, or responses to, these answer-ideas were broadly evident across all the teachers.

Some of these answer-ideas are echoed in this statement by Erica:

[My co-teacher and I] also have to keep in mind [that] at the beginning of second grade, most students [are not really able to—it's more effort for them to write than to—it takes a lot of even—and this is developmental—At beginning of second grade, I can’t expect them to be able to convey all their thoughts in writing, a lot of times it’s a better reflection of their thoughts and their thinking just verbally. (Erica, 18-19)

In this moment, “conveying thoughts in writing” is expressed as a binary ability. My qualifier “in this moment” is crucial. Just because Erica expressed something in terms of binary ability certainly does not even suggest that this is one of her preferred discourses. What it does necessarily show is that a discourse of ability is known to her and available for her use. In this quote, we also encounter a broadly common reference to “development,” such that to the above list of answer-ideas we can add

Development is an important consideration when judging ability or stating expectations.
Grade level is a meaningful proxy for development.
Age is a meaningful proxy for development.

Moving to another example, from Iris:

So usually in a class, I have students that are kind of around the same level, so that’s very helpful. [...] Usually their abilities are somewhat even in writing class. So either they can read very well and can apply the information that they’ve read to their writing, or they can’t. And it’s usually just a group of students who can do that, or a group of students who can’t do that. (Iris, 18)

Recall that Iris’s school focuses its mission on students with “learning differences.” Also know that Iris describes elsewhere in the interview how literacy classes at her school are comprised of students who have been assessed to be at the same “reading level” before the year starts. In Iris’s quote, we see echoes of now familiar answers-statement.

Talking about writing in terms of ability is easily related to assessment. Lonna discusses a
whole-grade low-stakes standardized assessment:

And then that helps us as teachers to see, okay, where are my kids falling down and where are they excelling, compared to their peers. (Lonna, 12)

Because Lonna is talking about a rubric with specific areas broken out, with this quote we might add

**Writing ability is sometimes specific to a certain skill**

**There are identifiable skills within writing.**

to our list. In an extended explanation of one of his persuasive assignments, Tom says:

[T]o have empathy for someone, and to have them see another person’s point of view, and to try and then address that with reasons that they shouldn’t think that way, is something that I don’t think a teacher could have done in one year, especially in the fourth grade level. So for them to have empathy, that’s much of an, almost like an upper middle school, like seventh or eighth grade sort of technique that, you know, I’d be expecting. [...] [W]e’re going to be pulling out those same pieces [from last year] again and looking at them and saying at them, now this is where you were a year ago, now is your chance to build so much more upon this. [...] [Y]ou could do this in third grade, but now you can do this even better in fourth grade. Because I know what you could do in third grade already, and so now I can really push you. I see that as really a theme throughout most of this year is when they came in for the first few weeks of first grade, it was kind of like, I know what you’re capable of already, I know all the things that you can do, so I can starting pushing you right away, I don’t need to try and figure out where you are, or what you’re capable of doing, because I know where you are already. (Tom, 6-7)

Tom employs a discourse of writing ability in a variety of ways, from talking about the difference between third and fourth grader to speaking of “capability” in general. This quote adds further weight to many of the answer-ideas seen so far, including, with his discussion of “techniques,” the notion of specific skills within writing. We can also find

**Some identifiable skills within writing are more difficult than others.**

one of the more complicated answer statements. This relates to the discourse I have referred to as “hierarchy of skills.” None of the teachers use the word hierarchy, but skills is not descriptive enough to name this discourse. The discourse is applied with considerable consistency. Here it is again, in this discussion by Andrew:

[F]irst and second grade is a lot of learning to write and spell and get the phonics
and then get beginning, middle, and end of story. And by the time they get to third grade they’ve got most of the basics there and now it’s introducing those new ideas. I think that’s one of the values of third grade as well, they don’t have to master them yet, it’s like, I think fifth grade you’re really trying to expect a lot out of them in terms of what they’re writing and the complexity of their piece, whereas in third grade you can say “Alright hey this was really complex, you did a great job with your character, next time we’re going to work on setting.”

(Andrew, 19)

The above flurry of quotes all involve teachers using discourses of ability, difference in learners, a hierarchy of skills, age, grade level, development, and assessment. Already we have seen most of the discourses that I argue are applied and connected to form answers to Question 1. We have also seen how these discourses are constantly being combined. After all, none of the above quotes involves only discourse or only one answer-statement. The data show that there are many relevant discourses that teachers can spontaneously combine and apply to discussions of their practice.

However, there are significant other instances of teachers raising a particular discourse only to challenge it. These instances further highlight the interconnection of multiple discourses that is so consistent in the interview data. Also, examples of discourses being actively contested more clearly show the teachers’ individual agency in defining their practice.

In some cases, teachers appear to be calling on major, familiar discourses on achievement, but in a way that retools them heavily. Tom combines discourses of development and rubrics, in a way that pits them against each other. In the process, he does some retooling of a discourse of development. Speaking about assessment, Tom said:

I don’t think writing should be based on a rubric. Well, I’m sitting in the school district office and saying that writing shouldn’t be graded on a rubric, like lightning will strike me dead while I’m sitting here [laugh]. I don’t think it should be graded that way. I don’t think kids writing should all look the same. I don’t think that there should be specific things that everyone must include in their writing. Kids are at different developmental stages. And I think if we’re able to focus them in on something and have them really work on that and really do a good job on that, it’ll come out much better for them, and they’ll be able to develop their skills naturally and organically than having someone say “Well, there’s no voice in this piece” or “There’s no direction in this piece” or “Your
grammar’s off in this piece.” It’s just silly to try and barrage kids with this thing and circling things and telling them this is where they are because especially for third and fourth graders, that’s meaningless to give them “you have a four on grammar, a three on this, a two on content” and—that’s stupid. There’s no reason to have that kind of thing there. I think if you just keep pushing them and pushing them and having them develop their ideas and develop their thoughts, they’re going to come out with some pretty damn good pieces of writing. (Tom, 7, emphasis mine)

I was very interested in this response because while Tom is calling on a discourse of development to argue against rubrics, I had never imagined these two discourses to be at odds with each other. Tom is clearly very certain that rubrics are not the right thing for his classroom. With so many ways of approaching teaching, his certainty doesn’t have to contradict the fact that others might not be convinced by his reasoning. So when Tom said “kids are at different developmental stages” at this point, I was a little confused. Tom’s personal stance on rubrics seems to be: Rubrics are focused only on weaknesses. I work with kids’ current strengths, not their current weaknesses. Adopting a discourse of development (which is echoed in a few other places in the interview, as well as in other conversations with Tom) might have been a move to try and borrow and benefit from the undeniability that some developmental discourses claim for themselves. In this way Tom’s argument would be: Rubrics are focused only on weaknesses. I work with kids’ current strengths, not their current weaknesses—and you shouldn’t do it any other way, because it’s developmental. Returning to the notion of answer-ideas, from Tom’s quote we can draw all of the following (some are repeats, new ones will be added to the main list so far):

- Writing ability is a meaningful concept.
- Writing ability can be assessed.
- Rubrics assess non-holistic characteristics of writing.
- Writing ability is not best assessed by rubrics.
- Some writing ability is transitional.
- Development is an important consideration.
- There are differences in writing ability between students.
- There are identifiable skills within writing.

Now consider this explanation of an assessment practice by Lonna, a small part of which has
And we kind of implemented this here and they all like it on my second grade team, because there’s five of us and we work pretty well together. Each marking period, we will come up with a topic or something for a writing, with a rubric for it, for what we’re looking for. We will have the kids in each room do the exact same writing assignment, and we work under the exact same conditions. This one is a timed one, and it’s not done with a lot of prep in advance, they just have to quickly organize it, turn it into a piece, that’s it. And then what we do as teachers is we sit down and the five of us all grade every one of them on the rubric so that all five classes are graded in the same way. And then that helps us as teachers to see, okay, where are my kids falling down and where are they excelling, compared to their peers.

And then what we do is we take, we just do it as a 4/3/2/1/0. And then what we will do is—and I told them I said it’s really important that the ones we pick never go back to the same room as the child who wrote it. So the teacher across the hall, I may take a 4, a 3, a 2, a 1, and a 0 from her, or from some of the other teachers. And she’ll take one from me. Then we take those back to the room and we have, we can project them up on the wall, so we use a little thing to project them up on the wall. And we have the kids look at the rubric—they’re seven but they do this very well—look at the rubric, go over it, and decide how they would count this. Did this person stay on the topic? Did they have a beginning, a middle, and an end? Whatever our little criteria is for that time. So the kids do this. And they’ll go “Ah, okay, we see where this one got a 4 or a 3 or a 2 or a 1 or a 0.” Or actually, as I do it with them, because I had a teacher in New Jersey did this, and it works better with children. “A home run, third base, second base, first base, or you struck out.”

So they get to see what somebody else did. And then it’s kinda going and you go “Hmm… Did any of you think of that? Next time when you write, you think you might want to try something like that? Would you like to try dialogue? Would you like to try questions? You know, think about it, because you might want to do something like that yourself.” And that gets the idea and they see that it’s their own peers who were doing this because what I found is [this:] Sometimes you get the poor kid who’s left in the dirt, only once he has an example of somebody who’s his own age… he bloody well—he’s going “Yeah, you’re telling me to put in more detail, what the heck do you mean by that?” You know? Or, “Stay on topic. What do you mean?” Then, “Okay, I see.” Or when they see one that’s a home run and they go “Okay so we start off talking about this and we veered off to what we had for lunch, then they get to “Okay, so I see what you mean.” So they pretty quickly get the understanding, and they really enjoy that, especially because it’s non-threatening because they know it’s not anybody that’s in our room. It’s just an unknown person from another room.

(Lonna, 12-13)

Some things are very evident about the two stances on rubrics. First, Lonna and Tom clearly disagree about the value of rubrics. Second, it does not appear that they are talking about

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5 Like the difference between green house and greenhouse, it is clear from the audio that Lonna is saying “kid who is in an unfortunate spot,” not “kid who is economically disadvantaged.”

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drastically different kinds of rubrics. Lonna mentions “staying on topic,” “beginning middle end” as possible items on the rubric, and Tom mentions “direction,” “voice,” and “grammar.” These seem to me to be on about the same order of complexity, though it is also worth remembering that Lonna is talking about working with second graders and Tom is talking about working with third and fourth graders. Third, and most counterintuitively, if we return again to an analysis of answer-ideas, it does not appear that the two quotes indicate any disagreement or discrepancy between those implied by Tom’s quote and those implied by Lonna’s quote. That is pretty strange! How could two people agree on so much and still disagree? I do not think that this strange divergence should cause us to discard the concept of applying disparate discourses as partial answers to a single question. Instead, the divergence of ultimate opinion only strengthens the notion of these discourses as answers to Question 1. Not only did Lonna and Tom share invoked discourses in common, they shared all their invoked discourses in common—they did not use any discourse that the other did not use. Though they diverged in their conclusion on rubrics, they converged in the foundations of this conclusion. This fits with the larger shape of the data. Though we could imagine many possibilities for key talking points in a person’s description of their writing ideology, the five case teachers had their key talking points (their relevant discourses) almost completely in common. In instances of disagreement, this common foundation might actually be broadly unusual. Think of all the public debates, mostly political, where opposing sides have completely different frames to begin with, and little reconciliation is possible as long as their premises and perspectives are so divergent (e.g., Lakoff, 2004). A discussion about rubrics between Tom and Lonna might have the potential to be rather productive and professionally relevant, given their considerable common ground. This broader implication of patterns in the data is considered in more detail in the next chapter.
Ability is a popular topic for contention. Another kind of discourse mixing is present when, over several instances, Erica presents and implicitly refers to a discourse of ability and seamlessly challenges it with other of the relevant discourses. Erica does this quite extensively in reference to discourses of ability. Throughout our conversation, she appeared to subtly challenge the notion that writing is an ability, something that you can definitively assess as in “this student is this good at writing, this student is that good at writing.” There is a fairly settled issue in educational theory of whether competency/ability in a certain domain is “fixed” or “incremental” (Dweck, 2000). Scholarly consensus is generally for the latter, that aptitude is somewhat of a dangerous instructional frame, and students could always achieve at higher than current levels. The opposite belief in a static ability or aptitude has generally been criticized and critics argue it leads to negative outcomes for students (Dweck, 2000). As a reminder, the relevant answer-ideas described so far in this chapter are:

- Writing ability is a meaningful concept.
- Writing ability can be assessed, sometimes easily.
- Some writing ability is not transitional, it cannot change.
- Some writing ability is transitional, it can change.
- There are differences in writing ability between students.
- Development is an important consideration when judged ability or stating expectations.
- Writing ability is sometimes specific to a certain skill.

The mix of possible transitional and non-transitional ability indicates that it is possible for some teachers to fall somewhere in between Dweck’s stated binary of “fixed” or “incremental” models. However, Erica does not appear to be distancing herself from a discourse of ability as static. Instead, she appears to distance herself from an idea of ability at all. This distancing recurs throughout her interview, sometimes in small ways such as:

“A lot of my students are technically performing under grade level standards, they’re below grade level average standards, whatever you want to call them. So my co-teacher and I, we had to be really creative in how we taught the lessons, and also the way we differentiated.” (Erica, 5, emphasis mine).

The use of hedging phrases (highlighted) implies some measure of skepticism about the validity...
of grade level standards, despite the fact that grade level standards are major frames on students that schools use, so this seems to indicate a high degree of active dissatisfaction with a particular frame on writing instruction.

In another example of distancing, we were talking about when and how spelling and other conventions fit into the picture of teaching writing as a whole, and Erica said:

But I guess some students are really ready to work— it really depends on the student, but some students are really ready to work on their spelling, because they’re able to get all their thoughts out fluidly, they can put their thoughts to pencil on paper. (Erica, 11)

In this example she uses the concept of “readiness” along with and in places where others might have said “ability.” This could be a mixing of discourses, or it could be intermittent substitution. In either case, it certainly helps to illustrate how teachers combine relevant discourses, as well as the variety that they are choosing from.

I expected teachers might differ in how they talked about differences in student writing achievement. Erica spoke to this point at length, worth quoting in its entirety. When I asked her about this, she answered with frames of readiness, motivation, and long-term student growth. In the first section, her description of variation among her students noticeably lacked use of the concept of ability, or even mention of the concept of ability. At the same time, she does not use a discourse of “Difference” with a capital D, the frame sometimes applied to talk about students described with “learning differences” or “learning disabilities.” When I asked this question of all the teachers, I tried to provide as non-committal a frame as possible and let the current interview inform the phrasing of this question. I purposefully do not use the word ability in the question, instead saying “successful” and “interested.” Notice, however, that Erica does not adopt either of the terms I used in the question. Her focus, again, is on readiness, motivation, and preference. Instances of these other frames are highlighted in the quote. Also notice how often Erica invokes
a frame of long-term student development.

Mark: And there’s this question I’m interested in hearing, so you’ve talked a little bit about the variation, especially at the beginning of the year, in terms of their experiences with writing and I’m sure that doesn’t necessarily go away in terms of how successful they are in their writing or how interested they are in their writing, but I’d like to hear more about how you respond to those differences?

Erica: I think it depends on the students. So some students come in really ready to write and read, and other students they’re not as engaged or motivated to do so. I guess I’ll just give a few examples. For example, some students when they come in, they don’t want to write, so they’re not motivated to write. So you kind of have to start with where they are, and you might have lessons or talk to them in small groups about why writing is so important, or how authors use it in our daily lives, and you just give them—it’s almost like a self-esteem boost, because a lot of students come in with a self-concept of not being a writer, and as a community classroom thing you really have to emphasize and show how everyone is a writer, because I think it’s really about your identity, or what you have to contribute from your life in your writing to writing.

So some students already know that I think [that], but other students I don’t think they realize because sometimes they might get caught up in their spelling so they produce one sentence every 30 minutes because they’re trying to spell every word correctly and I personally don’t think that’s the point of writing. So for some students who are not motivated to write, you kind of almost have to give them a self-esteem boost and increase their motivation for writing and then you might go into more, sometimes some students who really don’t know what to write, you kind of just want to write whatever, like anything goes, to just kind of show them that they are a writer and have them be more motivated. And then from there you kind of show them what the genres are. So I think it depends on the students. And other students who—and it’s like really simple things, some students in my students have IEPs, they have—they go to occupational therapy because their muscle tone isn’t as developed in their hands, so the physical task of writing is really hard for them so therefore they don’t write, because moving your hand across the paper is physically tasking. So with those students, it’s simple things like, some students might use a thin tipped black marker opposed to a pen or a pencil, because it has a thicker tip so it’s easier for them to write, so really simple things like that.

To students who are ready to really develop their writing more, if they already come in, they already wrote all of these stories over the summer that they want to show you, so for those students you can—you always—I guess I still think about it as your proximal zone of development [sic], depending on what your next, what the student’s next step is. So for some students who are really motivated to write, you don’t want them to be bored either, so you would have them be more independent and they could look at other pieces of model writing and try to model theirs off of theirs, or like have them think more about adding in more details, or thinking about what the big idea of their story is. So I think there are always ways to kind of push students from where they are. I don’t know if that answers the question.
Mark: Yeah, I think—

Erica: So I guess it’s just my mindset that students will all be at different places, but in the end it’s important for them to all develop their voice as a writer. So, whatever it takes.

(Erica, 20, paragraph breaks are only meant to be a reading aid)

The above quote clearly shows Erica’s use of discourses of motivation, readiness, and development to describe student work, and she does not invoke any notion of ability. The importance of “push[ing] students from where they are” to the “next step” is strongly evident throughout the excerpt. These metaphors (as in Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) of location and progression are found in other of Erica’s comments as well as those of some of the other teachers. If this were not enough, though, what happened next in the conversation strongly suggests that Erica is using discourses of motivation and progression as explicit alternatives to discourses of ability. Immediately after the above section, I asked Erica if she thought that her perspective on variation in student success with writing was linked to the age of her students, when they are early in the process of learning writing.

Mark: I’m just finding myself wondering about teachers who work with slightly older students, and I’m just wondering if they would tend to view differences in writing skills differently than you because at the age that you’re working with, a lot of kids are just starting out. So it goes back to how you were saying you kind of take for granted that they’re at different places with writing.

Erica: Mhmm

Mark: And so I just thought it was just interesting, when I asked about differences in how successful they were, you focused mostly on their self-concept and almost self-esteem about whether or not they felt they could be a writer and things like that.

Erica: Alright, okay, yeah I see what you’re saying. Yeah, well I guess, I don’t know if this is related to what you’re saying, but maybe older students who are kind of labeled or you know seen as unsuccessful writers, I think a lot of that is based on their past experiences in writing, in school and in writing. So—because maybe they had past experience where every time they wrote a word, the teacher crossed it out and then wrote the correct spelling. And then obviously you wouldn’t identify a writerly identity, obviously, because it’s just about getting the right word on the paper.
In this excerpt, Erica uses my word "[un]successful," but couches it in a hypothetical situation of a older student "labeled as unsuccessful" in a different classroom. This strongly suggests that Erica is distancing herself and her ideas from ability-centered ways of evaluating and assessing students. A similar focus on identifying student needs rather than rating students’ achievement is evident elsewhere as well:

But my co-teacher and I, we have conversations with students that it’s about how much you’ve progressed and learned, not about like what the number is on your report card, so actually most of our students understand now. (Erica, 25)

None of this is to say that Erica never uses a discourse of ability. In fact, I already quoted a short section where she did use that discourse. Erica’s many moves to distance herself and her practice from discourses of ability do suggest that ability is not her preferred frame for understanding student needs or for planning instruction. But more broadly, these moves also speak to the complexity of teachers’ discursive choices and the high stakes at which these choices are made. Erica’s moves also highlight the potential or even tendency for teachers to be careful, selective, or otherwise deliberate about their discursive choices and combinations.

Answer-ideas that can be drawn from Erica’s discussion include:

Motivation to write will differ among students.
Motivation to write is an important consideration when assessing students’ needs.
Motivation to write should not be mistaken for ability to write.
Motivation can change.

Iris engaged in some of the same processes of implicit comparison between discourses of ability and alternative discourses for framing student writers. In Iris’s case, the comparisons and occasional acts of distancing were not as frequent or as clear as Erica’s, but when they occur we can see hints of the same tensions that Erica’s words reflect.

Mark: Would you say that you have a specific philosophy of teaching writing, or some core ideas, and if so what are they?

Iris: I do. Some of my core ideas is to help children not necessarily love to write,
but not to be afraid to write. And to understand it as a vehicle of
communication—to some extent it’s their power if something happens in their
life. And to help them understand that this is something that they’ll have to use
later on to describe probably themselves, who they are, or just express
themselves, or relieve some tensions or some feelings that aren’t just always
comfortable.

Mark: And is there anything else? I mean that’s a big one already, but—

Iris: I’m sure there’s more but that’s just the main one.

Mark: Yeah it’s certainly an expansive idea, a very expansive goal. I’m
wondering do you find that idea of showing students that it’s something they can
use to express themselves and to have power and to relieve tensions and all those
things, do you find that they don’t come in thinking that writing can do all those
things for them?

Iris: Often the students that I have have a real fear of writing, or they have a very
strong dislike for writing, whether it’s actually physically writing or whether it’s
trying to figure out what ideas to put on paper. So that’s often the population I
have. So I have to begin by trying to make writing something that’s not as
intimidating.

Mark: Right.

Iris: And so that’s where I get into the whole “this is your vehicle.” I mean it’s
not a vehicle that you have to love, but it is a vehicle that you should at least—
you don’t have to master it—but you do have to have some competency in it.

Through and across this excerpt, a discourse of preference is Iris’s primary frame for explaining
her mission of teaching writing. This discourse of preference is not clearly in conflict with
discourses of ability, though it is being applied in a place where one could imagine ability being
used instead. There is a striking note of hybridity in the last turn by Iris, where she says in
essence: *Students don’t have to love writing and they don’t have to be great at it but they do have
to be competent at it.* The connections between *loving writing, competency in writing,* and
*mastering writing* are complex, and they represent a combination of discourses that is not easy to
reduce. Using the discourses of preference and ability in such overlapping ways indicates that for
Iris they are both at issue in the classroom and have purview over the same situations. If we view
Iris’ talk through her discursive choices, we are reminded that Iris’s irreducible hybridity reflects

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certain organizing bounds on the relevant discourses involved in writing ideology. The
discourses available to and employed by her share much in common with the other teachers, as
expected. As in other cases, looking for the answer-ideas structuring the talk can be helpful. One
clear answer-idea that could be drawn from Iris's talk here is: **Writing ability does not
necessarily entail liking writing.** Another answer-idea, more difficult to phrase precisely, is:
**There is a minimum acceptable standard of competency in writing that students should be
able to meet.**

This ends the review of teacher talk relevant to Question 1. Readers may note that some of the
discourses that I connected to Question 1, difference between students, testing, and school, have
not been much discussed so far. The discourses of difference between students and testing are
more minor members of the set and their limited presence is evident enough from the examples I
have presented.

The discourse of school, also not yet mentioned specifically, is a different story. This
discourse is actually a kind of backbone to this question. While I have not included any direct
mention of school in my phrasings of the answer-ideas, the idea of school is embedded in every
mention of "students," and any answer-idea that evaluates a practice (such as the rubric answer-
ideas) necessarily evaluates based in an idea of good schooling or teaching. The discourse of
school is therefore distributed throughout the answer-ideas. In a way, it represents the "what do
we do" in "Who is a good writer and what do we do about it?"

The selections presented here are of course only a portion of the teachers’ talk that
seemed structured by Question 1. Here is a review of the answer-ideas present in the talk quoted
in this section:

**Writing ability is a meaningful concept.**
There are differences in writing ability between students. Writing ability can be assessed, sometimes easily. Some writing ability is transitional, it can change. Some writing ability is not transitional, it cannot change.

Motivation to write will differ among students. Motivation to write is an important consideration when assessing students’ needs. Motivation to write should not be mistaken for ability to write. Motivation can change.

Development is an important consideration when judged ability or stating expectations. Grade level is a meaningful proxy for development. Age is a meaningful proxy for development.

Writing ability is sometimes specific to a certain skill. Some identifiable skills within writing are more difficult than others. There are identifiable skills within writing.

Rubrics assess non-holistic characteristics of writing. Writing quality is not best assessed by rubrics. Writing quality can be usefully assessed by rubrics.

A review of the analytical process, relevant to both Questions, is provided in the section 4.7, after the section that presents teacher talk relevant to Question 2.

4.6 Question 2: Discourse and Society
Question 2 is composed primarily of the following relevant discourses:

- children's futures, power, genre, audience, expression, communication, process, thought

When the case teachers entered these discourses, they frequently connected them, but overwhelming usually to each other, and not to the discourses relevant to Question 1. One of the most immediate implications of this is that when raising answer-ideas to Question 2, the case teachers usually did not speak about schools, classrooms, assessment, etc. They certainly seem able to apply answer-ideas relevant to Question 2 to classroom matters, and the trend is not absolute. But the shift from talking about schools to not talking about schools is notable, and in the theory and explanation of the Big Questions I am proposing, this is well-accounted for by the two separate questions and by the different components in each. Recall that the SCHOOL group

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of discourses is in Question 1 and not Question 2.

To open this section, I turn to a rich, extended section of Andrew’s interview. In it, he covers many of the major elements of Question 2: futures, genres, and audience. This section is also a good example of the separation between questions discussed above. It is talk that mentions school, but in a peripheral way. The answer-ideas that emerge from this section do not deal with it very directly; none of them involves “Classrooms should...” or “Good assessment is...”

Andrew is responding to a question about the relative importance of different genres:

Mark: So it seems like some of the writing you’re talking about now doing is like informational or argumentative. In terms of all the different genres of writing, are there some that you think are definitely more important than others, or do they all have their own value? What do you think about that?

Andrew: It’s one thing that I’ve been talking to a few people about lately. I think they all need to be taught, and it upsets me—my sisters a junior going into her senior year so she’s been taking the AP classes and studying for the AP exams, and it was interesting I’ve been talking to her about what their class is like, what kinds of books they’re reading, and things like that. And she reads almost exclusively fiction or narrative pieces. She writes almost exclusively persuasive pieces. And that to me makes no sense—I don’t understand how kids are supposed to be good at a certain type of writing if they’ve never read it, or why once you get to tenth grade you almost stop writing fiction in school. I think the thing that I enjoy most about still doing third grade is that you can balance that, that kids still do creative writing.

Andrew speaks to issues of genre as he contrasts the work that his sister’s is doing in school. In doing so he identifies some kinds of writing that he considers different genres. Then we see some of how Andrew relates different genres to the futures (including college admissions essays) that
he imagines for his students. Then Andrew implicitly critiques a strict understanding of genre when he argues that sometimes creatively breaking conventions can be the best way to make an impression on one’s audience and to write most effectively.

The following answer-ideas, all relevant to Question 2, can be seen in Andrew’s explanations:

Genres exist. Some examples are fiction, narrative, creative, and persuasive.
Genres have certain conventions.
Conventions of genres can sometimes be ignored in order to improve expression and to impress audiences.
One of the things that writing is important for is college admission essays.
Writing involves making an impression on the audience.
Kids should not be restricted from particular genres.

As I have stressed now many times, my findings relate to how the case teachers explain their ideas, and I do not claim to fully understand what their ideas are “in general.” So in my analysis of the above quote, I do not claim that Andrew’s pure ideas (an illusory notion anyway) of genre, future, and audience are always linked. Rather, in this section of the interview, he uses a combination of all three to express his understanding of each.

In the following section from Iris, some of Andrew’s above answer-ideas are echoed and others are extended:

Mark: [How important is writing to learn about?]

Iris: Oh, I think it’s important for students to advance in their academics, in their learning. Personally I think it’s more important that students understand that writing is their vehicle to express themselves when they need to, speak up for themselves. When they need to. To me writing doesn’t need to be a thing that you like, but it needs to be something that you really realize that you need to do probably eventually. And when you need to do it, you understand how to do it in the way that the society deems to be appropriate and intelligent. So when I tell the kids you know, when we do a project, I tell the kids whether it’s a writing project that other people need to see, or a writing project that is just for themselves. Because sometimes you want to write just to write, and that’s totally fine, and I would love it if kids would learn how to love to write, but everyone is not the same. And so if you love to write, I can work with you and help you to continue to write in a certain type of way that you can continue to express yourself. But if you don’t like to write, I can still, at least I feel like I can still work with you and let you know some of the things you need to include into your writing, so that when you have to write, when you have to fill out an application, when you have to write an essay for a college application, when you have to write to make a list of your grievances for a particular job or for a particular situation that’s happening to you, you know exactly how to do it.

Mark: Okay.
Iris: So I really want my students to understand that writing is one of their forms of power, one of their ways of exercising their forms of power. And it’s coming from a year when this girl was experiencing a racial situation with another student, and at the very end of the year, she wrote a letter to adults stating exactly how she felt. And it seriously was just a paragraph of just her thoughts, with no periods or anything like that. And I actually had to have her just sit down and just write, and that’s what she came up with, just a paragraph with a whole bunch of periods. And it’s fine, because it’s for her. And then she wanted to send it to someone else, and I said, “okay, now that’s something a little bit different,” and so she had to go back and revise and change and she came up with a beautiful letter that I am very proud of. And if you remind me—I will forget—if you remind me, I think I still have a copy of that letter. I think I’m going to keep it in my teacher scrap book.

Mark: Wow, that sounds like just a wonderful story.

Iris: I absolutely love it. And I wish I had the first version and I think I’m going to try and make sure that I get it before [location information redacted]. But yeah, to understand that there are different modes of writing, writing can be for yourself, but when writing is for other people, or when we share it with other people, it may need to look differently, and you may need to know some conventions. Yeah. And I just want them to know that the writing can be a way for them to express how they feel, which is a very powerful thing.

Here, Iris seems to employ the same answer-ideas relevant to genres, futures, and standards/genres. Like Andrew, one of her answer-ideas involves the existence of different standards, genres, or “modes,” and also like Andrew she connects this discourse to a discourse of writing futures, and again college applications. Out of all the teachers, Iris applied a discourse of power to her explanations of writing practices the most. For her, this discourse is often linked to a discourse of audience, as above. From Iris we can see echoed some of Andrew’s answer-ideas and add the following:

Writing can be used to express your thoughts and feelings for yourself.
Writing can be used to express your thoughts and feelings for an audience.
Writing can be used as an expression of power, to speak up.
One of the things writing might be important for is serious letters of complaint.
Conventions of genres can sometimes be ignored in order to concentrate on writing for yourself.

That final answer-idea from Iris is interesting in that it precisely mirrors Andrew’s answer-idea about ignoring conventions, which he mentioned in his talk as being relevant more to audiences than self. Iris and Andrew might think of writing for oneself and writing for an audiences as more or less important than the other, and it is unclear if they agree on this issue. In the above selections, though, they do imply that they see certain modes as more natural than others.
The connections between audience, expression, future, and genre are common. The links between these form much of the basis for the coherence of answer-ideas to Question 2. In the following section from Erica, there is a hint of why this might be so:

**Erica:** Yeah, I guess when I say perspective it’s almost related to—it almost directly correlates to your audience you’re writing for, if that makes sense. So I guess if you’re writing—back again to that example—if you’re writing an email to your principal, you’re writing from the perspective of a teacher, so you want to convey your thoughts as a teacher, or in a very professional way. So if you’re in a writing, if your audience is a student, if I’m writing a letter to my student for some reason, my perspective would be as like an older, I guess as a teacher too, but your perspective would be more geared to—you would write it in a way where your audience understands or I guess if you’re writing for a professor in college, your perspective would be more as an academic, I guess. I just think that depending on your persp—like your role, like your perspective, and your audience, the way you write it might look different. (Erica, 13)

This selection from Erica implies that, perhaps, any imagination of audience is necessarily an imagination of a future context in which writers might act. In this way, any use of a discourse of audience would have a connection to a discourse of children’s futures. In addition to answer-ideas seen in the other sections, we can add:

The audience of writing affects the perspective and identity taken by the author.

In addition to further illuminating teachers’ connections between expression, futures, and genres, Erica’s comments also illustrate the separation between answer-ideas relevant to Question 2 and answer-ideas relevant to schools and Question 1. In her discussion of perspective and audience, she spoke about a general “you,” rather than specifically focusing on her classroom or her students.

Some of the teachers, such as Lonna, employed the discourses of audience and communication (which presupposes an audience) to their essential description of writing:

**Lonna:** Let’s see, how would I describe writing to an alien from another planet? [Lonna is reading from the protocol I provided her with] I think—last night I was thinking of something—I describe there’s like a couple levels of experience. One is, you’re just there. You see it, you know it. Another is verbal communication where you can talk and interact, and people can give you questions. And the third one down, I guess the third best way for one of the ways to describe it, would be written communication. Because it’s someone giving you information, but unless it is on a blog or in a letter that they’re going to answer back to you (which is going to take a while), it’s not as interactive as what the other forms of communication are. It’s a good way to list information, it’s a good way to store it, but it’s not as interactive as the other ways. (Lonna, 9).

Lonna is giving a general description or definition to writing, and she immediately invokes Lewis 90.
discourses of communication and audience. Her particular use of these frames is suggestive of the kind of writing-speech divide criticized by Street (1993), further described in chapter 2. From this quoted section we can see the answer-idea:

**Writing is one-way communication to an audience.**

Lonna echoes these points later as well:

**Mark:** Okay, and you can see the next question, something that you’ve talked about a little before. Just in general if you could describe what some characteristics of good writing are?

**Lonna:** Well, good writing to me, it has to get across the whole idea that the writer was trying to tell you. So that’s—when I’m working with the kids, I’m saying to them, just picture, I’m just—sometimes I’ll say to them—"I came down from Mars" or "I came from another classroom." What do you want me to know? What are you trying to tell me? For example, one of the writings that we did that was an information based piece was—I work part-time at Barnes and Noble, so I don’t know if you’ve ever heard of the book *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*?

**Mark:** I think I’ve seen it, I don’t think I’ve read it though.

**Lonna:** Okay, well anyway, we had from Barnes and Noble, we had a giant cutout of Jeff, the wimpy kid. Now we had to write to tell Jeff, if he was going to be a citizen in our room, what the class rules were, how he had to behave, and everything that he had to do. So then when they would come up and I would look at them and I would say, "Okay,"—and I have Jeff right next to me—"Okay, is he going to understand this, is this going to make sense? When you say ‘snacktime,’ what do you mean by snacktime? Did you tell him what he can eat? Did you tell him he has to wash his hands first?” So I try to get across to them that the idea of good writing is some sort of a communication of the information that you want to convey. Be it directions, be it humor, be it information. (Lonna, 15)

Here again Lonna is discussing communicative, audience-oriented aspects of writing. She is using a classroom example of her answer-ideas on communication and audience are put into practice, but see how when she brings up the essential “idea of good writing,” she has zoomed out from her classroom. It is an idea that she thinks is important for students to know and believe, but it is also an idea that seems to exist (or can exist) separately from strictly classroom concerns.

Tom expresses connections similar to Lonna and aligned with the general pattern of Question 2. In the following section, we discussed a specific persuasive writing project of Tom’s, for which he provided part of the rationale:

**Mark:** Okay, great, and so, zooming out a little bit, and this is something we’ve talked about before, but just to get it down, Why do you think kids should be learning about persuasive writing in the
first place?

Tom: I think it’s a really important technique, just for them to have in life. It’s like a certain kind of life skills technique. And, actually we went through a lot of the things that you and [---] had talked about, and how you were looking at ideas of persuasion, just that you saw in the classroom before have really stood out for me. Because I think the kids as you mentioned before are using persuasion all the time. I mean, they’re always persuading someone to do something whether it’s their parents at the store, when they want to get some candy or whether it’s another adult on the street or the teacher [inaudible] at recess. For them to be able to have this sort of technique, and just say, well, you should do this because this is the way I think it is, but for them to really think out their thoughts and to clearly communicate them to someone is certainly a life skill. And I think it will help them not only in their writing, but also in their interactions with other students and other adults and other people in trying to persuade them. And, you know, have people think about their ways of thinking and doing and if anything it will give them more power to really take charge of how they think and how they feel. That way people can listen to them and listen to them informatively, rather than just thinking, well, you’re just saying this because this is what you want, but if they can have arguments and back up their reasoning and evidence and stuff, that gives them a lot more power and liaison than just having them say something because they want it.

Tom, like the other teachers, is clearly connecting discourses of communication and audiences.

Even though he is speaking specifically about persuasive writing, his thinking about genres and the connections he draws between genres and audience probably also mirror the other teachers. Like Iris, he also discusses the “power” of writing. Also, Tom connects discourses of thought into his description, and from this connection we can see another answer-idea:

**Clear writing is related to clear thinking.**

Tom is not the only teacher to invoke a discourse of thought in their discussion of writing. Also, in chapter 2, I discussed public ideologies of writing that make the same connection. It is not entirely clear how discourses of thought work with the other discourses. A discourse of thought is not often mentioned by the teachers. And the variety and implications of ideologies around thought itself are far beyond the scope of this study, as well as the scope of my conversations with teachers. However, a section from Andrew sheds more light on how discourses of thought are connected to other answer-ideas in Question 2.

Mark: [...] Another thing I want to ask you has to do a lot with what writing is or feels like in the moment. This is kind of a weird question, but if you could imagine that you were describing writing to someone who had never heard of it, or an alien from another planet, or whatever, how would you do that, how would you describe writing?

Andrew: I guess just explaining the idea of getting words in sort of a perfect order. And I guess it is that—it’s trying to get what’s in your brain on paper. And it’s sort of the idea of that you have all these ideas stuck
up here in your head, and you want to get them down there. But it's also, the way things run through your mind isn't how you want other people to read them. So I guess it's sort of like a constant negotiation between what my brain's saying, what the words on the page are saying, and what you're supposed to be reading as the reader of my work. So it's sort of taking this idea and making it something that someone else understands. So I guess it comes back to your persuasive writing that my class did at the end of the year, we were talking about "It's not about my ideas so much. It is, but it's about how to get them across to someone else, and that may mean you need to change your words from what you would say." So for example, right now our conversation is going to sound a lot different from if you had asked me that question and I was trying to write it out. (Andrew, 8-9)

In this section we can see familiar answer-ideas connecting communication and audience. We also see another use of a discourse of thought, here represented by "the brain" and "all these ideas stuck up here in your head." Here Andrew seems to also employ the answer-idea of writing as one-way communication, and he connects this with a particular answer-idea connecting thought and expression, roughly:

Spoken or written expression is a reflection of thought and intention, and the expression might or might not be unclear.

This answer-idea might be shared and applied by Tom in his most recent quoted section.

Connections between thought and language are relevant in a number of debates and issues in the tradition of linguistics, as well as in the public arena. Among the teachers, Andrew and Tom most directly state the connections between thought and expression, but it is sometimes weakly or quickly implied by the others. For example, from Erica:

Mark: We'll circle back to some of these aspects of your classroom and the stuff you said so far already, but thinking about writing in general, I'd love to hear you talk about how you use writing in your own life and what kind of place it has for you.

Erica: Um, that's a very deep question. It's interesting, because I guess just coming out of Swarthmore since I graduated in 2008, the past four years of College, writing was mostly used to write papers, to write academically, to really hash out my thoughts, to make a point, write a thesis, go back and revise. Read books, write about the books, in a very academic way, so during college that's the only real, the most relevant way I used writing in my life. But then you can think about how you use writing to write emails in this day and age and that I always—that's really important to me. (Erica, 11, emphasis mine)

Here Erica speaks about writing as, among other things, a way to better understand and express her own thinking. I suspect that a connection to thinking would make some sense to all the teachers, though it is one of the more infrequent and subdued discourses involved in their explanations of writing. This is partially because the connection between clear thinking and clear

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writing is common in non-school contexts as well. Additionally, in connections between writing and the clarity that its supposed one-way nature or permanence requires, I am reminded of the work of Great Divide theories of writing and literacy (e.g., Goody, 1977, Ong, 1982), which were described in chapter 2.

This ends the review of teacher talk relevant to Question 2. Like those presented for Question 1, these selections are only a portion of the teachers’ talk that seemed structured by Question 2.

Here is a review of the answer-ideas present in the talk quoted in this section:

- Genres exist. Some examples are fiction, narrative, creative, and persuasive.
- Genres have certain conventions.
- Conventions of genres can sometimes be ignored in order to improve expression and to impress audiences.
- Conventions of genres can sometimes be ignored in order to concentrate on writing for yourself.
- Kids should not be restricted from particular genres.

- Writing can be used to express your thoughts and feelings for yourself.
- Writing can be used to express your thoughts and feelings for an audience.
- Writing can be used as an expression of power, to speak up.
- One of the things that writing might be important for is college admission essays.
- One of the things writing might be important for is serious letters of complaint.

- Writing involves making an impression on the audience.
- The audience of writing affects the perspective and identity taken by the author.
- Writing is one-way communication to an audience.

- Clear writing is related to clear thinking.
- Spoken or written expression is a reflection of thought and intention, and the expression might or might not be unclear.

A review of the analytical process, relevant to both Questions, is provided in the next section.

4.7 Review of The Big Questions
The excerpts of teacher talk presented in section 4.5 and 4.6 illustrate the use of particular relevant discourses in the interviews. These discourses were major tools used by the teachers, in
overlapping instances, to explain aspects of their approach to writing instruction. The discourses were essential to the content of the interview, and their connections and applications constitute the answer-ideas that reflect teachers' writing ideologies to the greatest (but still partial) extent.

The summaries of answer-ideas that end sections 4.5 and 4.6 are somewhat of a window to an earlier stage of my analytical process. The lists are very similar to notes I had on the teachers interviews late in analysis but before I formulated the Big Questions, when I was using only the topical groups and the relevant discourses to categorize and organize content of the interviews. In the process of analyzing the interviews, I first noticed the common set of discourses employed by all the teachers (the relevant discourses). As I charted how these discourses were specifically used (applied and connected), declarative but partial statements of writing ideology (answer-ideas) emerged. At the time, I recognized the influence of the relevant discourses in the structure of the teachers' talk and in the creation of answer-ideas, but an explanation was also needed for the patterns governing which discourses were connected to each other and which were not. The Big Questions that I have proposed serve as a plausible candidate for an explanation of these organizing bounds. The Big Questions describe the relationships between answer-ideas, as well as the overriding concerns to which all the answer-ideas provide a partial response.

There is a definite note of reverseness to these findings. I conducted an interview study, but ultimately my interview questions did not guide the presentation or analysis of the data that the interviews gathered. Instead, the interviews were a springboard for teachers to talk richly and deeply about their practice, and I presented what I believe to be the teachers' central questions. These Big Questions represent the connections between individual teachers of writing and large-scale ideologies of writing.

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4.8 The Scope of the Questions
I have previously stated the tentativeness of my analysis. The nature of my data and my research questions leaves open the possibility of other conclusions. Nevertheless, the two Big Questions explain a lot about the shape and patterns of the data. To further illustrate the goodness of fit exhibited by the Big Questions, this section considers issues of the Questions’ scope.
Considering the intersections and separations of the Questions lets us see how they maintain validity under scrutiny. First, the questions are typically distinct, which entails usefulness as explanations and mappings of teachers’ concerns. Second, that very separation seems to reflect particular dominant ideologies relevant to writing.

4.8.1 The (non-)intersection of the questions
Do the questions overlap? Up until now, I have discussed questions as if they do not. Non-overlap means that any of the partial answer-ideas embedded in the teachers’ discussion is only relevant to one of the questions. We can see that this is certainly true for some answer statements, such as: Development is an important consideration when assessing writing ability. This statement is not an answer to “What do people use writing for?” Likewise, Writing allows clear expression is not an answer to “Who is a good writer?” This is common of many of the answer-ideas embedded in the teacher’s interviews. It is safe to say that at least for much of the ground covered in the interviews, the two Big Questions do not overlap.

But is this true for all the topics the teachers covered? Consider: Some people are better at certain genres. Most of the other instances of a discourse of genre have been associated with Question 2. But this combination clearly involves a discourse of ability and a discourse of genre. Does this answer both questions? The reference to ability is clear, so if any mention of genre

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qualifies as a partial answer to Question 2, then this answer might represent an answer to both questions. However, while genre is involved, the answer-statement at issue here is far more relevant to ability and therefore to Question 1. Discursive connections like the above are the closest approach to something that hybridizes the two Big Questions. Whether we consider this a weak example of hybridization or a non-example, it seems that there is little overlap between the two questions.

4.8.2 The separation of the questions
A tendency toward separation between the questions tentatively raises many questions. Does the questions’ separation mean that the case teachers did not tend to consider both at the same time? Does the questions separation imply that teachers do not generally see the issues within as connected? We have seen just how complicated each question is—perhaps it would be too taxing to consider all these issues at all times. Or perhaps they considered both questions at once at some point prior, came to relevant conclusions, and let them be separate again, just in time to get interviewed.

There are other implications of the separation which speak more to the broad sociocultural context of the teachers. Recalling the topical groups, two very interesting pairs are separated by the two questions. SCHOOL and DISCOURSE, ABILITY and SOCIETY. These pairs of topics are separated in the explanations of the case teachers. However, despite the silence here, combinations of discourses on these topics are hegemonic in the full sense of the word: socially pervasive to the point of dominance; and largely invisible as a condition of their dominance. While many people suggest that schools are the proper place to learn about the various written genres, the best way to express oneself and communicate clearly, schools do not represent a neutral, disinterested institution. Critical sociologists and linguists alike have argued
(as have I) that schools play a large role in the creation and maintenance of the systems of genre, quality, and taste that they are then tasked with enforcing. To apply a very uncharitable metaphor, it’s a bit like a protection racket. “Hey, you never know. It’s a dangerous world out there. You might get people looking down on you for the way you write. Maybe I can help you if you come to school for 7 hours a day 180 days a year for 13+ years.” Given this certain relationship between schools and standards and practices of talk and text, separating the two Big Questions from each other might discourage us from fully considering the roles that schools play in the world of writing.

Similar silences exist between discourse of society and discourses of ability. The teachers did not tend to discuss or use connections between these discourses, and the nature of the organization produced by the Big Questions might discourage them from doing so. However, in other contexts, discourses of abilities, motivations and social futures are widely intertwined, and these connections can be seen in the concept of the lazy poor, the phrase and idea of “the best and brightest,” and the SAT. Compared to connections between SCHOOL and DISCOURSE, connections between ABILITY and SOCIETY discourses are notably more out in the open and generally contentious, as the terms of some debates about some standardized tests, affirmative action, poverty, and tracking indicate. There are certainly deeply troubling aspects of the ways that abilities and futures are popularly equated, but I do not want to imply that the teachers’ silence is insidious in any way. Remember that the teachers did not bring up combinations of the ABILITY and SOCIETY groups at all—neither to say “Out in the world you succeed or you don’t based on your ability and I try to do the best I can for the kids who are never going to be great writers” nor to say “Out in the world people have this crazy idea that your abilities can never change and that they should define what you do, so helping these kids get competent in
writing is very important.” Once again, it is necessary to keep in mind how teachers’ talk is partially constituted by social patterns and structures that pre-date and surround their ideas and practices.

4.8.3 Who else might ask the questions?
The previous section considered the internal scope of the questions, but there is also external scope to think about. In other words, how far do I imagine these questions to extend beyond my case teachers? In my methodology chapter, I wrote at length about the limitations of my study. As stated previously, I cannot declare that my analysis will stay completely true for others. However, as I discussed in this chapter and previous ones, though I began the study focusing on individual teachers and contexts, I eventually came to understand my work as much more about how the culture of writing and writing instruction was speaking through the teachers I interviewed. If I was amply encountering this larger cultural soup, then it would make sense to suppose that many or most other teachers are working with the same Big Questions that I saw in my case teachers, with similar affordances and blindspots.

4.9 Summary
My interviews with five elementary school teachers revealed some of the ways in which they talked about writing and writing instructions through applying and connecting relevant discourses. These applications and connections amounted to partial but declarative answer-ideas. These answer-ideas may not have been directly included in the teachers’ talk, but they were implications in which the talk was anchored. I interpreted these partial answer-ideas as all organized under one of two Big Questions:

1. Who is a good writer and what do we do about it?
2. What do people use writing for?
These questions encompassed almost all of the answer-ideas and relevant discourses implied or invoked by the teachers. These questions appear to be meaningfully separate, not just in ways that organize their content, but also in ways that reflect larger ideologies, in particular those relating (and silencing the relation of) ability and society, and school and discourse (here, meaning the totality of forms of talk and text). Aspects of these findings have several implications for practice and research, especially the Questions themselves and the constant discourse use and re-use shown by the teachers in the interviews. These implications will be considered in the next and final chapter.
5. Conclusion

5.1 Restatement of findings
In this study, I interviewed five teachers of writing in elementary school because I wanted to better understand how and how much teachers’ writing ideologies were affected by wider ideology and common sense. In my work, I found that the teachers’ interviews could only honestly be considered statements of ideas, not pure ideas in general. Framing my data as statements of ideas led me to put greater emphasis on the ways that teachers’ talk adopted discourses relevant to writing, as well as how teachers connected and responded to these discourses. As I charted these adoptions, connections, and responses, I began to imagine the use of these discourses as partial answer-ideas to two large and fundamental Big Questions. These two Big Questions were:

1. Who is a good writer and what do we do about it?
2. What do people use writing for?
These two questions captured nearly all of what teachers told me about their beliefs about writing and writing instruction, and most of the answer-ideas brought up in the interviews only fell under one of the questions. The Questions are a theory about how the teachers have or do organize their ideas about writing. Some of the immediate implications were discussed in the previous chapter. There is little overlap between the questions, and it is possible that the questions’ separation masks some larger social patterns and power structures that work at the intersections of the topics of the Questions. The two Big Questions that organized the teachers’ responses are a kind of reverse blueprint that describes how the case teachers constructed statements of their writing ideologies.

5.2 Implications for practice
My findings suggest some implications for the practice of writing instruction. These implications
do not take the form of ways to teach better or new methods to try. Instead, they represent some of the lessons I learned as a pre-service teacher through my interviews and my analysis. My case teachers, if they read this work, may or may not find this section usable. Perhaps the previous chapter, where their words were described with the words of colleagues, was more usable. In any case, I reiterate that these practical implications are not explicitly addressed to my case teachers, although I do believe in the possibility for researchers and research subjects to learn with each other, not only from each other.

5.2.1 Impossibility of framelessness
My study showed how teachers adopted, rejected, and modified particular discourses and stances on writing and writing instruction. These discourses acted as frames for understanding situations, stories, and issues raised in the interviews. The frames were always present, and there was never a time when teachers were not employing a frame on their practice. Even the choice to hold consider multiple related frames represents a frame, and teachers’ choices could and did change in different moments and situations. The always present frame is not a new concept, and the framed or situated nature of our talk has been described by others (Gee, 1992, Bakhtin, 1986, Tannen, 1993, Bourdieu, 1991). However, since this point proved to be so crucial to understanding the ideologies of my interviewees, I think it is worth considering what this non-framelessness implies for writing ideologies and for the practice of writing instruction.

As a pre-service teacher, I think often of how the particulars of writing instruction will work in my classroom. This is especially true because the structure of US schools means that I might be teaching anywhere K-6 in the fall, because I am certified to teach that entire range. In anticipation of all the responsibilities I will have and all the classroom decisions I will make, I
am both reassured and challenged by my finding of non-framelessness. Non-framelessness is reassuring because it means whatever choice I make will be more like a choice among options, rather than an answer that could be correct or incorrect. Non-framelessness is challenging because it means that I must necessarily make a choice, and believing I have not made a choice on some issue might be a choice to ignore that issue. Teaching necessarily involves choosing ways to see our students, our classroom, ourselves as teachers. Expanding our awareness of the ways we make these choices, as well as the fact that we make so many, might help us solidify our stances and bring greater agency to our practice.

5.2.2 Ideological scope
My study showed how the set of relevant discourse applied by writing teachers could be bounded to a specific set. The application of and connections between these relevant discourses amounted to partial but declarative answers to two overarching and organizing Big Questions, which had specific, limited scope. These bounds structured the scope teachers’ ideas through a kind of containment, though not unbreakably so. Like the impossibility of framelessness, this state of being bounded by predispositions (as in Bourdieu’s *habitus*) is not a personal flaw, and it is certainly shared by the interviewees’ fellow humans. Also like non-framelessness, the implications for practice are worth exploring.

In my preparation as a teacher, I have certainly learned some self-reflection, but it is certainly difficult to consider what is outside the scope of my current thinking. However, the difficult job attending to the bounds of our current thinking is a crucial aspect for the teacher-as-problem-solver. What else could help this student? What am I missing? What resources am I not using? Who I am not reaching? Engaging with the always somehow limited scope of one’s
ideology is no easy task. But as I said, the boundedness is not inescapable. We will always have frame, but we could strive to make those frames larger. This task, if we make it our task, will not be easy, and we will not succeed all the time. But for the students in our classroom, every little bit will help.

5.3 Implications for research
My work also suggests some implications for research in writing instruction and language ideology. I drew on many research traditions in my study, but none were an exact fit for my project. I had no similar model to base my study on. Thus, throughout the process of conducting my study, I have considered the strengths and shortcomings of the scholarship that has influenced me. In this section I present some of these considerations, on the possibilities of researching writing, individuals in ideologies. I also describe areas where further research and partnership with teachers might benefit the study and practice of writing education.

5.3.1 Writing
I am disappointed that some of the research traditions I have drawn on still exclude aspects of writing from their work, if not writing entire. In the accounts of language ideology scholarship I reviewed through this project, I found little mention of writing specifically. I remain unconvinced that writing is a simple matter of a record of language. It is, as Iris would have it, a vehicle for self-expression and power. It is, as Andrew would have it, a way for students to have a voice and get their brain on paper. It is, as Lonna would have it, an area of communication rapidly changing under the influence of technology. It is, as Tom would have it, a skill that takes years to develop and can be constantly pushed to improve. It is, as Erica would have it, an

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indispensable tool that schools must prepare students in. Writing has a broad presence in the societies that use it, and a broad variety of ideologies to match. Writing can certainly not be fully understood if imagined only as recorded language, as separate from language, or of little interest to linguists and linguistic anthropologists.

Research from sociocultural frames, such as New Literacy Studies, covered some of the gap left by the linguistics of writing, but also overlooked some of the aspects of writing that were so clear in my study. In research like New Literacy Studies, I could benefit from understandings of writing as a profoundly socially connected practice, full of complexity and innovation. Yet some of the scholars in those disciplines were profoundly uninterested in what individuals say and believe about this practice. Like NLS-influenced researchers, I too see writing as a socially situated practice, but part of writing’s social situation is that it is not always practiced or taught like a socially situated practice. I found this tension unaddressed in much of the educational literature I reviewed.

For a complete account of writing, attention to ideological aspects is crucial. This is a flaw in most linguistic research that New Literacy Studies addresses. Yet individuals’ contact with ideologies is not strongly considered. My work is certainly far from the last word on this contact, but the implications and insights that arose from a single study on underaddressed questions were significant. In different forms and by different names, ideology is a crucial concept in social theory, although one that I have certainly seen be resisted or dismissed as too theoretical or too esoteric. It is possible that a focus on individuals’ contact with ideologies might provide a clarifying perspective on concepts of ideology and assuage some of the discomfort

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faced by some college education students and pre-service teachers, as described by Anderson, et al. (in press).

5.3.2 Studying individual beliefs can work
In the design and conclusions of my study, I struggled with the tensions between describing the beliefs of individuals and describing the way that they stated those beliefs. I eventually decided that I should focus on statements of writing ideology, which led me to attend to the ways the teachers used discourses to compose answer-ideas. This allowed me to make detailed claims without straying from my data. If language ideology research were more often done with a strong focus on individuals in their contact with the ideologies that surround them, I believe this stance will be valuable. In this belief I am supported by speech act theory and performative views of language, which would argue that interview data of the kind I gathered was significantly defined by the ways in which teachers engaged in acts and stances of opinion-giving and performances of self-as-writing-teacher (e.g., Austin, 1962, Wortham, 2001).

5.3.3 Further projects
I am a consistently curious researcher, and my work raised possibilities for future work. This study represents only a part of my interest in how schools are involved in the creation and maintenance of linguistic possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Examining expressions and implications of teacher writing ideologies is one piece of a larger puzzle not likely to be soon understood. The area that excites me most is the prospect of engaging in more collaborative work with and between teachers. In a much larger scale project, I might have been able to investigate as well as participate in conversations between teachers, not just conversations between

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individual teachers and me. Several of my interviewees mentioned to me how they did not often get a chance to have the kind of discussion we were having. In my student teaching experience, I often heard my colleagues talk about how teaching was “an isolating profession.” Given the complexity and richness with which my interviewees talked with me, I think they would have enjoyed talking to each other. Speaking as the researcher, I think that more involvement between participants would be far more interesting than finding additional teachers to interview in the same interview-heavy sort of project. Such a conversation has the potential to be generative and relevant for teachers. Documenting the impossibility of framelessness was an important finding, and I think this principle could prove a valuable ground assumption in that conversation. I place high value on genuine and collaborative conversations among teachers, but these conversations benefit from constructive facilitation. I will continue to seek out these conversations as a researcher and as a teacher.
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Appendices

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Appendix E

Interview protocol
Interview with Erica
Solicitation Email
Informed Consent Letter
Presented Poster
Appendix A: Interview Protocol

A. Your classroom:

Where do you teach? How would you describe your school? [What’s your district like?]
Have you taught in other situations (districts, grades, etc.) If so, how were they different from
where you are now?
What are the students at your school like? The parents? The administrators?
How much leeway are you given to make curricular decisions?
Is there anything special or unusual about the arrangement of your classroom? (ex: looping,
multi-age, co-teaching, etc.?)

B. Writing in general:

How do you use writing? What is the place of writing in your life?
How would you describe writing to an alien from another planet?
How important do you think writing is, in general, or for your particular students? Are all genres
equally important, or are some particularly valuable?
What are some characteristics of good writing?
Do you have any particularly strong memories of your early experiences with writing, in or out
of school?

C. Writing in the classroom:

Would you say you have a specific philosophy of teaching writing? What is it?
In a typical day, what is the place of writing in your classroom? How prominent is it?
Can you describe a typical writing lesson?
What about writing in something like science or math? In what ways is writing present even if
the goals of a lesson might not explicitly involve writing?
I’m sure some students are more successful or interested in writing than others—how do you
respond to these differences? And what do you think accounts for those differences?
What do you hope your students will use writing for in the future?
What in your mind distinguishes writing different from the other subjects in your classroom,
such as reading, math, or social studies?
How do you assess or evaluate the writing done in your class? For example, do you use rubrics
or some other kind of strategy?
How does a student in your class learn about what is expected of their writing?
In general, how does the typical student experience learning to write in your classroom?
In your years of teaching, has there ever been a student writer who really surprised you in some
way, or a student who you learned a lot from?

D. Closing

Is there any question you wish I had asked? If you were interviewing people about writing in
their classrooms, what would you want to know?
Appendix B: Interview with Erica

So, in general as you can see, the first thing I want to hear about is where you teach in general and how you would describe your school.

Erica: I teach in New York City at a public school called PS ### or the official name is like the ___ School. [location]. How would I describe my school? It’s actually a pretty large neighborhood elementary school about 750 students, pre-k to fifth grade. It’s in an old building, four floors, I’m not sure what to say about it [laughs]. I guess what my district’s like, since it’s a public school in New York City, it’s actually, I don’t know if you know a lot about New York City schools. But it’s in District ##, so it’s actually supposedly one of the better elementary schools in New York City, so in a way it attracts students in the neighborhood, and also a lot of students bus into the school from quote unquote failing schools under no child left behind, so it’s an interesting mix of students, yeah.

And would you say those two groups are fairly obvious to the students themselves and to the staff?

Erica: Uh, well, not necessarily.

Okay.

Erica: I guess the only difference is that they’re the ones, while neighborhood kids walk to school, some of those students who come in from other areas of New York City take a yellow school bus, so that’s always an interesting dynamic. But in general the school... yeah so supposedly it’s a pretty—in New York City’s eyes it’s a high-performing school for a public school in New York City and it’s done well on state tests. So there’s always this kind of - - not a pressure, but an expectation from parents and administrators that the school continue to be that way, so they hold students and teachers to kind of a high standard I think.

Okay. That’s really interesting and if you have any comments about that, I would love to hear sort of how you experience that pressure and how it’s expressed, are there for example regular pep talk meetings where they refer to these, to the history of these good scores, or what’s the climate about that?

Erica: Well, I’ve only taught for one year, and I guess the first year of teaching is always very eye-opening I guess. I mean it was interesting being in the school because no matter where you’re a teacher everyone tells you that it’s not the kids that get to you, it’s the system. And even in this school I felt that I guess, like I really love my job, I love the students, I love the other teachers, but I guess when you talk about that kind of pressure, it’s more, I think it’s more underlying. All the teachers there tend to be really motivated and the principal knows that and respects that, so you’re not, it’s not, sometimes—how do I describe it?

There is a pressure for you to teach well and for your students to do well from both the parents and the principal, so I guess little things like our school, we pretty much go by Edith Lewis 117
Marsden University, the literacy program, the Balanced Literacy program, which has its pros and cons, but we pretty much stick to that, and my principal LOVES [the coordinator of the program] [laugh], and all of the research that's been coming out of EMU in terms of literacy, so we've pretty much sticks to that research and my principal really advocates or requires teachers to use that curriculum and philosophy and the method. I mean, there is some leeway, but for example that's one thing because she, the principal believes this curriculum works, and it has produced good test results, so yeah, it's required that all teachers use it.

Okay, so is there kind of like an attitude of if it's not broken, don't fix it?

Erica: Yeah, kind of, I guess that's a good way to put it. But I mean, what do you mean?

Well, so going off of what you were saying about how the principal had faith in this curriculum that you were using now, so does that mean that there are fewer opportunities to change it or to modify because they're sticking with that they have, or is that not the case?

Erica: [pause] No, I think you can modify it. So it's more of a philosophy that you go by and the structure of the lesson is kind of a certain way. But I think at the school all the teachers are pretty smart so they're able to adapt and modify it according to their students' needs. But the units are already planned, the type of units that you do in reading and writing are already given to us, but then within those units, you can tweak the lesson depending on your students. So I think the thing that's more top-down is like, I don't know how to say, maybe, the way it's taught or the structure, how the structure of the lesson should go, not like—what the teachers actually say is not scripted out. It's kind of like the philosophy, the structure of the lesson. And then teachers are given leeway to tweak the lesson.

Okay, so would you say there's a good deal of day to day freedom within this larger structure and philosophy?

Erica: Yeah, I guess you could say that.

Okay, and could you say a little bit more about, when you say the structure of the lesson, or the general unit, what kinds of things are you referring to there? Is it “okay, next we're all going to have to do a unit on poetry,” or is it more specific than that? I just want to get a sense of what's—

Erica: Well usually the way Edith Marsden University works is, I mean could send you, I can send you a list of units I did this past year if you want, but, yeah I can email that to you. But Edith Marsden University generally they put out something called Curriculum Calendar for all the schools that participate in their [partnership program]. So inside the Curriculum Calendar is an overview of each unit, and each unit is meant to last one month. It's not like day 1 day 2 day 3, it's more of a general overview and then they give you ideas to do each lesson and how to supplement student needs. So yeah the one unit might be narrative writing, one unit might be

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poetry, and one unit might be science and writing. So yeah, that’s what I mean when I say units, and when I say structure of a lesson, I guess EMU calls it a mini-lesson. So you first—I don’t know if you want to hear all these details.

Sure, yeah.

Erica: So first—It’s actually, I think a lot of teachers do this naturally, it’s just that EMU really broke it down to make sure all teachers do it this way. So they do something called a mini-lesson inside a workshop for reading and writing. So the idea is in a workshop students will always be working on their own reading or their own writing. And it’s always an ongoing process, but you can give, but teachers can give mini-lessons to point to—So, it’s actually strategy work, so kids can try new strategies or use that in their own reading and writing.

So within a mini-lesson, mini-lessons are at the most like 10 or 12 minutes, especially with the primary years since I teacher second grade. So you start out with, what do they call it, a connection, like you just say something that connects with what they’ve been learning to what they’re going to learn today, a Teaching Point, which is usually a sentence or two about the strategies you want to show them, and then you explain how the strategy works, so if in writing you were teaching, if you wanted to show them the strategy of using a strong beginning, you would show them “Strong beginnings might include, you might start off with dialogue, or you might include a description of the setting,” So you would teach it, and you would have students try it with you during the lesson, like another example they could try, and then you have the Link, which is you just have them, you just tell them that they can try this out or like review it, and then the rest of the period on their own reading or writing. Sorry that was, I can type this up too, kinda confusing.

Oh, well I’m transcribing this all later, but that was great, that’s not too much detail at all.

Erica: Yeah so basically it is kind of dumbed down, but I guess it just ensures that teachers all across New York City teach it in a clear explicit way I guess, especially because its elementary school. But basically it’s a Connection, the Teaching Point, you teach it, and then you Link -say the Link, like kind of review the strategy, and then the next 20 30 40 minutes, the students have research time, the students have independent reading and writing time.

Alright, that’s really helpful information, yeah. Because my interest in this is a lot about the different influences on choices about writing in the classroom, it’s great to hear this kind of background of the program that your school is doing, and all that stuff. So you’re not giving me too much detail at all.

Erica: Okay, well I can give you more. It’s easy for me to talk about it I think because it’s not really my own way I teach, I think. Because it was kind of, in a way given to me and then I had to adapt it to what I wanted in a way. But I think to be honest as a first year teacher it was kind of helpful I think even though the steep learning curve because otherwise I don’t know where I would have started I think. But I think what’s going to happen my second third year of teaching is I’m going to end up adapting it more and more so it becomes my own. But the other thing that
the school does advocate in terms of structure—are so I guess in second grade in particular,
there’s a big push for second grade students in my school to be reading independently, based on
their interest and also their quote unquote level. So there are like levels of books that students
should be working toward, working through. It’s leveled a whole slew of books in our classroom
library, A-Z. Although I don’t completely agree with this, that’s the way it is I guess. But I really
try to make sure students are reading books that are interesting to them and that they’re able to
read well. So during reading workshop, students should be reading independently beginning of
second grade, quote unquote the research says, 15 minutes straight, and by the end of second
straight they should be reading 20 25 minutes independently. And within that reading, so students
in my school they read every day. They read every day independently books of their choice, they
have their own bag of books that they can choose. And then the teacher goes around and confers
with students have conferences with them, and teachers take conference notes about what you
met about, like “What are you reading? What are you working on?” and sometimes you teach
them new strategies, sometimes you just read with them a little but just to support them, scaffold
them to where they’re going and other times—there’s all these little structures—sometimes while
students are independently reading, you might pull a small group who are reading about on the
same range, since there’s such a diversity with readers and writers in the class, and you might
just teach those three students, it’s just more efficient sometimes to meet with one student three
times or meet with a group of three students who need the same thing. So sometimes you might
just have a small group and you might just teach them about short vowels because maybe they
forgot. Or sometimes you do guided reading with them during independent reading time, I don’t
know if that’s— So those are the structures that are given to you, these are things that you can do
during your workshop as a teacher. And then during writer’s workshop, it’s actually pretty much
the same structure. While the students are independently writing, you can go around and confer
with individual students or you can pull small groups. It’s usually like you do informal
assessments as you go. So I try, I try if I have time, I look at their writing in the process, because
students will be in all different stages of the process, so you can pull students in small groups
while everyone else is independently writing, and if they’re already finished with the story, then
you can quickly have a small group lesson with them, just 3 or 4 students, about how they can go
back and revise, or just remind them, or things like that. And that’s to make the classroom
structures more efficient, in a way.

Okay.

Erica: I don’t know if that was too much.

No, no, this is all great. As much as you want to say, I’ll record and transcribe and
everything, you don’t really need to worry about it. But I am interested in hearing from
you about the things you’ve done, you’re thinking about how you’re gonna adapt it in the
future or what you’ve already done to do that, just sort of how you’ve responded to that
structure you’ve been provided. Anything else you want to say about that?

Erica: During your first year teaching, it was even hard to just go by the book. Because I didn’t
know it at all. And I think a lot of teachers, like what you’re mentioning a lot of teacher choice,
and a lot of teacher effectiveness, I think I realize is really through practice and experience, so I think as teachers teach more, and if they have the willingness and brains and effort to do so that teachers should naturally, they should make choices to adapt the curriculum. So I don’t know if that answers your questions.

**Oh, yes, I think it does.**

Erica: Are you asking about what I specifically did, or?

**Yeah, if you want to say things about that too, I’d love to hear them.**

Erica: Well I guess another thing you should know—I see it’s a question here—is that my classroom, I teach in something called an inclusion classroom, so it’s like a co-teaching classroom. So last year I had 24 students, 10 students had IEPs, so they were special education students, and 14 were general education students. And I had a co-teacher, and we’re both literally co-teachers. We do 50-50 of the work, and we work collaboratively to meet the needs of all students.

So I think that’s really important since because of that, that makes students have such a diversity of needs. And students with IEPs, their needs really differ, they could be social/emotional needs to speech or reading and writing needs, needing extra support in reading and writing. So there’s just a really big diversity. So I guess I realize just my first year teaching that differentiating the curriculum becomes really really essential especially because the kind of classroom I’m in. Because often times—a lot of my students they’re technically performing under grade level standards, they’re below grade level average standards, whatever you want to call them. So my co-teacher and I, we had to be really creative in how we taught the lessons, and also the way we differentiated. So that’s just an example.

Like in reading we had kids reading on like a kindergarten level to kids reading on a third grade level at the beginning of the year. So what I mentioned about small groups we had to do a lot of small groups. And for the students who weren’t as strong readers, we had to do a lot of extra work with them and review things that they would have learned in first grade to meet them where they really are. So in that way, even though it’s not in the second grade curriculum, my co-teacher and I had to really be creative in how we’ve changed the curriculum. We looked back at the first grade curriculum to see what they needed, or sometimes we might look up at the third and fourth grade curriculum to reach the needs of students who are reading above grade-level and who could go beyond. So in that way, we had to do a lot of that in general.

**Okay, that makes a lot of sense. Would you say that most of the adaptations that you and your co-teacher have made to the curriculum you’re provided with are rooted in responding to what your students’ need and what you see in your own classroom? Rather than, for example, like philosophical disagreements with the curriculum or something like that?**

Erica: I think it would be more the former than the latter because it was my first year teaching and you’re still caught up in just the day to day and lesson planning and just getting through each
day, because it’s my first year. So we did kind of, we kind of went along with what the unit said and just made sure—because I guess also because it’s second grade, so still a primary year, so you’re really trying to build up those really foundational blocks for literacy because a lot of students at the beginning of the year could barely, they came in basically in first grade at the beginning of second grade, so they’re just learning to write and really get their ideas down on paper and developing their thoughts. So we really wanted to build that up, kind of that’s—if nothing else, I could teach them how to read and write, so they could be ready for the third grade and beyond. So yeah, I think that even though I don’t think I intended it to be that way, the adaptations really—if the kid couldn’t read the word cat, then you have to start from scratch and start there. So I think it did arise out of need. Well but I guess like philos—if I adapted the curriculum philosophically [pause] I can’t say I completely disagreed—I don’t think I disagreed that much with the curriculum, it’s more like, I wish I could have added more.

Okay.

Erica: Does that makes sense?

Yeah, so, added things that the curriculum lacked, or added more things that you wanted to do extra?

Erica: Yeah I wish I could have added more to the reading and writing curriculum. For example, as a teaching philosophy in general, I really appreciate more integrated or interdisciplinary curriculum, so I wish I could have done more work integrating in writing and social studies, because I think that’s really important. Or just reading and writing and social studies, or reading and writing and science, or, I mean we did do some of that, but I wish I could have done that more. And the only thing with that is that it takes so much time to plan it, and so when I was going from day to day, it wasn’t the top priority.

Okay. That makes a lot of sense, anything you want to say about how you interact with the curriculum that’s given to you?

Erica: [pause] Hmmmm, let me think. I guess also it was my first year of teaching, so I had never taught a student to read before, so in general it was a big learning process for me, with my first year of teaching, so I did my best to really differentiate the curriculum, and I hope that next year I could, like I said, add more to the curriculum, because I think next year I’m actually planning with some other teachers, like a more integrated social studies unit to go along with the reading and writing. But I will, yeah, because I will say one thing that, the one thing I do kind of disagree about with the curriculum at my school is they treat reading and writing as separate subjects. So when you’re doing readers workshop or reading in a period, you should always, it has to be in that period. And writing has to be a whole nother period. Because I think reading and writing are really reciprocal, and I think the lines could be blurred a little, to really understand the complexity. But in my school, they’re really treated as separate entities. And I think that actually there’s more research coming out of EMU saying that they should be blurred, so even though I believe that, the principal won’t believe me until the research comes out of EMU.

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Oh, I see.

Erica: Yeah, so you could still refer back to it, back and forth, to really get students to think about how reading and writing and all the subjects really go together, but that’s the only thing I really disagree about I guess. Like it’s not the end of the world if you run out of time and you only get to write for 10 minutes instead of 20 minutes, because you had a great discussion about this book you’re reading and students wanted to write about. But there also might be a thing where they’re only in second grade so developmentally, it might not be developmentally appropriate for you to blur all the lines between subjects for them, but that is one thing.

Okay, so that’s an interesting perspective, so you’re thinking that the kids you work with may benefit from the structure of “okay now we’re doing reading, and later we’ll be doing writing.”?

Erica: Yeah that’s something I think I took for granted when I first started teaching second grade, because I was of the mindset of, you know, after coming out of Swarthmore, you see all these really progressive classrooms, right like at Soundings or Rose Valley or at Radnor or whatever. And then I just realized that so much of this learning to read and write and literacy and social studies and science, that all of it is, especially in kindergarten, first, and second, is really developmental.

So I really had to take a step back and you know you kind of do like, in your mind when you teach you try different things out and try to see what works. And what you say is true, that structure is really important, at least at this age, I’m not sure about other ages. But if they’re expecting to do something, like having the schedule on the board is, they really appreciate that, because in a way they can get their minds ready for the subject that’s coming and they know what to expect. So in that way, the structure is helpful for them. And also, especially for students who have IEPs and some of them might have cognitive processing needs or issues, and for them to know that they need to- structure for them is particularly important, because they need to know what to expect. So it’s like a different playing field in second grade.

Alright, thanks a lot for going into that. You have the protocol in front of you so you can see I’m also interested to hear about what your interactions with parents are, and how much their influence or their expectations weigh on your classroom choices?

Erica: Oh, okay, I guess parents in general are, they’re very handson and supportive, sometimes too handson [laugh]. Yeah because like I said, there’s this expectation from parents and administrators for the school to perform at a certain level. A lot of, some of our parents are like your typical Upper Eastside moms who stay at home and are a part of the PA (the parents’ association) so they’re really involved in the school. And then you have like other people of more middle class or lower socioeconomic classes that—like there are single moms who work full time and try to support their kid, and actually, interestingly, the demographics of the school is interesting, a lot of the families, I would say at least half of the families in my school, the
parents are first generation Eastern European immigrants. Yeah, so there’s that. So I was surprised to find that in my classroom there are 10 or 11 languages spoken, which I wouldn’t have know because a lot of them are European languages.

And, yeah, I mean in general parents are very supportive, like at the beginning of the year, the principal relies on the parents to buy all the new school supplies for the year, so the teachers always send out letters that have a list of, literally fifty things on them. Like everything you need for the whole year, and the parents all go out and buy it and bring it in. It’s actually kind of crazy. And because of budget cuts this year, or because New York City is going to have budget cuts next year, the principal is relying on the parents even more to supply everything. So it’s kind of, it’s not a burden, but there’s also an expectation from parents like, “You’re a part of this school so you need to be involved and support the school financially, too.”

Okay, in terms of informing curriculum choices, I don’t really think that parents have a say in what I teach, but parents might in little ways, they might have a say in how I teach, like a parent writes an email or meets with me, saying she’s really concerned about a child and her reading, then I’ll make sure to really work more with her. I don’t really know if, just things like that.

Yes, yes, that answers my question if that’s what goes on. Yeah, I’m just interested in all the— the extent to which other people and influences have an effect on what you do, but if that’s all it is in terms of like— so is it like parents might draw your attention to one of their concerns about their students? Like you were saying “my child has trouble reading, could you do more work in reading with them?” Is that typically what parent involvement is like?

Erica: I mean, in general I guess. And parents, like I said, they’re very hands on, and the kinds of parents that if you send home a letter they’ll read it, or if you ask for chaperones, they’ll always be parents waiting in line to go on field trips with you. Or things like, when the kids bring home homework, and the parents, a lot of them will sit down next to them or remember to check the homework for them. So for example, the math curriculum that we use in the school is called Math in the City, it’s actually more of a progressive way to teach math, it’s more exploratory, and a lot of parents aren’t used to that. And throughout the year we actually had some issues where parents really voiced concerns saying, “Well, why can’t you just teach them the normal way?”

And with things like that, sometimes parents voice concern, and as teachers, we know that the parents have a big stake in their students and the way the students will perform or behave or think or whatever. So we’ll do things, we’ll send home really long letters explaining what we’re doing in math and how to help them with their homework and a slew of example problems that they can go over with their child. And things like that, I mean, it’s actually extra work.

But in terms of, I’m trying to think -- I mean I wish I had gotten parents involved more actually in terms of, because they have a diversity of careers, and something my co-teacher and I have been wanting to do is have them come in more and talk to the students as part of social studies or reading and writing, or whatever, so that way I guess that’s like a teacher choice. But in general, if parents feel concern, they’re not afraid to express it.

Okay.
Erica: And in a way, actually at the beginning of the year, I went through a really rough year in a way, because the parents were *so* handson, because I was a new teacher and my co-teacher was a new teacher in the building, they doubted us a lot, especially because we were so young, too. So there was kind of this sentiment of you need to prove to us, because I'm trusting you with my child weird dynamic. So in a way, my co-teacher and I, we probably worked even harder than we probably already were, because we felt this pressure from the parents. Not to please them, but for them to—because we see them every day, dropping their kids off and stuff and they have ties to the school or the principal or whatever. So we had this selfish need to work even harder for the kids, but in a way it kept us accountable, in a way. I don't know.

Yeah, that makes sense. You were saying that it wasn’t exactly to please them, it was more like to show that you were doing good work and everything like that, that really came through. Is that what you were saying?

Erica: Yeah, and also I was going to tell you that we just wanted to show parents that we cared about the kids as much as they did, and one way to show that is to really make sure you’re reaching the needs of everyone in your classroom.

Okay, that makes a lot of sense. A quick question, it’s interesting what you said about the math in the city program, and how they sort of don’t see that as maybe the kind of math instruction they’d expect. Do you ever get comments like that about the writing curriculum, or do they take writing workshops and things like that for granted pretty much?

Erica: Well I guess to them reading and writing is more—especially in second grade in terms of reading—so reading is a very cognitive thing so when they’re kids are reading, parents can’t tell if they’re really reading or not, so as long as a kid has a book in front of them, you know, from a parent’s eyes they think reading is reading, how can it be any different? But in writing, they never really have writing homework, they do all their writing inside school.

So I guess what it is is that for homework we’ll most often give math, to reinforce certain concepts, and that’s what parents see. And they get confused when their kid is like “No, that’s not how I learned to do it in school.” In some ways, reading is, some of the way we do reading instruction is sometimes can be confusing to parents, because we do everything through strategies, and also parents, when they think of teaching their kid to read they think of more phonics, but then our reading curriculum, the philosophy is, I guess I’m not even sure what the phrase for it is, but we integrate phonics along with the meaning of the text, and all the thinking behind the reading, too. And then some parents don’t get that. Sometimes parents think if you’re reading the words on the page, then that’s reading, but we really try to emphasize to parents and students that it’s really the thinking that goes along with the reading as well.

Okay.

Erica: Yeah, so sometimes parents do express concerns about the reading instruction.
Okay, and anything about the writing workshop? Or you said they do most of the writing work in school so the parents don’t—

Erica: Yeah, but parents will often comment on convention. The literacy philosophy of the school is, or at least for me, a lot of those conventions like periods and quotation marks and especially spelling, a lot of that is very developmental, so we never really emphasize it that much, especially at the beginning of the year, because I think it comes naturally. So towards the second half of the year, we start to emphasize spelling more and have them notice what they’re doing in their writing, or have them go back and circle every word they think could be spelled a different way, and some parents want us to give them 20 spelling words a week [sm. laugh].

Okay, got it.

Erica: You know, things like sight words, so things like that, that’s a little bit less conventional for parents so sometimes they ask about that.

And in terms of, you were talking about how you think conventions are mostly developmental, I’d like you to say a little more about that. So are you saying that in terms of the development of proficiency in writing, spelling doesn’t have to come at the beginning? Or— is that what you’re saying?

Erica: What do you mean the beginning?

Like—

Erica: I guess I’m—what do you mean the beginning?

So the sense I’m getting is that in second grade, you’re working with pretty basic writing skills, right, very emergent writers, and I’m wondering if you’re saying in your opinion at the particular point in the development of their writing skills, with the kids that you have now, is it that spelling and other conventions don’t really belong this early?

Erica: Well I think, I don’t think there’s a need to hit a kid over the head with conventions on the first day of second grade.

Okay.

Erica: That’s basically what I’m saying. Well I guess what I’m saying is, um [pause]

Or, sorry to interrupt, Or are you saying that at the age they are, developmentally or cognitively or whatever, they don’t need to, or maybe aren’t capable of working with spelling so intensely? That’s the other thing I thought you might be saying. But I wasn’t sure.
Erica: Well I guess when you think about spelling, spelling kind of comes from—spelling is really a complex thing because a lot of spelling in the English language is by sight, because it’s not intuitive the spelling. A lot of it, it kind of depends on what kind of books they’re reading and what kind of words they’ve been exposed to. So if they haven’t seen the word before, and especially if it’s an irregular spelling, they probably can’t spell it, at least the conventional way, a lot of it has to do with how much exposure they’ve had to text.

But I also think in writing, in writers workshop, especially in the first six months of second grade, just developmentally and just I think it’s much more important to have them start writing. Have them realize that writing is a process, that writing is to convey your ideas and feelings and thoughts. If I had to choose, I’d rather have them write as a writer and not like—opposed to writing and getting stuck on every single word they spell. So I think it’s—I don’t know if that—First six months of second grade, I don’t think its’ the most important thing to work intensely on spelling. Because I think the reading and writing they’re reciprocal, so eventually they’ll come together.

Okay, yeah that makes a lot of sense, I just wanted to make sure I was understanding, because, you know, people talk about developmental things in a ton of different ways so thank you for clarifying that.

Erica: Yeah, I don’t know if this clarifies it more, but I guess some students are really ready to work, it really depends on the student, but some students are really ready to work on their spelling, because they’re able to get all their thoughts out fluidly, they can put their thoughts to pencil on paper. Whereas other students, they’re not even sure what they’re thinking yet er they don’t know what to write so there’s no point in getting caught up in the spelling, because you just really want them to write what they’re thinking, and then later maybe work on their spelling. So it depends on each students too.

Okay, got it, that’s very clear, thank you. So moving on, we’ll circle back to some of these aspects of your classroom and the stuff you said so far already, but thinking about writing in general, I’d love to hear you talk about how you use writing in your own life and what kind of place it has for you.

Erica: Um, that’s a very deep question. It’s interesting, because I guess just coming out of Swarthmore since I graduated in YYYY, the past four years of College, writing was mostly used to write papers, to write academically, to really hash out my thoughts, to make a point, write a thesis, go back and revise. Read books, write about the books, in a very academic way, so during college that’s the only real, the most relevant way I used writing in my life. But then you can think about how you use writing to write emails in this day and age and that I always—that’s really important to me.

In general, writing to me is a type of communication, whether for your own purposes, whether for a profession, whether for your friends or family. Actually since I’ve started teaching writing, I’ve been using writing more as an—how do I say it? So I guess ever since I started teaching writing, it’s funny because I became a better writer through teaching writing, if that makes sense. Because especially when I was teaching narrative writing, I never really had done
narrative writing, maybe except in elementary school or middle school when I was forced to and it really wasn’t that poignant to me. But when I started teaching narrative writing to my students, I actually started doing my own narrative writing as well, and I use a lot of my own pieces to model, and to expose them to narrative writing. And I think that actually it kind of affected me outside of the classroom as well because I started doing a lot more narrative writing and journal writing, because I had more time to. And in that way, writing has become really essential to me in a way. Whether it is for communicating in emails, or writing academic papers, or even being able to really reflect, that’s another huge thing for me.

Okay, and that’s really interesting, and in terms of this next question, How would you describe writing to someone who had never heard of it, or an alien from another planet, or whatever. Would you, it sounds like you’re focusing on this communicative aspect and getting out your thoughts, is that mainly how you think of it, or are there other things too?

Erica: Yeah, I think so, I think it’s just another way to articulate what you’re thinking or feeling or how you’re acting, whether to shed insight just for yourself, or you can kind of communicate or convey to someone else what you’re thoughts are.

Okay, so in terms of those different purposes, this is a very rich issue that’s come up in some of the other interviews as well, in terms of those different purposes, whether it’s communicating to someone else, or reflecting for your own purposes, how do you see the relationship between those two things? Do they use very similar skills, or do they seem like very different processes to you, in your experience?

Erica: In my mind, you can kind of, well I think depending on your purpose and your audience, the way you write might differ, just so you can get across what you can, in the most effective way. Are you asking if I think the process is different?

Yeah, so, the process of writing to communicate to someone else, versus the process of writing to reflect on your own experiences for yourself, how are those different or similar?

Erica: I think it still uses a lot of the same skills, I think it can use kind of the same skills if in terms of just like whether you’re describing something or kind of writing down what you’re thinking. I think some of the skills are the same but, I guess maybe the perspective that you’re writing from could be different, if you’re writing for like an email to your principal to communicate something, or writing in your journal to reflect about your past week. I guess the perspective you write it can be a little bit different. And yeah, I’m not sure, I haven’t really thought about this, and I guess in general I tend to be for better or for worse, a very wordy writer, so when I write for myself, in a way I guess I don’t censor myself, so if I’m just writing for me only, I tend to be very wordy, and I just want to get everything out, all my thoughts out, and then maybe I’ll go back and revise, but if I’m writing an academic paper or something more professional in a way I’ll try to be more concise I guess. I’m not really sure.

Okay, could you say a little bit more about what you were talking about as perspective? So
like, is that the different things that you’re focusing on, or different things—

Erica: Right.

—that you’re finding relevant, kind of thin?

Erica: Yeah, I guess when I say perspective it’s almost related to—it almost directly correlates to your audience you’re writing for, if that makes sense. So I guess if you’re writing—back again to that example—if you’re writing an email to your principal, you’re writing from the perspective of a teacher, so you want to convey your thoughts as a teacher, or in a very professional way. So if you’re in a writing, if your audience is a student, if I’m writing a letter to my student for some reason, my perspective would be as like an older, I guess as a teacher too, but your perspective would be more geared to—you would write it in a way where your audience understands or I guess if you’re writing for a professor in college, your perspective would be more as an academic, I guess. I just think that depending on your perspective—like your role, like your perspective, and your audience, the way you write it might look different.

Okay, yeah, it sounds like you might also be talking about like the kind of identity you take on as you write for different purposes. Do you think that’s true?

Erica: Yeah, I guess, like the language you use, yeah your identity I guess.

Okay.

Erica: Well, what did you say, when you asked me about perspective?

Oh, when you first brought it up, it sounded like maybe differences in what you’re finding relevant or what you’re looking at almost, but I wasn’t sure about that.

Erica: Okay. Was I being clear enough? I’m not sure. You can keep asking me questions because I’m—I guess I looked at your questions but in a way I’m just thinking out loud, so there might be some discrepancies in what I’m saying.

Oh, sure, yeah. thinking out loud is perfectly fine, it’s not a, it’s not a survey so—

Erica: Right [laugh]

We’re sort of drifting between questions and making up new ones, which is all fine for the project.

Erica: Okay, cool.

So I think these notions of writing as communication or reflection, they’ll probably be echoed in some of the other things we talk about, and if I transcribe the interview later and
want to hear a little more about your thoughts, I might send you follow up questions of something like that.

Erica: Oh yeah, of course.

So moving on then, you certainly expressed a lot of reverence for writing, and it’s clear you think it’s important for your students, so that’s definitely come across already. In terms of particular genres though of writing, and different kinds of writing, different purposes, do you think some are more important than others for your particular students, or just what do you think about that?

Erica: In my view or from what you think the students need, or.

Uh, either one, really. So in your view maybe in general or what you think your specific students are going to need in the future, really whatever you want to talk about.

Erica: Hmm. Let’s see, one thing I always try to convey to my students is the importance of writing in everyday life and how it’s really important, so—this is a side note, but one thing, you know using writing everyday as a practical tool, that it’s indispensable in a way, especially in this society I think.

That’s one thing I really want them to kind of know, I mean I won’t say it to them, but through all my actions and lessons, I’m hoping that I convey that in a way. So with that said, I don’t really know—so with things like letter writing I really appreciate because it’s kind of a precursor for them to email writing almost, for their future. And so I kind of really, it’s not in the curriculum or anything but we do a lot of letter writing. So for them letter writing really means that there’s a very direct audience so when I write a morning message to them on the board, like a letter, I basically write a letter to them every morning on the board, and they kind of take on that structure and that language of like Dear Whatever, and Sincerely, and the date and having a greeting. They kind of internalized that in a way. so they actually really love letter writing, like when we have free time, when they just choose any activity they want, a lot of them will just voluntarily be like, “I want to write letters.” So they’re just like, write letters to their parents or their mom, or you know, when we have a holiday, right before winter break, the students, we just had them write letters to each other.

And, so that’s one thing I really want to convey to them, but I guess that in and of itself is a genre, but I guess in terms of their future, the more informational or expository become important, especially in the upper grades, as you get to middle school and high school, so in a way you do want to prepare them for that, but I also think there’s an important place for more fictional or narrative writing, because I think that really that can actually outgrow [expand] their thinking, it helps them to think and be more creative, and use a personal experience to write. And I think that’s really important, really at any age. I think it’s a shame that narrative writing and poetry kind of go out the door once you get to middle school when there’s more high school or whatever because then there’s more demand of doing the more academic writing. So I don’t know if certain genres—certain genres might—d. I don’t know, because I actually enjoy doing, I enjoy teaching all the units, I think, all the genres, because I think they are all important for 

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different reasons.

So for example, when you teach narrative writing, we call them Small Moments, they pick a moment in their life, whether it was small or big whatever, and they’re writing about it, and that’s actually a way for them to reflect and why that moment in their life is significant, and I think it’s really important for people / kids in general to be able to think about their experience or about their thought their feelings. And I think a lot of that you could learn to do that through writing, and I think that’s really a skill that goes beyond writing, being able to reflect back. So in that way I think narrative writing is really important, and I think when we did informational writing, everyone, they picked a topic of their interest, and they wrote an informational book, so they had to know—So like, coming in they didn’t know what a glossary was, but they—we did a lot of nonfiction writing too and they like created their own informational texts, and I think that’s really important too because in the years to come they’re going to have to know how to write informatively and incorporate facts along with their opinions. That’s why in a way all the types of writing and genres they learn now, are stepping stones to something else that they’re going to be doing in their future. Even though I think that things that are more—things like narrative writing or fictional writing or realistic fiction writing, for them I guess you can’t say for sure that this will help them in the long run, when they’re in high school, but I do think it’s important for them to do it even though—I guess there’s no way I can really prove on the outset saying “Doing creative writing will benefit them in the future like expository writing” because obviously if they learn expository writing, they’ll know a kind of a structure, and the way they do it will stick with them, and they’ll see that in middle school or high school. But I guess with the more narrative or creative writing, I think it has an important place. Well I guess for me I can’t really—I think that all the genres are important, that’s what I’m trying to say.

Yeah, that--

Erica: For different reasons.

Yeah, that’s definitely coming through and I think based on what you’ve said a little bit earlier, I think the question might be a tricky one since you’re working at such a foundational level for a lot of the students, is that right?

Erica: Right—a lot of them are just being exposed to genres.

And I’m also getting the sense that the expectations of what they’ll face later in their schooling certainly have an effect on your thinking about it, but at the same time, it’s interesting what you’re saying about in some ways, there’s not an easy way for you to prove that one particular thing will help them 10 years from now.

Erica: Right, yeah basically. Yeah so actually we did a—yeah, because I actually think being exposed to all the genres and trying them out is important for students, just so they’re aware of what’s out there, too. And actually there is some research that I read, it was probably TC, that—so we’re doing this- the idea of students doing poetry, the way you think about it, the way you describe it, the way you use your words to express yourself, or even in—and actually, I think I
read it in some book—that it gives them a foundation to actually do informational writing more nonfiction writing because there are more keen, the way they observe things is more developed, and poetry is a way to do that. And that actually bridges into nonfiction writing. So in that way I do see all the genres being supports for each other, too.

Mhmm, okay, and one really interesting things you said when talking about writing to reflect on your experience, when you were talking about the small moments writing units. So it seemed like then you were talking about writing as being one way to do a more general activity, like reflecting or recording or things like that. Was I reading that correctly?

Erica: Yeah, because I guess even, I don’t know if this is getting too deep or broad, but I guess also through writing, if students are able to reflect, I think it also speaks to how students can grow as individuals in the long run, or even as humans. So I think of, I think writing is challenging, and I think if you’re really able to engage in that process, you grow as an individual as well. So in that sense, that’s another thing I try to convey to my students too.

Okay, that makes a lot of sense, that’s great. So in terms of all the things we’ve been talking about and all the different genres that there are, and all the different purposes that you can put writing to, is there anything you think you can say about good writing or writing really well and the kinds of things that you are trying to develop the beginnings of? It’s another pretty broad question, but--

Erica: Oh, yeah, yeah, I guess the few things like awareness of audience, so that students can keep the audience in mind as they write is one of the things that you could teach really in any genre, so depending on the genre the audience could be different and that reflects how students might write, so I think that’s one thing that I constantly try to emphasize as a teacher of writing, and I think that could really help students focus their writing to really make it a good piece of writing. And another thing I think is kind of having stake in your writing, almost invested in your writing, and I guess in that way, I think students developing the voice of the writer is really important, and that really shows through a piece I think.

I think another piece of good writing is—I guess these are more habits of mind than actual things you could see on paper—but also just having students see writing as a process and I think when they’re able to do that, they’re able to actually produce better work, when they see it as a process, and not just, “Okay this is my end product.” I guess other good characteristics of writing, I guess in a way coherence and organization so that the student is aware of what they’re trying to convey and they can organize it in a way through that, then that really helps to convey their message.

Alright.

Erica: Yeah, I don’t know what else, I mean there are a lot of little things, but I think those are the main things.
Yeah, okay, and I think a lot of the little things have come out already, so that's a fine amount of detail, thank you. Do you have any—this is sort of just a random throw out question—this question of the memories of early experiences with writing: do you have any kind of particularly strong ones, things that you think about in your own teaching?

Erica: I can't say I've had really really good experiences with writing in my elementary years, just because I think writing then was very taught like how reading was taught from basal readers, you just kind of wrote in workbooks and maybe answered, wrote a page based off a prompt, so I can't actually say that I had very good writing teachers in my elementary school, but I guess in high school, my AP English teacher, she really—I remember this the most because basically we were just writing about our personal experiences, we did a lot of narrative writing in AP English. And I think I remember I wrote about my sister, and I still have that piece, because I spent a lot of time on it and I thought, "Oh I wrote this well." And I actually kept it. And I looked back at it a few weeks ago. So I actually think the most kind of relevant writing experience that I experienced in my K-12 was actually based off of narrative writing, when I was able to write about my personal experiences.

Okay, that's great thank you, yeah it's—the question is kind of an interesting one because I'm never sure how strong people's memories will be and it's hard to remember that far back but it's good to hear about some of the things that you dwell on a bit. In, so in this next section you can see, questions about writing in the classroom, a lot of this stuff you've mentioned already, so we might be sort of skipping around.

Erica: Okay, that's fine.

But we'll get to all the details eventually. So is there anything in addition to what you already said that you would describe as your philosophy of teaching writing or some kind of core idea about teaching writing? You've talked a lot about meeting students where they are, and you have a pretty diverse classroom in terms of their experiences with writing and you said you think it's really important to view writing as a process and all of those things. But on top of any of that, is there anything you'd like to add?

Erica: I guess it's one thing to think about what writing is, and it's another thing to think about what your philosophy of teaching writing is, and I think I kind of know what I kind of have a sense of what I think writing is, but in terms of figuring out how to teach it so it reflects that philosophy of what I think writing is, I think that's different. So I think I'm still developing a philosophy of how to teach writing, does that make sense?

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

Erica: I kind of see that as two different things. But I guess in general I mentioned all those things, yeah I mean I think I mentioned everything really, but I think just students should start off with an understanding of what writing is, exploring it, appreciating it, and how it's really used in everyday life or in society, I think that's important, and then I think the way I would like
to teach writing, If I’m able to, is to help students develop their voice as writers and write with a purpose, keeping in mind audience. I think in second grade in particular, there is some advantage in teacher students—the more and more I teach I really believe that students, especially in the primary years are really benefited from seeing a lot of models of good writing, being able to see what other authors have done and being exposed to good writing of each kind of genre. Because I think even if you just expose them to a lot of writing, and then just reading through it, exploring it, it’s—I’m not sure how it works cognitively, I guess it’s interesting to think about—but somehow they just kind of internalize it, those things that the authors do. Not that they’re like—I don’t think they’re really copying what the author does, but I think somehow within all that exposure, students really pick up on what good writing is or how it could be, and that could show in their own writing as well. So I think that’s really important, another thing I guess I didn’t mention, having them exposed to a lot of good writing, or different kinds of writing.

Great. And so in terms of a typical day, you’ve talked a lot about how writing appears in a lot of different places, like the morning greeting and reading that letter, and writing letters during free time, and things like that, so this is another one that you’ve said a lot about before, but could you tell me how many hours a day are involving some kind of writing, or just sort of the concrete stuff like that, is what you haven’t gotten to already really.

Erica: Hmm.

Just an estimate, I mean—

Erica: In the act of them actually writing or spending time talking about teaching and exploring writing, or—?

I think both.

Erica: Both? Well I guess if anyone walked into the classroom the most obvious time would be writers workshop, and writer’s workshop tends to be 45 minutes to 50 minutes a day. So probably 12 minutes are spent teaching a lesson, and the rest of the time, students are writing.

Okay, and is there—you’ve talked about how you want to integrate say writing and social studies more in the future, that was one example you did. So is it something you try in general to make writing appear in lots of different places in the classroom day?

Erica: Yeah, I think that’s important, but I also have to keep in mind—or *we* also have to keep in mind—at the beginning of second grade, most students they’re not really able to—it’s more effort for them to write than to, like it takes a lot of even—and this is developmental—At beginning of second grade, I can’t expect them to be able to convey all their thoughts in writing, a lot of times it’s a better reflection of their thoughts and their thinking just verbally. So I guess it depends on what the purpose of my teaching or the lesson is. If I wanted students to be able to think about the social studies lesson at the beginning of second grade, about like “why maps are used” or something like that, I wouldn’t want them to write that, I would want them to talk about
it and discuss it with each other as a class, just because their talking is more reflective of their thinking than their writing in the beginning of second grade. But I think by the end of second grade, I would want writing to be—when they have their foundational skills, like even they’re able to hold a pencil properly—by the end of second grade I would want writing to be much more prominent in each subject as a way to communicate what they’re learning and thinking.

Okay, yeah that makes a lot of sense, and that answers the question well, thank you. And so, this question about a typical writing lesson, I guess in terms of what you’ve told me already, I’m interested to hear, is it mostly, when you teach about the writing process, or teach writing strategies, is it primarily in the form of these mini-lessons you were talking about previously?

Erica: think primarily it is, so writers workshop is t—beginning of the year it’s probably more like 30 minutes, but at the end of the year, writer’s workshop will be 45 minutes, because their stamina for writing usually increases over the year, so they’re able to write more in a given amount of time independently. But I think writing, we also do something called shared writing once or a few times a week we try to. And shared writing is actually just it’s more, it’s like the class creating a story together, or a piece of writing together, so the teacher usually—it’s kind of a lesson, so you try to whatever genre you’re learning or whatever they’re writing—so if they’re writing nonfiction for example, like you’ll have, you’ll try to create a class story with them, so you’ll use really big paper, and think out loud with the class about what you want to, what the class wants to write about so it’s almost like a class piece of writing. That’s another way for students to see the process of writing, because they’ll see how the teacher thinks aloud and thinks through each page, and adds some things to their writing. So that’s another way, you’re modeling for them what the process of writing is outside of writers workshop and mini-lessons

Okay, that makes sense.

Erica: Yeah but I would say between the mini-lesson and writers workshop and shared writing, is mostly how writing strategies are taught.

That makes sense, I don’t think I need any more detail on that, I think you’ve described a lot of it before. And there’s this question I’m interested in hearing, so you’ve talked a little bit about the variation, especially at the beginning of the year, in terms of their experiences with writing and I’m sure that doesn’t necessarily go away in terms of how successful they are in their writing or how interested they are in their writing, but I’d to hear more about how you respond to those differences?

[break in the interview]

Erica: Alright, your question was how do I respond to those differences?

Yes.
Erica: Was that basically your question?

Yep.

Erica: I think it depends on the students. So some students come in really ready to write and read, and other students they’re not as engaged or motivated to do so. I guess I’ll just give a few examples. For example, some students when they come in, they don’t want to write, so they’re not motivated to write. So you kind of have to start with where they are, and you might have lessons or talk to them in small groups about why writing is so important, or how authors use it in our daily lives, and you just give them—it’s almost like a self-esteem boost, because a lot of students come in with a self-concept of not being a writer, and as a community classroom thing you really have to emphasize and show how everyone is a writer, because I think it’s really about your identity, or what you have to contribute from your life in your writing to writing. So some students already know that I think, but other students I don’t think they realize because sometimes they might get caught up in their spelling so they produce one sentence every 30 minutes because they’re trying to spell every word correctly and I personally don’t think that’s the point of writing.

So for some students who are not motivated to write, you kind of almost have to give them a self-esteem boost and increase their motivation for writing and then you might go into more, sometimes some students who really don’t know what to write, you kind of just want to write whatever, like anything goes, to just kind of show them that they are a writer and have them be more motivated. And then from there you kind of show them what the genres are. So I think it depends on the students. And other students who—and it’s like really simple things, some students in my students have IEPs, they have—they go to occupational therapy because their muscle tone isn’t as developed in their hands, so the physical task of writing is really hard for them so therefore they don’t write, because moving your hand across the paper is physically tasking. So with those students, it’s simple things like, some students might use a thin tipped black marker opposed to a pen or a pencil, because it has a thicker tip so it’s easier for them to write, so really simple things like that.

To students who are ready to really develop their writing more, if they already come in, they already wrote all of these stories over the summer that they want to show you, so for those students you can—you always—I guess I still think about it as your proximal zone of development, depending on what your next, what the student’s next step is. So for some students who are really motivated to write, you don’t want them to be bored either, so you would have them be more independent and they could look at other pieces of model writing and try to model theirs off of theirs, or like have them think more about adding in more details, or thinking about what the big idea of their story is. So I think there are always ways to kind of push students from where they are. I don’t know if that answers the question.

Yeah, I th’ink--

Erica: So I guess it’s just my mindset that students will all be at different places, but in the end it’s important for them to all develop their voice as a writer. So whatever it takes.
Yeah, that’s definitely coming through. And it sounds like based on that mindset of yours, that you take for granted that they’re going to have different experiences with writing and they’re going to be at different levels, then it seems like maybe in contrast to someone who worked with older students, a lot of what you end up working with in terms of engaging with writing is they don’t see themselves as a writer, they don’t have that self-concept

Erica: Mm-Hmm.

Is that true do you think?

Erica: Yeah I think it is, what do you mean—with older students?—or—those that don’t write?

I’m just finding myself wondering about teachers who work with slightly older students, and I’m just wondering if they would tend to view differences in writing skills differently than you because at the age that you’re working with, a lot of kids are just starting out. So it goes back to how you were saying you kind of take for granted that they’re at different places with writing.

Mhmm

And so I just thought it was just interesting, when I asked about differences in how successful they were, you focused mostly on their self-concept and almost self-esteem about whether or nor they felt they could be a writer and things like that.

Erica: Alright, okay, yeah I see what you’re saying. Yeah, well I guess, I don’t know if this is related to what you’re saying, but maybe older students who are kind of labeled or you know seen as unsuccessful writers, I think a lot of that is based on their past experiences in writing, in school and in writing. So—because maybe they had past experience where every time they wrote a word, the teacher crossed it out and then wrote the correct spelling. And then obviously you wouldn’t identify a writerly identity, obviously, because it’s just about getting the right word on the paper.

So I guess I find it even more—because of that, like because I know that there are students like that, as students get older, I find it really important in the primary years to develop that sense of identity as a writer, if nothing else I guess, like even if they’re just like—yeah, yeah I guess. Especially for the students too who are really not motivated to write, as long as they’re—and I feel the same way about reading too but—not to build their self-esteem based on false accomplishments, not just making them feel good. There’s a difference to be like “Oh, you’re writing, you’re writing!” when they wrote one letter on the page and “Oh, you’re so smart!” I don’t think that’s really doing much good, but really having them notice for themselves every small step they took. I think a lot of times when adults look at kids writing, especially kindergarten, first, and second, they don’t see it as writing. But if they did a little bit more than they did the day before and they, you can tell, like if you know the students, who they are as people, and you look at their writing and if you can see that they’ve challenged themselves and they did a little bit more than they did the day before, and you can tell that they were thinking
about it, even if all the words are spelled wrong, I think that’s huge. So really having them notice every step they take as a writer I think is really important, because they only way they’ll really develop that identity, because if they don’t know, if they can’t name what they’re doing, then how do they—you want to help them name what they’re doing in order for them to realize that they’re doing it, in a way. It’s very meta I think.

Okay.

Erica: Developing an identity as a writer.

Yeah, what you’re saying makes a lot of sense to me and I think you’re describing it very clearly. So what you’re saying is really coming through I think.

Right, okay, [laugh]

So one of the things I wanted to ask more about as I was making notes is you talked about the sort of blurry line between reading and writing and how they both play into each other, but on the other hand the curriculum that you’re given sees them as different as has different periods for them,

Erica: Yeah.

So I wanted to hear more about your opinions there and the relationship between reading and writing that you see and also their differences and how that gets expressed in the classroom. I know that’s a big topic but anything else you want to say on that would be great.

Erica: Right, I think that is a big topic, but I think they do go hand in hand. I also, sometimes I think there, I think students’ ability to read might become their ability to write sometimes. Sometimes not all the time. For students to know what good writing could look like or look at the craft of writing, they should be able to look at writing or at least listen to it. Or read the text. So I think as students read a lot, they’re exposed to a lot of writing, a lot of text. I guess I’m not sure how to describe it. I think it really does go hand in hand. I think with spelling, reading a lot helps with children learn spelling. I think writing can help with reading as well, because I guess when you’re writing your own stories, or your own piece, you get a sense of authorship I guess, and then when you read a book you realize that author in the same way is writing a book and writing for an audience. And I guess, to be honest, I’m more of a reader than a writer, so I think I, I mean I enjoy reading more than I do writing I think, so when I teach students, and I think students at that age tend to think reading is a little bit more easier than writing, just because sometimes it comes first for some students. So if they’re able to kind of appreciate reading, then you can encourage them to do the same thing that the authors are doing in their reading, but they can now be the authors. So you take on your role as a reader, and then you turn that into your role as a writer. So it gives them a sense of audience. I’m not really sure what I’m trying to say [laugh]. I’m not really sure what the question was.
No, that’s fine, like I said it’s a very broad question and the lines are blurry in a lot of ways so those thoughts of yours are great and thank you for stumbling through a complicated issue.

I guess in terms of in the classroom. I think when I do readalouds sometime, when you readaloud a book for students and speak a lot and discuss it and ask questions or whatever, I think those are really good times to show students or have them a good opportunity for students to become aware of what the writers are doing. So I think there are two levels. I think it’s really complex. Like when you readaloud a picture book to students, they’re comprehended the text (they might be looking at pictures or they might be listening to the words). They’re comprehending the text, they’re looking at what the big message of the book is or thinking about what the sequence of the events is. So that’s all thinking you do in reading, but also a whole nother layer is having students look at, or have students notice how the authors wrote their books. Because I think that’s another really good way to integrate reading and writing. So you could have them comprehend the book and read it with you, and then you can have them go back and look how the author wrote it, like what kind of describing words the author used, how he used dialogue in his book, or how he made all the pieces of the story go together, and I think those are really important places of discussion, because that helps students realize that there’s a craft to writing, and that because the craft is so good in the book, that’s why they enjoyed reading it. I think that’s a really good link. So having students—I think it’s just more of a mindset, and talking about it whenever you can, and then it just becomes like a classroom ritual, or a classroom environment almost, and then sometimes it’s really interesting to watch students notice things themselves, if you just encourage that in a classroom environment I think.

Okay, that makes a lot of sense, yeah. And so that’s something you really work at developing starting early in the year and, it sounds like becomes part of the classroom culture, which is really wonderful.

Erica: Yeah, I try to, but I think sometimes it’s too much for students cognitively, so sometimes they do tend to get confused but I think it’s still really good exposure.

Okay, great. And so the last topic I want to talk about is writing assessment in your classroom. And I just want to hear about what kind of assessment you’re responsible to do, like do you have to make up report cards for the kids, or do you grade their writing, just that whole aspect of it.

Erica: Okay. So I guess we could talk about assessments like informal assessments and formal assessments. So officially and formally, for writing and specifically, we do report cards three times a year. And there is a writing portion and it just talks about things like “student’s independence for writing” “meeting grade level standards” “conventions of writing.” They’re actually really generic, so you can kind of—yeah, they’re actually kind of vague, the criteria on the report card, so obviously throughout the year, the standards for writing would go up a little bit, because they should be developing their writing skills. So basically for the report card we
just grade it based on, like “below grade level standards,” “on grade level standards” or “beyond grade level standards.” And that’s why I think it’s really vague. So what we often do on the report cards is we write longer comments almost like, what do they call it, not narrative writing—what is that thing called when you write about kids for a really long time?

**Uh, learner narratives?**

Erica: Yeah, learner narratives, we tend to write those but it’s not—so we write a lot about what students are actually doing in their writing, and what they’re working on at the moment like what strategy they’re working on. And that’s basically how we officially grade writing. And I guess the school kind of has a view or a lot of the teachers at my school have a view that writing is developmental, but at the same time, so obviously students will be at different places and you can’t push them all of a sudden to produce a piece of writing that’s way beyond where they started. But at the same time, even though writing is developmental, I guess there’s like an idea that there is such a thing as a grade level standard. So you can have a piece of writing that you expect students—like that’s an average piece.

**Okay.**

Erica: Does that make sense?

**Yeah.**

Erica: So we have report cards, and then in terms of just throughout the units, I guess for each unit there are focus points or teaching points you want students to be able to do. They’re usually really basic I think. And actually I think, especially writing is a very complex thing because a lot of the skills you learn in one unit, they could be using in the next, but I think what students do a lot of the time is that even though they learned how to like “incorporate dialogue” in one unit, like realistic fiction, when they go on to write fiction, they don’t realize that they can be using the same thing, because they haven’t really thought of it as a strategy yet. So you kind of have to re-teach it. So even though they already learned how to use dialogue, when you say “Oh use dialogue in this new genre,” they kind of sometimes think it’s a brand new thing.

**Okay.**

Erica: So depending on the genre the things you expect them to do can be different. A lot of times I just informally assess, like if I kind of have a picture in my mind of in each unit—like if it’s a fiction unit, I have in my mind “Oh I want at this point in the year and at this point in the grade students should be able to, for example, plan a sequential story, and write out their thoughts sequentially.” So I have that in mind, I guess, and throughout the unit I’ll actually look at all the students writing, usually hopefully once or twice a week I’ll be able to look at all the students writing once or twice and then just to gauge where they are in their writing, and the process and in the skills.
Okay.

Erica: And in terms of other informal assessments, we usually, my co-teacher and I, we go out on the clipboard and we just jot down what they’re doing in their writing and we confer with them or conference with them. And that having a look at their writing helps inform what we’ll teach for the next few days or the next week depending on what we think they need. So those informal assessments are more for our understanding of what to teach next, while the formal assessments are—actually I don’t think the formal assessments are that important but it’s more just for having it on paper I guess.

Okay, that makes sense, and so how aware are the students of all of these assessments going on, do they give much thought to their report card, or the things you write down on your clipboard or do they just see at as, you know, part of school, people are helping me do this, etc. etc. What-

Erica: It’s a mixture of both. It’s funny, I think in second grade they’re still pretty naïve to that sort of thing, but somehow they already have in their mind that report cards are these big important things, even though I don’t even think that they are important at all in second grade, because—yeah I guess the parents make a big deal out of it, since that’s the one concrete measure parents have to see how their students are doing. So I think sometimes what they see in their report cards, they have like a 2, which is quote unquote below grade level standards, some of them care, some of them don’t take it to heart—I think it depends on the parents, how much the parents emphasize the report cards. So that can vary. But my co-teacher and I, we have conversations with students that it’s about how much you’ve progressed and learned, not about like what the number is on your report card, so actually most of our students understand now.

But in terms of informal assessments, yeah I don’t think they don’t really notice, because it’s not like we’re assessing them from like a—we’re not judging them, just assessing what they need next. We’re just trying to figure out how to best help the students, and hopefully, I think that does come across to students, so we always—and even though we need to push them to a certain standard, students still know that at the end of the day we’re just trying to help them. Sometimes they might feel pressure to do what we taught them, but I don’t know, I still think that they’re kind of naïve. Because also another huge thing in New York City is that state testing starts in third grade. So that can vary. But my co-teacher and I, we have conversations with students that it’s about how much you’ve progressed and learned, not about like what the number is on your report card, so actually most of our students understand now.

Okay, that makes sense. Alright, well that’s, those are all of the specific questions I have to ask, is there any kind of question you wish I had asked or a question that you would have included in an interview about teaching writing?
Erica: I don’t know, well I guess my question for you is how are you using, wait, what was the topic again, wasn’t it about persuasive writing, or was it just writing?

**Elementary writing in general.**

[talk about the project]

Erica: I guess my perspective is still very—not fully developed I guess, because I’m only been teaching for one year, so I just kind of gave you my initial impressions, I guess. so it would be interesting to see what kind of responses you get.

[chatter]

Erica: I guess one thing I could say about teaching in general but I guess teaching of writing, as a first year teacher, I think I kind of came—because (1) I did my student teaching in fourth grade, and second grade even though an outside might not think so, second grade is a whole new world from any other—really I think every grade is different in elementary years, so I guess coming in as someone who had never taught second grade before and as a first year teacher in a new school in a new city for me, I guess I didn’t really know what to expect or even how to teach it, even though, I guess Swarthmore prepared me to think about teaching and teaching writing, I actually didn’t know how to do it, just because in second grade and the primary years, you have to be so explicit, and really think out your lessons. So I will say even though I think Edith Marsden University the whole idea of writers and readers workshop, I think is a great curriculum and a great model, I actually liked having that structure for myself as a teacher to be able to kind of, having a structure of readers and writers workshop actually helped me to deliver what I wanted to teach in a way, even though at some times it did feel a little restrictive but overall I think as a first year teacher it worked out well even though- like the first six months were really hard. I think, especially your first year, you know the principal and administration and—I guess you could say my school is kind of topdown, like your first year they try to give you a lot of support and help you but it really seems like judging me and telling me what to do at a certain point. I’m hoping that in the next few years I’ll have a lot more leeeway because I think, you know you kind of like pay your dues, so I think I’ve kind of earned their trust, I’m hoping that I could do more of what I think, and try out—I guess a lot of it is just experimentation for me—like trying out different things and seeing what works. But I’m hoping I can do more of that experimentation in the next few years, or however long I teach. So I guess that’s a concluding thought.

**Great, alright well thank you very very much Erica and I’ll be in touch.**

[end, then]

Erica: Yeah, I’d I really like a transcript, when you get around to it, just because I really enjoyed this too because it gave me an opportunity to reflect on what I think about writing, because no one has ever asked me before I think. [laugh]

[end of interview]
Appendix C: Solicitation Email

Initial Email:

Dear ______,

My name is Mark Lewis, I'm a senior at Swarthmore College studying Education and Linguistics. Pr. Diane Anderson, my adviser, suggested I contact you. I am writing to ask you if you would be interested in participating in a research study I am currently undertaking.

The research involves the teaching of writing in elementary grades--I am interested in your participation because of your experience in elementary classrooms. Your participation would involve allowing me to interview you this summer. After that, if it is alright with you, I might ask to subsequently observe your classroom in the spring of 2010. (I will be unavailable in the fall because I am doing my student teaching for elementary certification that semester.)

The purpose of this research is to better understand how teachers negotiate between their own beliefs about writing and possible outside pressures they face when they make instructional choices in the classroom. Interview questions will be focused on personal beliefs and values about teaching writing, instructional choices in teaching writing, and experiences of outside influences on beliefs and practices.

The study is not evaluational, in that its purpose is not to assess and compare the merit of any one teacher's practices and beliefs. Instead, I want the research to be a presentation of some of what teachers go through when they make decisions about teaching writing.

I hope you will consider allowing me to work with you. Feel free to ask me any questions you might have, and I'll be happy to talk more about the research. If you are interested in participating, we will set up details for the interview.

Thanks,

Mark Lewis

Three-week Followup:

Hello again,
I'm just trying to re-contact you to see if you had a chance to consider the email I sent to you previously. If you did get the email but decided that you were not interested, that is fine of course, but do please let me know, since because it is the summertime, I might just as easily conclude that you simply didn't get the email. If you are interested, please let me know, and we'll start talking details right away.
Thank you for your time!
-Mark
Appendix D: Informed Consent Letter

Dear ______:  
Thank you for agreeing to talk with me about the teaching of writing in your classroom. This research study has several parts, one of which is an interview with elementary teachers, from a variety of schools and districts, about how they teach writing. With some of the teachers I interview, I will be pursuing further work, including classroom observations and more interviews.

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Any interviews and observations will be used for research purposes only. Interviews will be audio-taped so that I can more easily review the conversation later. In the final report of the research, your identity will be kept confidential, but data may be reported in the form of individual case studies, with a pseudonym and with other identifying details changed. The same confidentiality will be maintained in the event that classroom observations are conducted. If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the permission form below. If at any time during your participation you change your mind about participating, you should feel free to stop.

Sincerely,

Mark Lewis

Questions about this project, which has been approved by the Institutional Research Review Board at Swarthmore College, can be directed to Tania Johnson, IRB administrator, at 610-690-5713. You may also contact my advisor, Pr. Diane Anderson at 610-328-8065 or danders1@swarthmore.edu.

I am willing to be interviewed as part of a study of teacher beliefs, practices, and pressures regarding teaching writing. I understand that the data collected in this project will be used for research purposes only, and that I can choose to end participation at any time.

Signature ____________________________ Date ________________
Writing Ideologies and Writing Instruction: Five Elementary Teachers Describe Their Practice

Mark Lewis
Honors Special Major, Educational Studies and Linguistics

Background
Social life is pervaded with powerful ideologies—ideas that are embedded and related through practices, relationships, and institutions. Ideologies might be about writing, family, marriage, ice cream. Language ideologies are particularly strong, especially in powerful, language-mediated institutions such as school. Research scholarship has shown language ideologies are very broad and, focusing on the level of more accurate or using more complicated terms on large scales.

Based on the language ideologies approach, this study is concerned with writing ideologies of five individual elementary teachers. This book helps address gaps in current research by investigating how individual students' public language ideologies and how individual students' teachers' ideologies are related to children's language and writing.

Research Questions
- In what ways are teachers' ideologies of writing shaped by the academic curriculum (e.g., social studies, science, mathematics), personal experiences, and professional development of their pedagogy?
- How do teachers' ideologies of writing (common core) around children's language and writing?
- How do teachers' ideologies of writing (common core) around children's language and writing?

Methods
- Semi-structured interviews (Ritchie and Spencer, 1999) with five elementary school teachers identified in a community-based sample. Interviews were held, about 90 minutes, and all were transcribed.
- Interviews were analyzed with ethnographic-grounded theory approach (Creswell and Creswell, 2003). In analyzing a human (70,000 words of transcripts), I went through the transcripts of the content of teachers' ideas in aspects of their context, such as ideologies.

Selected Interview Questions
- What are your ideas about writing?
- How do you think about this writing?
- How do you think about your students' writing?
- What is your role in the writing process?
- What do you think about your students' writing?
- How do you think about your students' writing?
- What do you think about your students' writing?

Interviewed Teachers
- Grade: 1-2, 3-4, and 5-6.
- Number of teachers: 5.

Implications for Practice
- The interviews teachers were asked about presenting a program or series of programs to their colleagues and students. Teachers were asked to share their findings with students, teachers, and parents.

Implications for Research
- How might we expand our awareness of the role of writing in the lives of children? How can we not open our own eyes, but others'?

Advice for Writing a Thesis
- Start early. Your ideas can change. Write ideas can change.
- Use your ideas, be prepared.
- Don't let your ideas change more than you can share as long as it's ready, because you can always change the ideas.
- Talk about your ideas to many people at points.
- Talk to other people about your ideas.
- Talk to people about your ideas.
- Talk to others about your ideas.

Acknowledgements
- I would like to thank the people who have shaped the course of this project, and there is not so much enough here to thank everyone. My advisor Mark Lewis always and always, all of them.

Appendix E: Presented Poster

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