

Teaching Grammar and Writing: A Beginning Teacher's Dilemma

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This longitudinal case study follows one high school English teacher's path of concept development over a two-year period encompassing her student teaching and first year of full-time teaching, both at the same rural school in the southeastern United States. The authors use a sociocultural theoretical framework emerging from the work of Vygotsky to focus on the construction of activity settings and the ways in which settings help to shape concept development. In particular, the analysis finds the teacher drawing on apparently inconsistent pedagogical traditions and their associated mediational tools: one centered on a teacher's authoritarian control of the curriculum and adherence to formal properties of texts and one centered on students' interests and their agency in learning.

In this study we analyze the teaching of grammar and writing of one teacher, Brandy (a pseudonym, as are all names of people and places in this article), as she moved through student teaching and her first full-time job at the same rural high school in the Deep South of the United States. Grammar and writing have proven to be particularly nettlesome areas of the curriculum for beginning teachers (Smagorinsky, Wright, Augustine, O'Donnell-Allen, & Konopak, 2007). This problem becomes particularly complicated when the novices are caught amid competing demands, priorities, and traditions, such that, as Cuban (2009) has concluded, most teachers "have hugged the middle of the continuum of two teaching traditions, combining teacher-centered and student-centered practices into hybrids of progressivism" (p. 62) rather than teaching according to a consistent set of principles. In the area of writing, this binary appears in the tension between the form-centered instruction that Hillocks (2002) finds dominant in most large-scale writing assessments and the more open-ended teaching advocated by many English

education faculty for preservice and inservice students and colleagues (e.g., Newkirk, 2009).

Cuban (2009) laments the inability of progressive education predicated on student agency and teacher facilitation to produce anything greater than a compromised approach in which authoritarian instruction subsumes progressive ideas. In our own work, we have characterized this tension in terms of the ways in which the settings of learning to teach mediate beginning teachers' concept development in uneven and often contradictory ways, resulting in a twisting rather than linear path of concept development (Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003; Vygotsky, 1987). The mediation of concepts in school settings makes it unlikely that beginning teachers can embrace student-centered instruction as wholeheartedly as Cuban (2009) and many other teacher educators would prefer, given that their initial efforts at practicing their conceptual understandings of teaching and learning come in contexts that suggest or manifestly impose on them the greater appropriateness of mimetic approaches to education.

In seeking to understand Brandy's methods of grammar and writing instruction, we consider the following questions:

1. What factors contributed to Brandy's development of a conception of how to teach the language and writing strands of the secondary school English curriculum?
2. How did her instruction unfold within the constraints and affordances of the settings that produced these factors?
3. How was this conception evident through her choice of pedagogical tools—the teaching practices through which she enacted instruction in grammar and writing—and the attributions she made to identify the source of those tools in her teaching, thus suggesting the influence of the settings in which she appropriated these particular tools?

We next frame this inquiry by weaving together a topical review of problems facing beginning teachers and a theoretical framework that helps to illuminate these issues.

Topical and Theoretical Framework

Beginning English teachers face many obstacles in their efforts to teach writing and language study effectively. Tremmel (2001) argues that university programs in English education focus primarily on the teaching and

learning of literature, with writing pedagogy getting scant attention in the literature-oriented emphasis of teacher candidates' preparation. His argument implies that strategies for teaching the language and grammar strand of the curriculum also get overlooked, especially in conjunction with usage in writing. With few resources for teaching either writing or language—and especially for teaching them in relation to one another—beginning teachers tend to default to the methods they learned from their experiences as students during what Lortie (1975) calls their *apprenticeship of observation*.

In addition to this extensive and deeply ingrained foundational knowledge learned through their educational experiences, beginning teachers typically rely on available curriculum materials to support their instruction (Grossman & Thompson, 2008), materials that primarily treat writing as an issue of form (Hillocks, 1995). Hillocks (2002) further notes that in large-scale assessments of student writing, the emphasis in many states is on the production of static formal properties irrespective of meaning. Although states such as Kentucky have developed portfolio approaches to assessing writing, many states follow the lead of Illinois, whose assessment at the time of Hillocks's study used a five-paragraph rubric to evaluate student writing samples, regardless of genre: Even narrative writing was required to fit within the five-paragraph template. As Hillocks (2002) notes, such writing may be vacuous in terms of content yet receive high scores if it includes the specified features. Johnson, Smagorinsky, Thompson, and Fry's (2003) case study of a beginning teacher in one such state illustrates the ways in which this emphasis creates peer pressure within faculties to teach to produce the highest possible test scores. The ensuing feelings of stress can be prohibitive in beginning teachers' efforts to provide writing instruction that engages students in topics and forms of potentially greater interest to them and employs methods that attend to learning processes in the midst of competing demands for content coverage.

Grammar instruction is similarly problematic for beginning teachers of English. The reviews of research on writing and grammar instruction by Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer (1963), Hillocks (1986), and Weaver (1996) conclude emphatically that the teaching of grammar in isolation does not improve writing and indeed may adversely affect students' writing because of the tremendous allocations of time it consumes at the expense of instruction in actual writing. The evidence against traditional grammar instruction as a pedagogical tool appears to be sufficiently solid that, following Hillocks's (1986) review, few researchers have found the need to study grammar instruction, as evidenced by the lack of such studies in Smagorinsky's (2006) edited volume reviewing composition research from 1983 to 2003.

In Applebee and Langer's (2009) preliminary report based on NAEP data concerning the teaching of writing in the last 50 years, the authors make only one reference to attention to grammar, and then only as a proofreading afterthought. Graham and Perin's (2007) meta-analysis did identify studies of traditional grammar instruction but found that the approach's "effect was negative. This negative effect was small, but it was statistically significant, indicating that traditional grammar instruction is unlikely to help improve the quality of students' writing" (p. 21).

Even with the case against discrete grammar instruction seemingly closed, teachers nonetheless face requirements to teach grammar, often in the isolation that has proven so counterproductive. This quandary has been addressed by concerned grammarians who try to complicate and improve instruction in language use by tying it directly to students' writing; see, for instance, Anderson (2005), Ehrenworth and Vinton (2005), Haussamen, Benjamin, Kolln, and Wheeler (2003), Killgallon and Killgallon (2006), Schuster (2003), Smith and Wilhelm (2007), Topping and Hoffman (2006), Weaver and Bush (2008), and other texts for a recent sample, along with special themed issues of *English Journal* edited by Christenbury (1996) and Reid (2006).

English education faculty members in colleges of education tend to emphasize learning processes rather than stressing the formal appearance of products (Smagorinsky & Whiting, 1995). The settings of teacher education programs thus cultivate student-oriented approaches that attend to the metacognitive strategies and other processes that students should learn, as opposed to the body of facts endorsed by Hirsch (2006) and central to most secondary school curricula. University faculty have been more effective at critiquing traditional approaches to teaching writing and language through the imitation of form and adherence to textbook standards, however, than they have in providing concrete alternatives for teaching students in ways that provide them with tools for fluency in the context of the textbook-driven approaches so common in schools. This problem becomes particularly acute when, as Tremmel (2001) observes, programs treat writing and grammar instruction as ancillary to the teaching of literature.

From a theoretical perspective, the settings of learning to teach—those that our research participants point to as the sources of their pedagogical tool kits—provide formative environments that guide teaching toward particular sets of practices. As reviewed by Smagorinsky (2010a), teachers overwhelmingly become acculturated to the principal orientation of schools, one that positions teachers and texts in authoritative roles and students as receptive vessels of transmitted knowledge. This orientation begins the moment they enter preschool, to the point where even first graders can have difficulty

adjusting to open-ended instruction (Smagorinsky, 1999). Students' continual exposure to such settings persists through their secondary education and then into college, where content-area professors tend to conduct class by impressing on them the established scholarship in their field rather than in a manner dedicated to student inquiry or discovery (Addington, 2001; Marshall & Smith, 1997).

After 14 or 15 years of authoritarian instruction, teacher education students begin their pedagogical coursework, which typically includes practica that immerse them in the same sorts of schools settings in which they learned about education as students. Schools then provide the contexts for their student teaching and subsequent careers, leaving teacher education programs with a lifetime of conceptual orientation to top-down instruction to challenge in a relatively short period of time. Teacher candidates experience practica in school settings that tend to reinforce the values that teacher education faculty are likely to question; newly certified teachers then enter jobs in those same settings where school administrators hold considerable power to guide their pedagogy back toward the authoritarian norm, one that is further fortified by assessment mandates toward which they must direct their instruction.

which they must direct their instruction (Hillocks, 2002).

Beginning teachers thus launch their careers with preparation largely in the area of literature instruction, and enter a teaching setting in which writing instruction is heavily geared toward satisfying both internal and external mandates for producing form-centered texts. The teaching of writing and grammar therefore typically begins with marginal preparation and is then shaped by school settings in which both the available textbooks and the imperatives of test preparation conspire to mediate teachers' conceptions of instruction in terms of fragmented parts rather than fluid wholes (Smagorinsky, 2010b). It should come as no surprise, then, that the teaching of writing and grammar remains highly problematic for beginning teachers as they enter the often-bewildering complexity of their first jobs (see McCann, Johannessen, & Ricca, 2005) and rely on supports such as curriculum materials—including grammar and composition textbooks and the preparation materials that accompany high-stakes assessments—to assist them in areas in which they feel underprepared.

In this study we analyze the experiences of one teacher who entered this contradictory and challenging situation and consider the manner in which she resolved the tensions she experienced to develop an approach to teaching writing and grammar. Her experiences illustrate the difficulties that many beginning teachers face when attempting to teach complex areas of the curriculum in the midst of overlapping settings whose centers of gravity pull them in different directions with different degrees of force, and with insufficient preparation in critical areas that have proven prickly for even veteran teachers.

Context

Participant

Brandy described her upbringing as that of a “military brat” who moved often both within the United States and abroad. On graduation from a small rural high school, Brandy worked for 12 years as a zone manager for a local newspaper. During this time she also got married and had children, with her primary teaching experience coming as a Girl Scout leader. She then attended a two-year college and, after earning her associate’s degree, transferred to her state’s namesake university, where she enrolled in the program in English education and volunteered to participate in this research.

In the gateway interview that Brandy provided prior to student teaching, she was asked which teachers from her past stood out to her and comprised the best and worst of the instruction she had received. She responded by providing a binary between “inquiry” and “control” approaches. An “inquiry” approach, she said, enabled students to take the lead and develop a sense of agency to direct their own learning. In contrast, she critiqued a “correct answer” approach oriented to “control.” We use the terms *agency* and *control* in our analysis to identify occasions in Brandy’s teaching that gravitated toward these poles on the binary that she provided.

Of these two approaches, she hoped to emulate those who ceded control to her students, as advocated by the two English education professors who team-taught her program. She admired teachers who allowed students to “let us do our own interpretations” without specifying “what you will get out of it.” Her “favorite English teacher of all time” took an open-ended approach in which “She didn’t do the ‘I’m the teacher, I stand up here and talk and you listen.’ . . . She was the first teacher that ever said, ‘You know, I don’t have all the answers. Just because I see it this way doesn’t mean you have to see it this way.’”

Such teachers, she said, “weren’t pushy. . . . They kind of still left con-

trol to the kids. They never forced it on them.” Brandy hoped to import this philosophy to her teaching at Clinton County Comprehensive High School, the site of both her student teaching and her first full-time job. In considering her own instruction, she said that

Good teaching is letting the students lead . . . because they might see things that I have never seen and take me somewhere new and interesting, just as I can take them someplace. Maybe it’s a joint discovery. So I see a lot of interaction with good teaching, a lot of give and take on both sides.

In contrast to teachers who let their students lead their own learning, Brandy described those from her past who engaged in what she called control-oriented teaching. She said, “The ones I disliked the most were those that said, ‘I’m in control, and I’m telling you’” what to learn. Such teachers were anathema to Brandy’s beliefs about good teaching when she was a student and became the foil against which she positioned herself when she talked about her own classes during the interview she provided before she began her student teaching.

University Program

Brandy’s university teacher education experience involved a yearlong apprenticeship under the mentorship of a teacher who was part of a network established by her two professors, whose campus team included two teaching assistants who provided instruction and supervised student teachers. Two features of the program are salient for this study. First, the program was heavily field-based such that the relationship with the mentor teacher served as the key factor in the teacher candidate’s orientation to the discipline. The mentor teachers as a whole were affiliated through a formal network with Brandy’s two English education professors in what was designed as a democratic approach to teacher education that placed the influence of the school on equal ground with that of the university program. This partnership arrangement further was intended to provide congruence across the teacher preparation program and to create both community and continuity between university and schools.

Second, at the time of the research, there was no specific university course that centered on writing and language instruction. Rather, there was a course in instructional planning, one in the teaching of literature, and one dedicated to inquiry into practice. The team-teaching approach of Brandy’s professors blurred the distinctions across these course boundaries and folded attention to writing and language pedagogy into the planning component of the coursework. The main conceptual emphasis of the program was on

making connections with secondary school students: getting to know them, basing instruction on their interests and dispositions, and otherwise centering instruction on their social worlds. The notion of connectedness also figured into the close relationship between the university faculty and the cohort's mentor teachers and their schools.

Site of Brandy's Teaching

Because of similarities in her own background, Brandy was familiar with the rural settings in which her students lived. Clinton County, at the time of the research, was in the process of growing from a decidedly rural community into one that included more neighborhoods that were suburban in character due to population growth on the outskirts of a metropolitan area. Clinton County Comprehensive High School (CCCHS), in which Brandy taught, enrolled 1,400 students and employed 72 teachers, and it served the most rural and least affluent of the county's three school districts. Residents of Clinton County earned on average 16 percent less per capita income than people throughout the rest of the state, and this number was even lower for the 12 percent of the total population who were African American. At the time of the study, 7.5 percent of the adults in the county had obtained bachelor's degrees, and 68 percent had graduated from high school.

Brandy's mentor at CCCHS for both her student teaching and first year of full-time teaching was Laverne Baker, a veteran teacher with more than 30 years of experience teaching high school English. Brandy described her as "a really good teacher," yet a practitioner of an "old school" approach in which "a good teacher is just one that transfers the knowledge." In contrast, Brandy and her cohort of preservice teachers represented "the new school" of student-centered instruction, one in which "the transfer model doesn't work." Nonetheless, Laverne did not compel Brandy to teach according to the traditional authoritarian model, but instead was a "hands-off mentor [who] lets you fall flat on your face, and then she'll pick you up and say, 'Okay, what did you learn?'" Brandy considered her relationship with Laverne to be positive and regarded her as a supportive mentor and colleague throughout the course of the research in spite of the differences in their assumptions about teaching and learning.

Method

Data Collection

We studied Brandy's teaching through six *observation cycles*—three in each of two years of longitudinal research—with an observation cycle consisting

of a pre-observation interview, two classroom observations recorded via field notes, and a post-observation interview. The third author collected all data and the interviews were then transcribed; the first two authors conducted the analysis as part of a research apprenticeship under the first author's guidance during the second author's doctoral studies.

Data Analysis

We used the following major categories for our codes, developed in previous research in this line of inquiry (see Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999): *pedagogical tool* (i.e., the means through which Brandy effected her instruction) and *attribution* (i.e., the source to which Brandy attributed her knowledge of the tool and how to use it). Table 1 charts the coding system and frequencies for each year of the study. Although we do attend to frequencies, we do not regard them as hard-and-fast indicators of precise ratios of different types of teaching. Rather, we see them as suggesting trends and emphases that characterized her teaching.

More codes were applied to the data than those used for this study; in a separate study, for instance, we conducted a cross-case analysis of Brandy and two other teachers from her cohort to analyze the implied character curriculum enacted by beginning teachers working with vocational English classes and blue-collar students enrolled in nonvocational English classes (Smagorinsky, Boggs, Jakubiak, & Wilson, 2010). For this study we focus solely on Brandy's development of an approach to teaching writing and grammar, and the codes we report are confined to that instruction.

We next detail each code in the *tool* category; the *attribution* category, we assume, requires less exposition given that it simply names the source to which Brandy attributed her understanding of the pedagogical tools she used. Like many of our readers, we are wary of binaries in accounting for practices of schooling, and we find that they potentially suggest that only polar opposites are available. And yet, like Cuban (2009), we find that teachers often position themselves between the extremes of student-centered and teacher-centered instruction, making those poles useful in helping to establish general tendencies between which many practices reside as teachers "hug the middle" of the binary.

Brandy found herself working within, and vacillating between, the competing traditions of the field. To account for these trends without suggesting that they represent mutually exclusive polar opposites, we use a terminology that we intend to suggest tendencies toward an extreme without necessarily indicating that they occupy this space with no conceptual or

Table 1. Codes and Frequencies

Category	Student teaching	First full-time year	Total
TOOL			
<i>Toward Control</i>			
Prescribed Meaning and Materials			
Convergent-question assessments	23	10	33
Mandated curriculum coverage	4	1	5
Proper Form			
Essay components	3	8	11
Grammar instruction	2	20	22
Mandated writing genres	28	18	46
<i>Toward Agency</i>			
Learning Processes			
Ad-libbed teaching	8	8	16
Developmental teaching	0	10	10
Scaffolding	2	5	7
Writing process attention	22	13	35
Open-Ended Form, Pace, and Meaning			
Individualized/self-paced instruction	3	22	25
Making learning relevant	5	5	10
Writing creatively	8	3	11
ATTRIBUTION			
Cohort (university classmates)	2	7	9
Colleagues at teaching site	2	9	11
Cooperating teacher	9	5	14
Curriculum materials	1	24	25
Graduate coursework	0	4	4
Mandates	18	16	34
Preservice coursework	4	3	7
Self	32	23	55
Students	42	49	91

practical bridge to the other. We thus divide Brandy's instruction in writing and grammar as *toward control* and *toward agency* to account for the trends in the teaching we observed. We apply these categories, and codes within them, to represent our understanding of Brandy's situated use of them, rather than to identify static or universal means of usage. *Writing process attention*, for instance, can be prescriptive or open-ended, depending on how a teacher provides it. Our codes are interpretive in this regard, indicating how we understood from her actions and statements the intent of each pedagogical tool in the context of her teaching at this site.

Toward Control

This category included Brandy's efforts to superimpose on students her preconceived expectations for *prescribed meaning and materials* and *proper form*. Codes for such instruction included the following:

Prescribed meaning and materials. Brandy constrained students' choices by imposing *convergent-question assessments* such as quizzes, tests, workbooks, worksheets, and study guides; and by following mandates for *curriculum coverage* such as standardized-test preparation and other curriculum mandates for writing and grammar.

Proper form. Brandy emphasized proper form through her stress of *essay components* (e.g., proper form for quotes, paragraphs, and thesis statements), *grammar instruction* (e.g., knowledge of prepositions to improve subject-verb agreement), and *mandated writing genres* (e.g., formal essays, narratives, and research papers required by the curriculum).

Toward Agency

These codes were applied to instruction Brandy provided that allowed students to direct their own learning, including *learning processes* and *open-ended form, pace, and meaning* in students' expression.

Learning processes. To support students' learning processes, Brandy provided *ad-libbed teaching* in which she changed plans based on her perception of her students' moods; *developmental teaching* that she thought was age-appropriate; *scaffolding* for students' learning, especially when a prior lesson had not worked sufficiently; and *writing process attention* including proofreading, brainstorming, prewriting, editing, freewriting, writing to learn, and producing rough drafts.

Open-ended form, pace, and meaning. Brandy allowed for open-ended form, pace, and meaning by engaging in *individualized/self-paced instruction* (adapting lessons to students' needs, providing choice in assessment, conducting individual conferences with students, attending to students' learning styles, allowing students to set their own learning paces), *making learning relevant* (encouraging students to make personal connections to the curriculum), and providing opportunities for *writing creatively* (giving students choice in writing poetry or writing imaginatively as a way to enhance or extend their learning).

Findings

We present our findings chronologically, given the developmental nature of our approach to teachers' concept development. During student teaching Brandy did not teach a great deal of writing and grammar, and so we summarize her instruction in one section. Her writing and grammar instruction during her first year of full-time teaching was available to us in greater detail,

and we break down the teaching according to what transpired during each of the three observation cycles.

Student Teaching: A Foundational Focus on Teaching Literature

Throughout her student teaching Brandy taught “college bound” students in an eleventh-grade American Literature classes during a block schedule. A single class, Brandy’s third-period advanced 11th-grade English class, was observed in each observation cycle. Even with the “advanced” designation—which indicates its role in the school’s tracking levels and not its adherence to an Advanced Placement curriculum—Brandy found that the students’ motivation for schoolwork was minimal and that their writing skills needed considerable development.

The codes for Brandy’s student teaching are revealing. In making attributions for the source of her teaching decisions, she made a total of four references to her university coursework, two references to classmates from the university, 30 references to school-based influences, and 32 references to herself as the source of her ideas. The field-based emphasis of the teacher-education program, then, became evident in the infrequency with which Brandy drew on ideas from her university classes, even while still under the wing of her professors and university supervisors.

Further, the codes indicate the general lack of writing and grammar instruction she engaged in during student teaching. There were only two occasions on which grammar came up, and the most robust category for coding was *writing process attention*. As we will detail below, her attention to writing process actually came about because simply providing assignments—her initial approach to handling writing instruction—resulted in student confusion. Brandy’s solution was to backtrack and provide *post hoc* scaffolding of the processes that would help the students complete the assignments. We next describe the instruction that led us to these inferences.

During the March 3–4 observations, Brandy was instructing the students in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown.” She gave a writing assignment: “Decide if [Goodman Brown] has undergone a tentative, uncompleted, [or] decisive initiation.” Their drafts needed to include a thesis statement, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Brandy initially assigned the essay by telling the students what to write and then giving them time to produce a draft. Students, however, floundered, and Brandy began circulating and recommending that individual students try brainstorming for ideas. Soon she addressed this suggestion to the whole class and additionally provided a five-paragraph structure in which students could present their

ideas, emphasizing what should go into their thesis statements. For this assignment, then, Brandy specified a task that the students found too difficult and adjusted to their struggles by scaffolding their work. She then passed out a handout that reviewed parts of speech and their proper use in the context of a vocabulary lesson, without relating it to their writing.

The March 24–25 observation cycle opened with a lesson about using note cards and the style guidelines provided by the Modern Language Association (MLA) (Gibaldi, 2003) for research papers they were writing, and this instruction was the only writing and grammar teaching that took place during these observations. In the April 22–23 cycle, Brandy returned the students' research papers and answered questions about their grades, then took the class to the computer lab for a writing assignment that required students to produce two essays on creative topics within 90 minutes as practice for a timed writing assessment. Brandy altered the assignment so that the students could choose one of the two and replace the second with an anonymous critique of her 10 weeks' instruction.

During one post-observation interview, Brandy also described her instruction in writing comparison and contrast essays, which occurred outside the confines of the research observations. After giving the assignment and finding that the students had no procedural understanding of how to write the papers, she had them compare and contrast familiar, tangible items—an apple and a pear—and had them fit their ideas into the five-paragraph template. During her student teaching, then, we observed a pattern of Brandy giving writing assignments under the assumption that students would know how to complete the sort of task she specified, then regrouping after students struggled and providing scaffolding through simpler and more accessible tasks of the same type as preparation for the more complex writing. She relied on students' understanding of the five-paragraph theme for the final form for their writing, and ad-libbed instruction when simply assigning tasks produced frustration among the students.

As we have noted, Laverne's approach to mentoring was to allow for failure and then debrief with Brandy to identify how the problems occurred. For Brandy, then, her preparation to teach writing and grammar prior to her first year of teaching provided little foundation for a conceptually grounded approach to instruction. Her campus coursework did not include a course in writing pedagogy; the field-based emphasis of the program relied on the mentor teachers to provide instructional support; and her mentor teacher's approach focused more on experimentation and repair than on providing upfront pedagogical support.

Our purpose in providing this summary and analysis of Brandy's first year of full-time teaching is not to find fault with the various stakeholders. Rather, we intend to position Brandy as a beginning teacher of writing and grammar who is perhaps typical of many novice teachers in terms of preparation to teach these strands. Even though Brandy initially stated a vision of herself as part of a new breed of teachers whose progressive methods would enable them to transform the profession, once in a school she quickly began to resemble the teachers she critiqued during the idealistic setting of her gateway interview. In spite of having had a dedicated university faculty team and earnest mentor in the field, she found herself with little practical knowledge for addressing students' writing and language use. She relied on assignments rather than procedural instruction for having her students write research reports, comparison and contrast essays, creative pieces, and evaluative papers, resorting to teaching strategies only (and inevitably) when the assignment proved insufficient.

Brandy thus entered her first year of teaching without the sort of knowledge that critics such as Hillocks (2006) assert is available in the field but not widely used in the classroom for the successful teaching of writing. We next outline her progression through the three observation cycles during which we studied her teaching the next year, tracing her ongoing effort to find effective ways of teaching writing and language, particularly so as to foster students' control of their own learning.

First Year of Full-Time Teaching: Seeking to Promote Student Agency in Writing and Language Use

Brandy taught ninth grade during her first full-time year at CCCHS, with her preparations consisting of two English enhancement classes designed for "struggling readers" and one "average" English course. During the second half of the year, these courses changed and Brandy taught two ninth-grade "advanced" (not Advanced Placement) English classes and one "average" English class. Although Laverne was assigned to mentor Brandy during her first year of full-time teaching, Brandy made only five references to her in the three observation cycles.

Brandy cautioned her research visitor prior to the first observation that the teacher being observed was, she said,

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not me. When you observe me, it is not me because I have found that I have got to be so stern with this class. We really cannot have fun because the minute we start to have fun, they take it, and they run. . . . I have to be so very controlling in this class, and it's really frustrating because it's not me. I think learning should be fun, should not be one task after another after another with no discussion. Discussion techniques do not work in this class. A lecture does not work. I haven't figured out what works.

Like many beginning teachers, Brandy struggled with issues of classroom management, and so needed to enforce discipline and limit freedoms as a way to control her students so that she could proceed with instruction.

The second constraint on her teaching came in the form of pressure to teach to the state writing test, a point she made when asked which concepts were most important for students to learn in the classes observed. Brandy replied,

At this stage? How to write. That is probably the single most important concept. They haven't learned like paragraph organization, how to stick to one idea per paragraph. And you may end up with five topic sentences in a single paragraph. So I think writing has been the most—it is the most stressed concept that they need to learn in order to pass the [state] writing test.

Brandy's attention to students' writing was thus shaped by the mandate of the exam and its formalist requirements, her own apparent belief in paragraph organization as a fundamental requirement for knowing "how to write," and her observations of her students and their response to her instruction. The codes applied to the data suggest that, in contrast to her student teaching observations, Brandy gave far greater attention to issues of *grammar instruction* (a jump from 2 during student teaching to 20 during the first full-time year), a substantial increase in *individualized or self-paced instruction* (from 3 during student teaching to 22 in her first full-time year), an increase from zero to 10 instances of *developmental teaching* (instruction based on what Brandy considered to be students' age-appropriate needs), and a decline in *writing process attention* (from 22 to 13). Each of these factors, along with the differences in teaching assignments in each semester of her teaching, appears germane to our understanding of Brandy's grammar and writing instruction in her first year of full-time teaching.

Brandy also made relatively few references to the influence on her teaching from her university coursework, with a total of 7 attributions from either preservice or graduate coursework (including a course she took while full-time teaching), 54 attributions to on-site influences, 7 references

to ideas from students from her university cohort, and 23 attributions to herself for her teaching ideas. These ratios suggest the ways in which the field-based emphasis amplified the influence of the school site on Brandy's understanding of effective writing and grammar instruction and mitigated against her employment of the student-centered teaching methods stressed in coursework. Her self-attributions for the sources of ideas further suggest that she developed many of her teaching ideas outside the influence of either the school or university realms, indicating the possibility that these sources were not sufficient for addressing the issues she found critical in students' development as writers. Finally, her instruction of students designated as lower in the school's tracking system may have contributed to her employment of particular pedagogical tools in her first semester of full-time teaching.

First Observation Cycle: An Emphasis on Form

We first observed Brandy on October 4 and 7. Both the fieldnotes and interviews suggest that Brandy, as she ruefully remarked prior to the first visit, did not feel as though she was being herself in her instruction. With students not responding well to discussion and an emphasis on processes, she imposed an attention to form, stating that formal knowledge should precede open-ended opportunities to use that knowledge for personal expression. This observation cycle revealed a new teacher struggling with issues of control and using a formal emphasis as a way both to crack down on student mischief and to provide what Brandy believed to be foundational knowledge to improve their writing and language use.

The first observation began with a transparency projected on a screen that displayed a painting by Tony Ortega featuring people from different cultures. Brandy told the students to "Write a three-paragraph essay explaining what is happening in this scene. Be sure to include an introduction and conclusion." She set a timer for 15 minutes. She then asked students for sentences that "they need to make this like a story" so that the class could produce a collective narrative about the picture. From this basis Brandy asked students if they could see the beginning of a story developing. Brandy reset the timer, and when it went off, she asked students what they had written and recorded their sentences on the board. She then asked the students what they would need to do to make their impressions into a story.

Brandy later projected on a transparency five sentences in which the students were to identify prepositions. They were further to list the 68 prepositions reviewed the day before. Brandy reset the timer. When it went off she reviewed the questions and answers with the students, explaining that they needed to study prepositions because they were having trouble

identifying the subjects of sentences. By knowing prepositions, she told them, they would be better able to identify objects of prepositions and eliminate them as possible subjects of sentences. Brandy next provided four sentences in which the students were to underline the object of each preposition. She set the timer; when it went off, they reviewed the correct answers. Next Brandy gave a homework assignment to write the first 20 prepositions from the list of 68 five times each.

Later in the class, Brandy told the students they could work on their poetry portfolios. For the unit on poetry taught during this observation cycle, she had students “do more identification rather than production.” Initially she “was looking at having them produce their own poetry.” However, she said, “I’ve done a total 180-degree turn into abandoning the production of poetry and just recognizing the devices used because it seems ninth-graders are having a hard time grasping these poetical devices much less being able to produce them. . . . This year it’s more important that they be able to at least identify than to produce.”

Rather than testing the students on their knowledge of devices, she used the portfolio so that “they could show that they know what they’re talking about without me testing them.” Brandy used the term *portfolio* in ways that departed from meanings that refer to collections of student work that represent either a key learning process or an exemplary product. Rather, she had the students “find poems that use the different devices and identify the device used and how it affects the poem.” To prepare students for identifying such devices, Brandy used a “poetry folder that kind of gives them worksheets and practice in identifying similes.” The folder, she explained,

walks them through step by step on how to write this stuff and how to identify it. You know, like for simile in this packet, it gives them a poem and then walks them through and shows them the similes. And then the next page walks them through on writing the poem with a simile. . . . One of the ones they had to write was a parts of speech poem, which I was using to tie in our grammar studies that we’ve been doing. With each part of speech you just write down like, you know, two nouns followed by three adjectives followed by two more nouns followed by adverbs, those kind of things.

The students introduced their collections of devices with essays that they wrote explaining what makes poetry distinctive: “With each lecture we’ve added ideas to where hopefully by now they have at least a three-paragraph essay on what poetry is.” The students wrote these essays, which also included an introduction and conclusion to produce a five-paragraph theme. Brandy provided thesis statements for each of the three paragraphs, such as “Poetry is different from prose,” which the students then developed

into a paragraph. She described their task in the first body paragraph as clarifying “visual differences” such as the ways in which “the punctuation is different, capitalization is different, the structure is different, paragraphs you indent, poetry you do not, poetry has stanzas where prose does not, that sort of differences.” With the first body paragraph complete, the students could begin outlining the second point of their essays, “which was the topics that poetry can cover. You know, poetry can talk about emotions, feelings; and anything that prose talks about, poetry can talk about.”

Brandy had the students grade one another’s work with a focus on their knowledge of subject-verb agreement, capitalization, and punctuation, and their fulfillment of the requirements of the assignment:

I was letting them grade themselves so that they could not come back and say, well, I didn’t know I had to have that. Because they’re marking off on their grade sheet, yes, I have this so I should get three points or five points. . . . I will take off for their grammar mistakes and failure to capitalize, things like that. But they will still get overall points for at least having the material. If you look at the beginning of the rubric, it shows where I count for, is it on white paper or is it on notebook paper?

The second observation began with Brandy setting the timer for 45 minutes and telling the students that they could work on their poetry portfolios until the timer went off, at which point she asked four students to each write five prepositions on the board, then asked another set of students to do the same. She told students to use the listed prepositions in sentences and identify the objects of the prepositions.

At this point in the year, Brandy’s teaching was, as she recognized, not the instruction of the teacher she’d initially hoped to be. Instruction was highly formalistic. The opening prompt to produce a narrative based on a painting focused on paragraphing rather than storytelling skills; the instruction in prepositions, although designed to help students with subject-verb agreement in their writing, did not occur in the context of writing instruction; the poetry portfolios jettisoned poetry writing for the identification of poetic technique that would serve as the basis for taxonomic writing fit to the five-paragraph template; and additional attention to prepositions was disembodied from the writing it was designed to improve. Class segments were briskly fit to the ringing of the timer bell, and assessment was geared to matters of proper form.

Invoking Cuban’s (2009) binary, we see Brandy at this point leaning toward the control-oriented teaching she had eschewed during her initial gateway interview. She acknowledged this tendency with some regret, saying that such a teacher is “not me.” With the state writing test serving as

the end toward which her writing and language instruction worked, she took a formal emphasis in her teaching. At the same time, she appeared consonant with the values of this exam; for example, her attention to the role of prepositional phrases in subject-verb agreement appeared to follow from her own observations and conclusions about the students' writing and how to teach to improve it, rather than values imposed by the writing test.

Developmentally, then, Brandy's conception of writing and language pedagogy at this point followed a twisting path (Smagorinsky et al., 2003; Vygotsky, 1987). As opposed to linear stage theories of human development, this notion of concept development does not proceed firmly from one stage to the next. Rather, development unfolds in relation to the mediation of settings. Removed from any influence of the university and situated in a rural school in which students, even in advanced classes, lacked high levels of fluency with written speech, Brandy was faced with the imperative to have her students perform well on the state writing test, in which infelicities of form reduced scores. Without a strong background in writing pedagogy, either from coursework or student teaching experience, Brandy was left to make decisions based on the best available information and support. This foundation led her to refer to herself as the source of many of her teaching decisions, and these decisions appeared to come in response to student problems rather than as part of instructional planning. If a concept may be conceived as a framework through which to anticipate future actions and developments, Brandy's teaching at this point appeared to be preconceptual in that her instruction rarely unfolded as she envisioned it would, requiring her to diagnose what went wrong and attempt a new approach.

Second Observation Cycle: Agency in Learning about Form

The observations on November 2 and 4 and the attendant interviews revealed an epiphany in Brandy's goal to teach as part of a new generation of student-oriented English faculty. Although her awakening might raise eyebrows among progressive purists, it nonetheless left her feeling elated and newly confident in her teaching. During this cycle Brandy found, somewhat by accident, a pedagogical tool for teaching the form of language in ways over which students had a degree of control: a computer program that allowed the students to pace their own progress and determine when they had achieved a satisfactory level of success. They thus were able to individualize their learning in ways that appeared to reduce their resistance to Brandy as an authority figure and give them a degree of control over their proficiency as writers, pace of learning, and use of language in the context of school.

The first observation of the second cycle began with Brandy giving a writing assignment: “Your teacher has asked for the homework you were supposed to complete last night. You didn’t do it. Make up a brief excuse so dramatic or so funny or so outrageous that you might be allowed to make it up tonight.” Brandy set the timer for 8 minutes and the students began writing. During the post-observation interview Brandy said that this assignment represented a routine for opening class that allowed students to write in open-ended ways in response to prompts that Brandy provided. She based her choice of topics on her reading of the students’ moods and dispositions as they entered class, saying, “I’ve been kind of doing those by the spur of the moment, kind of try to judge how they’re coming in that day. And do we want a serious topic, or do we want a fun topic?” This writing potentially developed into more extended pieces, depending on how Brandy read the students’ moods and needs, as indicated in our coding by the *ad-libbed teaching* and *developmental teaching* codes.

Brandy’s instruction during this observation cycle remained centered on matters of form. For the students’ essays on *Romeo and Juliet*, she said, she emphasized

what can they infer from things and of course, you know, their grammar. Show me that they’re utilizing what we’ve been studying in grammar. And have a central controlling theme for their whole paper as well as each topic—does each paragraph have a topic sentence and are they sticking with this topic sentence? . . . Even though I know all of the statistics that say direct grammar instruction does not work, that’s what I’m doing, is direct grammar instruction.

Brandy’s gravitation to direct instruction involved attention to form, an emphasis that she developed because she believed that her students’ writing skills were below grade level, which was a problem because “They’re just not going to pass the [state] graduation test if I don’t focus more exclusively on their writing skills. And unfortunately, if you don’t know grammar, it’s really hard to write.” She geared her instruction toward “a major unit test, which is multiple choice, which I know is not the best assessment tool, but I’m required to have at least one multiple choice” test as preparation for the state graduation test.

Brandy’s primary source of knowledge on how to pitch the language instruction was the students themselves. She said, “I guess the influence in that is just their—the student work. I cringe when I read it. They cannot write.” Their speech, she said, included dialects and slang but at least made sense to her. However, “There’s a mental block of 90 percent of these

kids because they cannot even write like they speak. So they will have these sentences that make absolutely no sense.” By the second observation cycle, Brandy’s view of her students’ writing as deficient had been reinforced to the point that she eliminated a unit on Homer’s *The Odyssey* to create three weeks dedicated exclusively to writing.

The second observation of the cycle produced what was, for Brandy, an awakening regarding her frustration in teaching in rigid ways. She imposed formalist requirements on students because she felt that to pass the state writing test, the students needed to improve the presentation of their written expression. Yet she appeared to rue her gravitation to the sort of control-oriented teacher from whom she had hoped to distance herself yet whom she understood that she was becoming. The vehicle through which she believed she achieved this balance—one that allowed her to “hug the center” of Cuban’s (2009) binary rather than lean too heavily toward the pole she least aspired to reach—appeared to her in a form that, on first glance, would not be a candidate for such a transformation from the perspective of many university-based progressive educators.

For the second observation of this cycle, the class went to the computer lab to work on their writing, using a CD called *Writer’s Solution*, published by Prentice-Hall. The disc included sections on developing writing style and sharpening grammar skills. The students worked on the tasks for the duration of the period, with Brandy clarifying the details of the assignments on the disc and specifying that the essay portion needed to include at least 300 words.

During the post-observation interview Brandy stated that this computer program, which focused on teaching the eight parts of speech, included a feature that

lets them retake these tests over and over and over until they get it right With that kind of control in their hands, they’re more open to [the grammar exercises]. And they’re beginning to see they really do control all of their grade. . . . I’m really in love with this computer program. . . . Their whole attitudes have been a 360-degree turn. . . . They’re coming in after school to play on the program. They come in before school if they have, you know, dead time in class because we’re working on projects right now. And so like one will say, “Well, my partners aren’t here. Can I just do my language lab instead?” So this program is motivating them.

She attributed the students’ more positive attitudes to both their newfound sense of control with the computer program “and the fact that I said I’m not taking this grade unless that’s what you want me to take. It made them feel more in control, and I think it’s that control issue with these

kids. If they feel in control they're more likely to do what you want them to do." With her students having taken this more positive view of their studies, Brandy took a more generous and relaxed perspective on her students. "Last Friday," she said,

I was so impressed that they worked hard for two entire weeks. And third period is just not known for their effort. But they had really kept their noses to the grindstone for two full weeks. So last Friday we got to the part where Romeo and Juliet were getting married. I brought in a cake and drinks and we celebrated the wedding. . . . They were just like, oh my god, I can't believe she's doing this.

Her insight came through her understanding that the students thrived when invested with responsibility for their own learning. She said, "I may have actually tapped into what makes this group tick. . . . I really have to think that it's the [software] program and the fact that I relinquished control. . . . I realized these kids needed more control" over what and how they learned. She realized, she said, that "If I give more control to them, and I kind of stand back, maybe they'll teach each other a little bit better." By yielding control of instruction to her students, Brandy indicated, their disposition toward her class changed, which led Brandy to seek additional ways to cede control.

In her gateway interview prior to her student teaching, Brandy had identified "control"-oriented teaching as something she hoped to avoid in her career. At this point in her first year of full-time teaching, she learned to shift the locus of control from herself to her students. Brandy's descriptions of her students changed along with her recognition of the consequences of surrendering control. Her language regarding—and presumably her view of—her students changed from the language of resistance and tension to that of approval and support. From this transition we infer that she found her work to be more satisfying. Although the academic work remained focused on grammar lessons, both she and her students appeared to be pleased with Brandy's decision to allow students to regulate their own individual pace of learning. Given Brandy's frankly negative assessments of both her students and their approach to schoolwork during her earlier struggles, we have confidence that her account of their turnaround at this point was faithful to the students' levels of involvement while using the software in the computer lab.

Brandy's descriptions of her students changed along with her recognition of the consequences of surrendering control.

Third Observation Cycle: Applying Principles of Agency to a New Preparation

On March 14 and 16 Brandy was observed with a new teaching assignment, a consequence of the semester-length duration of courses at CCCHS. Although she was now teaching an “advanced” rather than vocational class for ninth graders, she found that her students exhibited “low motivation, but they’re capable. It really frustrates me.” She had to make modifications in her expectations: “We’ve just about abandoned the idea of homework for the most part. . . . They’re not going to do it.” Even with what appeared to be a teaching preparation involving less resistant students, then, Brandy found the class to lack the sort of disposition toward achievement that many believe characterizes the higher tracks of a curriculum (Nolen, 2003).

In this setting, Brandy continued to emphasize form in students’ writing while allowing greater choice in their topics and personal directions. The writing instruction that both she and her colleagues favored was, consistent with what we observed in the previous visits, one that stressed formal properties of writing. Since the students’ scores on the state graduation test had dropped, the school board and administration had supported a shift away from “holistic writing” instruction because it “didn’t give them a strong enough foundation. . . . Before you can go holistic they have to understand that there really is a formula behind everything. You know, sentences do have a structure. . . . But we never taught them that structure.” This emphasis on writing form and the structure of whole texts required considerable attention to what she called the “foundation” of writing, such as paragraph form. Tied to her belief that the curriculum should allow more time for writing was her view that the students would benefit from more grammar study. She hoped to spend more time “pulling all that grammar together and showing them how to integrate it. Why is it important that you know these different parts of speech?”

Brandy began the first observation with a pronoun lesson, using a blank overhead transparency on which she wrote down pronouns that the students offered. She next put up a prepared overhead involving “pronouns in compound constructions.” Brandy then provided another overhead transparency that concerned pronouns and antecedents. After a review she had students individually identify the personal pronoun and its antecedent in five sentences, then went over their answers together. Brandy next reminded the students that thesis statements were due, and then gave a new menu of writing assignments based on *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The students wrote

while Brandy passed back their note cards for a research paper and conferred briefly with each student.

Brandy then took out a crate containing clothespins and distributed five to each student. She wrote the parts of speech on the board, and a student wrote a sentence. Each student was required to identify the part of speech of each word in the sentence. A correct answer enabled them to take a clothespin from a classmate; an incorrect answer required them to forfeit a clothespin to Brandy. For the game, each student began with five clothespins. A student volunteer initiated play by writing a sentence on the board. Brandy said, “They like the idea that it’s their sentences on the board. I’m not just pulling them from a book because then, of course, they say, ‘Well, I’d have never said it that way.’ But these are student-generated sentences so this is how they speak.” The student sentences got increasingly long and complex as the game progressed, as students made the game more challenging to increase their chances of winning.

Brandy provided two open-ended assessments of students’ engagement with *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The first was a writing assignment, the topic of which students could select from the following alternatives:

- (1) Write a letter of recommendation to nominate Atticus as “Man of the Year” in Maycomb.
- (2) Think about the time Tom Robinson was in jail. Imagine there was a prisoner in the next cell. What would the prisoners say to each other? Write a dialogue that might have taken place between Tom and the other inmate as Tom was awaiting trial.

The second open-ended assignment was a project that the students presented to the class; these projects served as the unit test. The students could choose the medium for their projects, and their work included a newspaper about *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a webpage, and a board game. Following each presentation, which Brandy video-recorded, the other students provided written feedback.

Simultaneous with their work on these two assignments, the students were writing a research paper that allowed them to select from the year’s readings to study a related topic that they found interesting. Research projects were required in the ninth grade, and Brandy provided them with latitude in what they would write about. Topics included prejudice in the 1930s, mental health in the 1930s, types of swords in the time of *Romeo and Juliet*, the degree of realism in the film *Shakespeare in Love*, and other foci that students identified based on the interests they developed through their reading. Students worked incrementally on this larger project throughout their reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, with Brandy parceling the instruction into

the generation of note cards, the development of thesis statements, and other segments for which she could provide formative assessments. Ultimately, the students presented their research to their classmates, using feedback from their project presentations to help their performance on this assignment.

In the spring observation cycle, working with a new set of students, Brandy appeared to have solidified the approach she had discovered through the parts-of-speech computer software. Although she still emphasized formal aspects of language and writing, she provided students with choice in which topics to write about and how they could approach the tasks interpretively. By the end of her first year of full-time teaching, Brandy had found—within the context of CCCHS, its working-class rural student population, a faculty that Laverne represented as part of a “die-hard old school” approach to teaching, and a state-mandated writing test that she felt obligated to prepare her students for—a medium between the control she originally imposed to promote appropriate attitudes toward schoolwork and the self-control that she hoped to instill in and allow for her students. While her resolution to the tensions she felt amid competing needs and notions of effective teaching might not meet the spirit of progressive education valued by those who populate NCTE conferences and journals, it left her satisfied that she had achieved a balance that found her and her students both in greater control of and more gratified with her classroom.

Discussion

Hillocks (2006) asserts that the field has amassed sufficient knowledge about how to teach writing, yet that this knowledge

is apparently not an important part of what beginning English teachers have learned. We are beginning to have the knowledge necessary to decide what pedagogical content knowledge teachers of writing should have. The failure to convey the pedagogical content knowledge for teachers of writing is in no small part responsible for the poor showing of American students on various writing assessments. (p. 75)

Although it is difficult to argue causally from one omission to another, we infer that Brandy’s struggles to teach writing and grammar might follow from the absence of a strong pedagogical foundation for entering the classroom. We make this claim with the understanding that beginning teachers from literature-oriented teacher education programs also struggle to teach literature in conceptually consistent ways, although other teachers from Brandy’s program appeared more ready to teach literature than writing or language, even as they were frustrated by restrictive school cultures to do

so with wholehearted student-centeredness (Smagorinsky, Gibson, Moore, Bickmore, & Cook, 2004; Smagorinsky, Lakly, & Johnson, 2002).

We do not offer this interpretation as a critique of her university professors, whom we observed to be highly conscientious and indefatigable in their efforts to run a quality teacher education program. The absence of a course in writing and language instruction and folding of these strands into an already-packed general methods course, however, while not analytically a causal factor in her struggles to teach writing and grammar, struck us as a likely culprit in our efforts to interpret Brandy's lack of an informed pedagogy and ultimate reliance on her own impromptu judgments about how to teach these strands. With mentor teacher Laverne both "old school" pedagogically and hands-off in terms of her guidance, Brandy was left with perhaps more agency than her experiences suggested were appropriate for the complex and challenging task of deciding how to teach writing and grammar effectively to her generally disaffected students.

In the absence of this pedagogic foundation for writing and language instruction from either her university coursework or her practicum experience, Brandy (1) gravitated toward the culture of the school, including its emphasis on test scores, as might be expected in a field-based program in which the mentor teachers served a critical role; and (2) relied on her own judgment and the signals she received from her students regarding what they needed pedagogically. The many attributions made by Brandy to herself or her students for the source of her teaching ideas at once indicate the possibility of her adopting the university program's value on building instruction based on an understanding of students, and an absence of concrete pedagogical ideas learned through formal instruction and extant scholarship to translate that personal orientation into conceptually grounded teaching that would enable her to anticipate more clearly the consequences of her instruction.

Our study did not include attention to student achievement, however measured, and so we cannot comment on the effectiveness of her instructional gravitation to the grammar software that allowed for students' self-pacing and Brandy's self-reports of greater satisfaction and less contention for both herself and her students. The use of the software did, however, appear to improve classroom relationships and address the grammar/language strand of the curriculum in a manner that alleviated many of the tensions experienced between Brandy and her students and between Brandy and the teacher she feared she might become, the teacher who "is not me" because of the degree of control she felt she had to exert to force her students' compliance with school tasks. Given the changes she reported in her levels of anxiety

with her discovery of this unanticipated advantage of the software, perhaps that benefit was enough, at least during her first year in the classroom and given the degree to which identity crises of the sort she experienced, and somewhat resolved by exploiting the self-pacing feature of the software, may affect teachers' decisions to stay in the profession (Alsup, 2006).

We found no similar revelation in Brandy's writing instruction, however, which remained focused on the structure of sentences and paragraphs and driven by attention to the formal properties of English grammar. Again, we cannot argue causally from the absence of a writing course, or sustained attention to writing instruction, during preservice coursework to Brandy's gravitation to school norms of test preparation and formalist emphases. We do infer, however, that without a pedagogical tool kit for teaching writing learned during coursework, and without a field placement in which she taught writing, and without field-based mentoring that proactively provided a method for teaching writing, Brandy was ill-prepared to teach this strand of the curriculum when she began her first job. As a result, she was left to experiment and repair, with scaffolding of students' thinking about the reasoning involved in such tasks as comparison and contrast coming only after initial reliance on assignments produced confusion among students.

As we have argued in prior studies (e.g., Smagorinsky et al., 2003), expectations for teachers to have developed powerful conceptions of teaching at the outset of their careers rest on questionable assumptions about the nature of concept development. At the same time, this study suggests the problems that follow when students have little formal preparation at all for particular strands of the curriculum. One aspect of pedagogical conceptions that seems relevant in our analysis of Brandy's teaching is the degree to which a concept helps one to anticipate future instructional outcomes. Even when Brandy's efforts at effective instruction worked for her, such as when the software program enabled self-pacing that ceded a degree of control to students, the results were unforeseen. Her writing instruction yielded no such surprises and remained fixed at the formal level over the course of the research. A rudimentary conception of how to teach writing might have helped her to predict that simply giving assignments would produce student confusion and require scaffolding through initial instruction in strategic thinking related to the task or other appropriate prewriting activities.

We would not expect Brandy to have developed full-formed conceptions of how to teach every dimension of the increasingly complex English curriculum; nor would we expect her university faculty to be able to provide such extensive preparation during their semester of coursework. The domain is vast; the profession does not agree on whether or not "best practices" exist

to impart to teachers (Hillocks, 2009; Smagorinsky, 2009); and the generally student-centered methods advocated within NCTE tend to be at odds with the formalist emphases of schools and assessors (Smagorinsky, 2010b). Within this contested turf, and in the midst of additional transitional issues facing beginning teachers in their lives (McCann et al., 2005) and often amid personal identity confusion (Alsup, 2006), beginning teachers are pulled in different directions by many competing centers of gravity, priorities, and demands. It is no small wonder that their instruction often produces inconsistencies and deficiencies, given the scope of their task and the uncertainty and conflicts among and within the settings in which they must meet it.

Our understanding of this problem based on our study of Brandy, in the context of other research in this line of inquiry, is that at least rudimentary concepts are useful in helping to design instruction that helps to anticipate pedagogical results. In Vygotsky's (1987) outline of concept development in young children, which has greatly influenced our thinking about teachers' concept development at the outset of their careers, he distinguishes two types of concepts, spontaneous (or everyday) and scientific (or academically learned). Spontaneous concepts, because they are tied to learning in specific contexts, allow for limited generalization to new situations. Scientific concepts are grounded in general principles and so can more readily be applied to new situations. Vygotsky argues that a dialectic between conceptual fields—that is, an interplay between formal and everyday concepts—is necessary for one to develop a clear and unified conception; strictly theoretical knowledge is hollow without grounding in everyday practice, and what is learned without attention to formally abstracted principles is unlikely to be modified in new situations.

We invoke Vygotsky's (1987) understanding of concept development because it characterizes what we see in Brandy's initial efforts at teaching grammar and writing. Without formal preparation in principles of writing practice, she had few pedagogical tools to carry out writing instruction so that she could anticipate how her students would respond, and so had little procedural knowledge of how to prepare her students for the processes needed to complete the tasks she assigned. We see that lack of preparation as being central to her initial struggles to teach this strand, a problem compounded by the limited attention to writing provided during her internship and the formalist demands of her school curriculum and the writing test for which she was compelled to train her students. Although we cannot say analytically that a course in writing pedagogy would have helped her to navigate this contested terrain more effectively, we can say that without such a course, she found the territory to be considerably challenging. Our hope in present-

ing her case is to provoke English educators to consider the consequences that follow from literature-oriented teacher education programs for teacher candidates who immediately face mandates for student performance in other areas of the curriculum. Both the teachers and their students, we believe, would benefit from more formal preparation in teacher education programs in these critical areas of learning.

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