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How Leadership Content Knowledge in Writing Influences Leadership Practice  
in Elementary Schools

by

Heather Stuart Olsen

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in Elementary Schools

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by

Heather Stuart Olsen

## Abstract

How Leadership Content Knowledge in Writing Influences Leadership Practice  
in Elementary Schools

by

Heather Stuart Olsen

Doctor of Education

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Cynthia Coburn, Chair

In an era of increased accountability mandates, school leaders face daunting challenges to improve instruction. Despite the vast research on instructional leadership, little is known about how principals improve teaching and learning in the subject of writing. Leadership content knowledge is the overlap of knowledge of subject matter and instruction in leadership. Using a cross case study format, this study examined the work of three elementary school principals who had different levels of leadership content knowledge in writing. Through observations and interviews, the study focused on how leadership content knowledge in writing influences the work of the principal.

The findings of this study indicate that principal practice is strongly influenced by leadership content knowledge in writing. The greater the leadership content knowledge, the more aspects of instruction the principal attended to, moving beyond surface features of instruction to underlying pedagogy and assessment. The principal with high leadership content knowledge gave more feedback to teachers and that feedback was much more detailed and specific than the feedback given by the principals with developing or moderate content knowledge. Leadership content knowledge also influenced how the principal designed professional learning opportunities for teachers and how they supported individual teachers through differentiation. This study contributes to the research literature by investigating the link between principal's knowledge and principal's practice.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

New policy demands require more of school principals than ever before. The mandates of No Child Left Behind are designed to leverage reforms for underperforming schools and are among the most daunting requirements in recent memory in education. There are also state accountability mandates such as the Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) in California, which requires improved student performance and school improvement. California's PSAA holds schools accountable for meeting high levels of student achievement through a system of standardized testing, curriculum standards, and sanctions. Schools are responsible for ensuring a determined level of performance and for increasing the performance from year to year (Woody, Buttles, Kafka, Park, & Russell, 2004, p. 450). These new reforms call on principals to become more knowledgeable about leading and motivating instructional change.

In spite of growing research attention on instructional leadership, little is actually known about how instructional leaders improve teaching and learning. The research does tell us that school principals contribute to student learning indirectly through their influence on other people or on the organization and give us indications on how principals should spend their time (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Heck & Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). But, most of this research has resulted into a list of leadership behaviors that are associated with increased student achievement. While there is plenty written about the *what* of instructional leadership, more research on *how* school leaders think about their work of improving teaching and learning is needed. Understanding how leadership contributes to teaching and learning requires a framework for studying both leadership and instruction. We need to know more about how leadership and instruction interact.

Recent research suggests that a principal's content knowledge impacts the way they do their job. We know that principals' content knowledge influences how they observe classroom instruction, work with teachers, and structure teacher professional development (Coburn, 2001, 2005; Nelson, 1998; Nelson, Benson, & Reed, 2004; Nelson & Sassi, 2000a, 2000b; Spillane et al., 2002). Despite these findings, we still know little about principal's understanding of subject matter and how it is used as a component of leadership that influences instruction.

The concept of leadership content knowledge may provide the conceptual tool for investigating school leaders' understanding. Stein and her colleagues (Stein & D'Amico, 2000; Stein & Nelson, 2003) define leadership content knowledge as the intersection of subject matter, pedagogy, and leadership. It is when a principal uses knowledge about subject matter understanding, pedagogical expertise, and leadership in her role of improving teaching and learning. Research in the area of leadership content knowledge has mainly focused on mathematics instruction (Nelson & Sassi, 2005; Nelson, Sassi, & Grant, 2001; Stein & Nelson, 2003) and to a lesser extent in reading (Coburn, 2001, 2005; Overholt, 2008; Szabocsik, 2008). But we know little about how school leaders use their knowledge and leadership in other school subjects. Yet, we know that school leaders exercise leadership in subject matter specific ways (Burch & Spillane, 2003, 2005; Stein & D'Amico, 2000).

Acting as a principal and doctoral student, I conducted a cross-case study of leadership content knowledge of elementary school principals in the subject of writing. Writing is a foundational skill for students at all levels and there are many benefits to a strong writing

program such as organizing thinking and improving reading (Bruer, 1999; Calkins, 1994). The outcome of the study is an in-depth description of how principals use knowledge of writing, instruction and leadership in their work improving instruction and student learning. This work is important because a deeper understanding of principal leadership content knowledge and how it is used in the work of the principal can point to new avenues to improve leadership in ways that have the potential to influence instruction and student learning. It also has significant implications for the preparation of new principals and professional development for existing ones.

### **Literature Review on Instructional Leadership**

It has been well documented that principals play a key role in efforts to improve teaching and learning (Coburn, 2001, 2005; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Heck & Hallinger, 2005; Hightower, 2002; Hightower, Knapp, Marsh, & McLaughlin, 2002; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001; Nelson, 1998; Nelson et al., 2004; Nelson & Sassi, 2000a, 2000b, 2005; Nelson et al., 2001; O'Day, 2002; Smylie, Wenzel, & Fendt, 2003; Spillane et al., 2002; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003; Woody et al., 2004). In the current environment of accountability and commitment to reducing the achievement gap, there is enormous pressure on school administrators to focus on instructional leadership.

Many scholars argue that the field of educational leadership can be improved by establishing connections to the research on teaching and teacher learning (Prestine & Nelson, 2003; Rowan, 1995; Stein & Spillane, 2005). To make this argument, Stein and Spillane (2005) examine the research that seeks to identify the connections between educational practice and student achievement. They argue that the studies fall into four broad categories:

- Direct correlates between educational leader behavior and student learning.
- Mediation paradigms, which examine the behavior of the educational leader, a mediational process and the resulting student learning outcome.
- Learning through interaction with others and student learning outcomes.
- Cognitive frames of research examining educational leader thinking, behavior, interaction with others, and the resulting student learning outcomes.

Here, I draw on their categorization of the literature to argue for more attention to the connection of principal leadership to teaching and learning. Research on the kind of content knowledge needed to improve instruction and how principals support teacher learning is an important step in response to unprecedented pressures for administrators to improve instruction and student achievement (Stein & Spillane, 2005).

### **Direct Correlates Between Educational Leader Behavior and Student Learning**

Studies in this category examine instructional leadership by looking for direct correlates between the educational leader's behavior and student learning. Two recent studies have examined the characteristics of high performing elementary schools on a statewide basis and how they are different from low performing schools. The studies differed in their findings. Williams, Kirst and Haertel (2005) found that Academic Performance Index scores were higher

in schools in California with principals whose responses indicated that they act as managers of school improvement by driving the reform process and cultivating the school vision. Kannapel & Clements (2005) found that there was little difference in the area of leadership between high-performing and low-performing schools from the state conducted analyses of high poverty schools in Kentucky.

While both studies sought to answer what common characteristics and practices contribute to high performance, the difference in the findings may be a result of their differing methodology. Williams, Kirst & Haertel (2005) used a large-scale survey of 257 elementary schools throughout California using only schools in a very specific demographic range (the 25<sup>th</sup> to 35<sup>th</sup> percentile band of the School Characteristics Index) and compared the principal and teacher survey results against the school's Academic Performance Index. Kannapel & Clements (2005) visited the study schools and interviewed staff and principals in these eight Kentucky elementary schools to identify how high-performing and low performing schools differed and to find practices that were helpful for the learning of all students. In this study, the schools were selected based on a state accountability index score of 80 or higher and having 50 percent or more of the students on free or reduced lunch. Differences in study design, sample size, sampling procedures and definitions of poverty may have contributed to the divergent conclusions. The previous studies of high poverty schools sought to understand a wide range of school characteristics and practices that were present in high-performing schools and absent in low-performing schools. A third large quantitative study that specifically analyzed the effects of school leadership practices was the meta-analysis of 70 studies of student achievement and leadership (Marzano et al., 2005; Waters et al., 2003). This study is unique because it provides data on the quantifiable relationship between the impact of 21 specific principal leadership responsibilities and the correlation to student achievement. The authors define leadership as the principal's abilities in the 21 specific leadership responsibilities such as culture, input, change agent, knowledge of curriculum and instruction, and situational awareness. The findings show that principal leadership is positively correlated with student achievement and has an average effect size of .25. This means that a one standard deviation in principal leadership is associated with a 10 percentile point gain in student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005; Waters et al., 2003). Knowledge of curriculum and instruction, which included knowledge about assessment practices and providing guidance for teachers regarding effective classroom practices, had an effect size of .24.

This work to document the correlational relationship of the instructional leader and student learner has been criticized as being too simple a representation of a complex phenomenon (Heck & Hallinger, 2005). Research that examines the direct correlation between educational leader behavior and student learning does not explain the influence of the behavior or further the understanding of the practices by which the principal improves school effectiveness. The decontextualized nature of the findings limits their usefulness. Practitioners may benefit from more detailed analysis of educational leadership.

## **Mediational Paradigms**

Studies in this category seek to explain the “black box” of the work of the principal. The mediational paradigm attempts to explain the actions that a principal takes that result in improved student achievement. Most research on mediational paradigms focus on how principals influence student learning by shaping features of the school organization (Heck & Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2004; Smylie et al., 2003; Spillane et al., 2002; Stein & D'Amico, 1999, 2002; Woody et al., 2004). These features include expectations for students, school mission, opportunities to learn, and instructional organization.

Smylie et al. (2003), for example, found that the principal had a “make-or-break” role in school development as a result of the authority associated with the position of principal and control of key resources. Principals in more highly developed schools were able to manage the school’s resources, develop strong working relationships with the external reform partners and work to minimize the disruptions by distractions to school improvement (Smylie et al., 2003). Similarly, Woody et al. (2004) found that principals played a key role in how teachers experienced California accountability measures. The principal either buffered or pressured the teachers with the requirements of accountability. Successful schools used standards and ongoing assessments to gauge the schools progress (Woody et al., 2004).

A limitation of the mediational paradigm of instructional leadership is a focus on school effectiveness through student outcomes rather than a focus on the relationship of leadership to teaching and learning. Stein and Spillane (2005) hypothesize that the reason for the limited research on how principals impact teacher learning is the traditional emphasis in the literature on social and organizational conditions and because principals are just beginning to assume roles of instructional leadership, so there are few schools in which to observe learning opportunities for teachers. The site of the research in the influence of the principal on the instruction of teachers would be in the interaction of the principal and teacher. For this reason, it is important to study the ways that principals influence learning in their interaction with others and not just student outcomes.

## **Learning Through Interaction with Others**

The third group of studies in instructional leadership attempt to examine the relationship of leadership to learning in social settings. Research in learning through interaction with others is different than the research in mediational paradigms because it attends to the social nature of learning. Mediational paradigms look at the actions or behaviors of the principal and the resulting outcome. Research in learning through interaction with others examines the relations of leadership to learning in social context and has focused on creating a community of learners among a school staff, or how teacher and principal interaction influences sensemaking (Coburn, 2001; O'Day, 2002; Spillane et al., 2002). The limitation to research in this category is that it is limited to overt, observable behavior.

Principals play a role in promoting conditions that are required for teachers to work together to improve instruction. O'Day (2002) found that change at a school site and across school sites in school reform was a result of developing professional knowledge through focused assistance on instruction, professional norms and the professional patterns of interaction

necessary for establishing the basis for ongoing organizational adaptations. Spillane, Diamond, Burch, Hallett, Jita & Zoltners (2002), found that principals acted as middlemen between teachers and district offices by being the sensemakers of accountability policies. This study looked at how three principals figured out what the accountability policy meant and then how to craft the work of their school to meet the requirements of the district's accountability policy. The focus was on leadership events that involved working with teachers such as grade-level meetings, staff meetings, school improvement planning meetings, professional development workshops, supervision of teaching practice and conversations. District assessments and the data played a prominent role at all three schools. The principals used the accountability policy and the test scores data to connect their leadership to instruction through social interaction with teachers. One principal used data to inform teachers about district requirements and also to help teachers understand the relationship between external demands and internal instructional concerns. Another principal pushed for increased internal accountability by shifting her focus over time from support for teacher growth to the expectation of improved outcomes. Both principals used the social interaction with teacher to improve student achievement.

In the role of "middlemen" because of the position between the teachers and the district, the way principals mediate accountability policy was shaped by their school, professional and community contexts. For example, two schools studied were in the same neighborhood with similar student demographics and large increases in the percentage of low-income students over the last ten years. One school used the changing demographic as a challenge to be addressed with changes in instruction while the second school used the changing demographics as an explanation of declining test scores and therefore made more limited instructional changes (Spillane et al., 2002).

Interactions between school staff have been studied in the area of sensemaking and instructional reform. In a study of teacher sensemaking, Coburn (2001), like O'Day (2002), found that principals played an important role in shaping the sensemaking process for teachers by influencing where sensemaking happened, privileging certain messages about reading and not others, being a strong voice in the construction of understanding and structuring the collaboration that happened in formal settings at the school. The sensemaking process was influenced by the principal's knowledge and beliefs about reading instruction.

The field of instructional leadership has developed from a list of characteristics of effective principals to a description of what effective principals do. We know from the research on learning through interaction with others that the principal plays an integral part in developing supportive communities of practice (Coburn, 2001; Fink & Resnick, 2001). The benefit of research that examines instructional leader interaction with others is that it begins to address the complexity of school change and the difficult work of the school principal. Given that leadership is evidenced in social interactions, then the site of study should be the interactions between individuals (Stein & Spillane, 2005). This change in the focus of research in educational leadership may change the locus of study to be the interaction between individuals. Prestine and Nelson (2003) suggest redrawing what counts as the research site for instructional leadership

so that it includes teaching and learning and leadership, but also using methods that are anchored in the co-construction of meaning, the "jointedness," that occurs when teachers and administrators work together in schools, as communities of

practice, as well as methods that examine structural features of such arrangements (pp. 31-32).

Research that uses interviews, observation and document analysis to document the role of teachers and administrators in providing professional development provides a much richer view of the work of the principal than research from the Correlational and mediational categories. A limitation of this research that examines instructional leader interaction with others is that it is limited to overt behavior. We need to know not only what instructional leaders do but also how they think about what they do (Hallinger, Leithwood, & Murphy, 1993).

### **Cognitive Frames**

The fourth kind of research in instructional leadership is the examination of educational leader *thinking*, behavior, interaction with others and the resulting student learning outcomes. The difference between research in cognitive frames and learning through interaction with others is that research in cognitive frames focuses on the principal's cognitive perspective of their actions. Research in learning through interaction with others is based on the overt, observable behaviors of the instructional leader. In contrast, research in this area, while limited, focuses on what the principal is thinking during their actions of improving student learning rather than the social interaction among two or more people. It is not just having the knowledge but also knowing how a principal uses that knowledge in their actions improving instruction. Using a cognitive perspective allows a deeper understanding of the *how* of instructional leadership.

Existing studies suggest that knowledge of subject matter and instruction influences how a principal works with a teacher to improve instruction in the context of educational reform. In research that bridges what we know about school leaders' role in sensemaking with research on school leaders' content knowledge, Coburn (2005) demonstrated that a school leader's assumptions about reading influenced how they understood and implemented reading policy. A principal with an emerging understanding of reading instruction provided teachers with access to information that was congruent with her vision of quality instruction and filtered out those messages that were not congruent. On the other hand, a principal with a more superficial understanding of the content of policy messages made decisions that resulted in incongruent messages about a vision for high quality instruction.

Both quantitative and qualitative research shows that content knowledge affects a principal's leadership practice in elementary mathematics (Nelson et al., 2004; Nelson & Sassi, 2000a). Two studies had slightly different, though not conflicting, findings. The quantitative study by Nelson et al. (2004) found that just because principals had strong mathematical content knowledge, they did not always use it in analyzing a classroom scenario (although the principals with low content knowledge used the knowledge even less). This provides evidence for the importance of leadership content knowledge because it shows that mathematical content knowledge is not enough. One must also know how to leverage that knowledge in their work. Nelson and Sassi (2000) found that the principal who was more familiar with the ideas of the mathematics reform provided more detailed explanations of what learning is, what she sees in a mathematics classroom, and what she wants to do with the teachers. The principal who was less familiar with the reform focused on the process of the teaching, but not the content of teaching

strategies. This suggests that leadership content knowledge plays a role in the work of the principal, but we need to know more about how it influences that work.

A seemingly simple, yet sophisticated study done of classroom observation by Nelson and Sassi (2000b) sought to discover how administrators' ideas about learning, teaching and mathematics manifest in their perception of elementary mathematics classrooms. Twelve principals, two assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction, and four district level math coordinators viewed a videotape of a classroom mathematics activity in October and the same videotape again in June after attending monthly seminars on mathematics content and pedagogy. In first viewing of the videotape in October, the comments by the administrators addressed mostly structural and managerial features of the lesson such as uneven transitions between activities, absence of rules for classroom management and the time the teacher waited for student answers. "In general, these administrators' initial reactions focused on the degree of orderliness, good classroom management, understandable and well-executed structural components to the lesson, and teacher behaviors (wait time, gender inequities) that might affect students' opportunity to learn" (Nelson & Sassi, 2000b, p. 565). Participants saw a vastly different picture of the same lesson eight months later after eight months of seminars on mathematics and mathematics instruction. In June, they did not attend to the structural components of the lesson and valued the teacher's actions differently (Nelson & Sassi, 2000b). This suggests the need for principals to bring adequate subject matter knowledge to their role of teacher supervisors. Research in cognitive frames looks at how the principal uses knowledge to inform their practice of instructional leadership.

Research on instructional leadership is continuing to develop. The paradox of the research in educational leadership is that work that classifies knowledge simplifies great complexity, but it turns into a long list of behaviors. One gains economy at the expense of context, complexity and detail. Correlational studies limit our ability to generalize the findings because they only provide a list of behaviors. The mediational paradigms attempt to demonstrate the influence that a principal has on student outcomes with another list of how a principal influences student outcomes while not examining *how* the principal's actions result in student outcomes. The research of instructional leaders' interaction with others begins to tell us how a principal influences student learning by examining the social interaction among two or more individuals involved in improving instruction, but is limited to overt and observable behaviors. Research that focuses on cognitive frames examines the principal's thinking, which includes knowledge and beliefs. It appears that the cognitive frame of how instructional leaders impact their work with improving instruction and learning is an area rich with potential in research in instructional leadership.

### **Leadership Content Knowledge**

One emerging example of research of cognitive frames that examines instructional leader thinking, behavior, interaction with others and student learning outcomes is leadership content knowledge. A principal may make meaning of information and situations through leadership content knowledge. It is a framework for connecting instructional leadership to subject matter and instruction. For example, how one observes a lesson for the purpose of teacher evaluation is based on her understanding of the subject matter or instructional strategies. Research on principals' content knowledge demonstrates that content knowledge is important and can

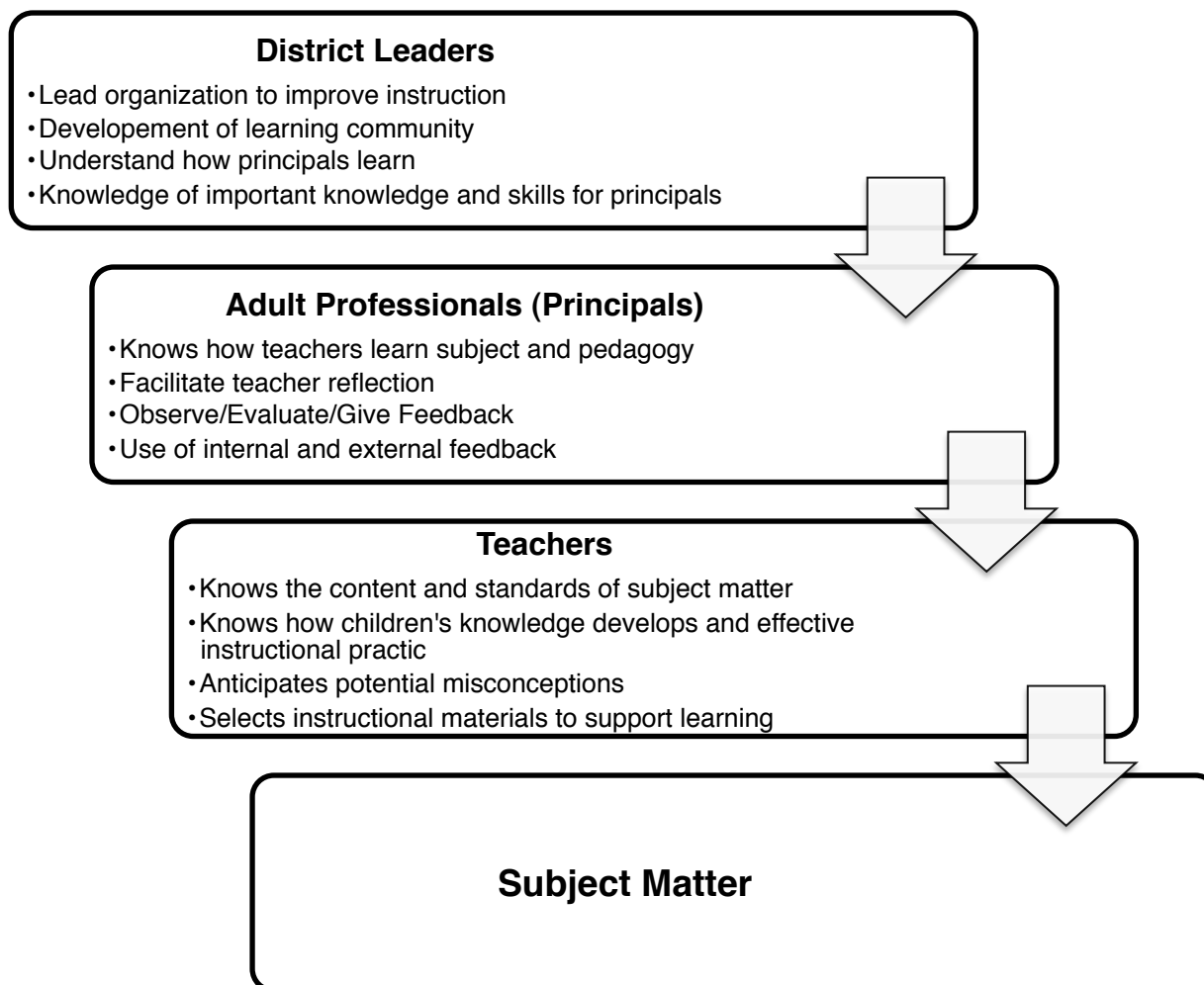


influence the work of a principal (Nelson & Sassi, 2000a, 2000b; Prestine & Nelson, 2003). We know that principals' leadership content knowledge influences how they observe classroom instruction, work with teachers and structure teacher professional development (Nelson & Sassi, 2005; Prestine & Nelson, 2003; Stein & Nelson, 2003). Principals draw on their leadership content knowledge to develop understanding of their work with others in the context of improving instruction.

Stein and her colleagues (Stein & D'Amico, 2000; Stein & Nelson, 2003) define the intersection of subject matter, instruction, and leadership as *leadership content knowledge*. Leadership content knowledge for school leaders is analogous to pedagogical content knowledge for teachers. Pedagogical content knowledge is the transformation of subject matter knowledge for teaching (Shulman, 1986). Leadership content knowledge is the transformation of subject matter knowledge for leadership. *Pedagogical content knowledge* as proposed by Shulman in 1986 included how teachers should understand the subject matter, so that they could help others learn it. This includes an understanding of what makes the learning of topics difficult, conceptions that students of different ages and backgrounds bring with them to the learning, strategies that are effective for student learning, and likely misconceptions of students in the learning process.

Stein and Nelson (2003) illustrate the concept of leadership content knowledge in three case studies of instructional leadership - an elementary principal doing classroom observations, an associate superintendent leading a curriculum adoption committee, and a district office designing district-wide mathematics education reform. They show, for example, that as the administrator moved away from the classroom, the needed knowledge remained anchored in the knowledge of the subject and how students learn it. But, the different functions of the three administrators appeared to require different amounts of knowledge and different kinds of knowledge based on the function of the activity from classroom observations to facilitating a curriculum adoption to designing ongoing district professional development on mathematics reform. The relationship between educators at different levels of the educational organization and content knowledge provides a context for identifying and analyzing the knowledge they use in their work. Stein and Nelson suggest that at every level of the organization, administrators need to know how to help the other adults within their scope of influence to learn. This study is important because it presents new dimensions of instructional leadership, which connects leadership to learning and teaching. This conception is illustrated in Figure 1, below.

Figure 1. Leadership content knowledge: Relationships and responsibilities among roles (Modified from Stein and Nelson, 2003)



In Figure 1, above, the bottom box represents the subject matter that the students are to learn. The successive boxes represent the roles of school personnel. The “leader” of each level is responsible for teaching the content of his previous box. For example, teachers are responsible for teaching the students the subject matter. This includes not just understanding the subject matter but also knowing how students’ knowledge develops, effective instructional strategies and potential misconceptions that students may have. The next box above represents the group adult professionals such as principals. Principals are responsible for the learning of the teachers. In order to design and facilitate the learning of teachers, they need to know what the next step is for teacher learning and observing and giving feedback to teachers inside the context of teacher evaluation and/or teacher coaching. The principal is the leader responsible for working with teachers to improve their teaching (how to help the teacher be more effective at teaching their students subject matter). Their work will include everything in the previous boxes; subject matter, pedagogy and how students learn. The principal’s added responsibility from the third level is that they have to know about teachers as adult learners. The essence of the concept of leadership content knowledge is this intersection of the subject matter and instruction, but also how to work

with the teacher so that the learning results from the interaction. It is the role of the district leaders in the fourth box, labeled “District Leaders”, to lead the learning of principals and teachers to work together to improve the effectiveness of the teacher’s instruction of subject matter to their students.

At every level in the organization, administrators need to know about how the other adults in their purview learn so they can best assist others with their learning. According to the constructivist view of this learning, the principal (or school leader) is responsible for understanding the learning needs of teachers from teachers themselves, arranging interactive opportunities and environments that have the right mix of expertise and appropriate tasks across staff to develop learning, motivating teachers, and ensuring the availability of adequate resources (time, money or materials) to support learning at all levels, including the students (Krug, 1992). Facilitating learning within an organization is an important dimension of leadership content knowledge. The nested learning community in Figure 1 described by Stein and Nelson (2003) holds the teachers responsible for facilitating the learning of students, the principal responsible for facilitating the learning of teachers, and district leaders responsible for facilitating the learning of principals.

While this work in leadership content knowledge is promising, it is undeveloped. Questions still remain. What does leadership content knowledge look like? How does leadership content knowledge influence the work of the principal?

### **Subject Matter Differences**

Subject matter understanding is consequential for administrators as it shapes decision-making. Most of the research done on leadership content knowledge has been done in the area of mathematics (Nelson & Sassi, 2005; Nelson et al., 2001; Stein & Nelson, 2003). But principals view and use content knowledge in different subjects in different ways.

### **Mathematics and Reading**

Three studies that examined the differences between mathematics and reading in school leadership found that school leaders were less likely to mention the importance of teacher input in mathematics reforms than in literacy reforms, and viewed expertise beyond the school as critical to mathematics reform (Burch & Spillane, 2003, 2005; Stein & D’Amico, 1999). Principals were less prominent in leading math instruction than literacy instruction. School leaders more often attributed improvements in mathematics in schools to the use of an established curriculum. Administrators focused improvement of instruction in mathematics on increasing teachers’ mathematical content knowledge and paid little attention to instruction. School leaders were more likely to mention the value of a teacher’s input in literacy than in mathematics. In literacy, little attention was paid to improving teachers’ literacy content knowledge and focused on instructional delivery.

There exists little research on leadership content knowledge in reading. Szabocsik (2008) studied LCK in reading and found that administrators who have a deep understanding of reading can better recognize and support literacy instruction and identify and improve ineffective instructional practices. Overholt (2008) found that administrators with more “expert” LCK were

more detailed in their discussion of literacy practices and clearer and more directive in their communications with teachers around reading. There is a need for more information on how school leaders use their knowledge and leadership in other school subjects at different levels. Based on the research on subject matter differences in how expertise is viewed, a subject specific look at how a principal uses subject matter knowledge would be an important contribution to the research (Burch & Spillane, 2003, 2005; Stein & D'Amico, 2000). Next we'll look at writing, the subject matter focus of this study.

## **Writing**

Writing is an essential foundational skill for students at all levels and crucial to school and career success. Writing acts as a gatekeeper in schools. Assessments and assignments require students to be proficient writers in order to show mastery of most subject areas. If one does not learn to write well, they will struggle in classes where writing is the primary means for demonstrating proficiency such as essay tests, reports and high stakes assessments of writing (Graham, MacArthur, & Fitzgerald, 2007a). Writing is an essential skill for higher education, employment or participating in social and community activities. "Yet every year in the United States, large numbers of students graduate from high school unable to write at the basic levels required by colleges or employers" (Graham & Perin, 2007). High-level literacy skills are fundamental for employee success in the service industry including finance, insurance, real estate, construction, and manufacturing. According to the National Commission Writing in 2004 and 2006, (as cited in Graham & Hebert, 2010) almost 70 percent of salaried employees in these industries use writing as part of their jobs. Over 90 percent of white-collar workers and 80 percent of blue-collar workers indicate that writing skills are important to job success.

In addition to its essential benefits to academic progress and employment, the act of writing itself provides benefits to students beyond becoming strong writers. Writing clarifies thinking, helps students to learn about other subject areas and improves reading (Bruer, 1999; Calkins & Pessah, 2008; Graham & Hebert, 2010). Good writing requires clear statements with supporting details to help the reader understand the writer's thinking. Through the process of writing, students learn to organize and extend their thinking. (Bruer, 1999; Calkins, 1994). During the writing process, students gather their ideas around a particular topic, organize those ideas, and then work to communicate those ideas in a way that will effectively impact their audience. The writing process is a way to extend thinking and reasoning on paper (Graham & Hebert, 2010; Shanahan, 2006; Tierney, Soter, O'Flahavan, & McGinley, 1989).

Reading and writing are interrelated; learning to write helps students become better readers. While many practitioners have long advocated for writing as a means to improve reading, a meta-analysis by Graham and Hebert (2010) confirmed that writing practices have been found to be effective in increasing reading skills and reading comprehension. They found that students' comprehension of science, social studies and language arts texts improve when they write about what they read by responding to text in writing (i.e. summarize a text, write notes or answer questions about a text in writing). They found that reading comprehension improved when teachers taught the process of writing, examined text structures, and explicitly taught paragraph or sentence construction skills. Reading fluency also improved when the teachers taught spelling and sentence construction skills. Finally, Graham and Hebert found that

students' reading comprehension improved by having students increase how much they produced their own writing.

Writing is regarded as one of the three basic school subjects (Reading, Writing & Mathematics) yet is unevenly taught throughout schools. Cutler and Graham (2008) conducted a random sample of primary grade teachers across the United States, 178 teachers completed a survey about their instructional practices in writing. The survey asked about the types and frequency of writing activities students engage in during the school year and how frequently teachers use specific writing practices. The findings revealed that 75 percent of primary teachers reported a varied approach to teaching writing, combining instructional practices from both process writing and a skills approach. There was considerable variability between teachers in terms of how much they applied each of the writing practices. The median time teachers reported that their students spent writing was 20 minutes per day, a small percentage of the school day.

Writing becomes even more essential to student success as the student advances through to middle school and high school. Applebee and Langer (2009) found by reviewing NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) data for 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders that many students are not writing for much time in any of their academic subjects including English. Forty percent of 12<sup>th</sup> grade students report not being required to write a paper of three pages or more. Long-term analysis of writing achievement is remarkably stable. In 2007, only 31 percent of students in eighth grade and 23 percent in twelfth grade were rated as proficient in writing.

The data suggests the need to do a better job teaching writing from Kindergarten through high school. There is agreement by the researchers on best practices in writing instruction and the teaching of writing is not marked by huge debates. There is agreement that students need to work through the writing process and that they benefit from direct, explicit instruction. Student topic choice is an important element to students becoming proficient writers; when students choose their own topic, they write in a more authentic, thoughtful way and they are motivated to complete their task to the best of their ability (Calkins, 1994). There is also agreement that the assessment of student work provides evidence for what students can, and cannot, do and that the process of learning to write is developmental in that students improve step by step over time in a predictable way (Calkins & Pessah, 2008). However, there is virtually no research on the role of school leaders in promoting strong writing instruction.

There are a growing number of books written to help principals lead writing reform by bridging the gap between knowledge and practice (Calkins & Pessah, 2008; Graham, MacArthur, & Fitzgerald, 2007b; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2002; National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006). The books work to develop principal expertise, develop strategies for implementation of a writing reform and suggest ways to overcome obstacles to success. Despite the importance of leadership in writing, there is insufficient empirical research about what principals need to know in order to lead instructional reform efforts in writing. Two studies suggest principal leadership content knowledge in writing as an important element to a strong writing program. (Coldren & Spillane, 2007; McGhee & Lew, 2007). A survey of 169 elementary and secondary principals found those who have knowledge of effective writing practices act in ways that help teachers teach writing such as providing quality professional development, modeling the writing process and providing time to talk about and exchange ideas

about writing (McGhee & Lew, 2007). The large-scale survey provides a list of activities that the principals engaged in yet more information is needed to understand how instructional leadership works with writing. In order to understand instructional leadership in writing as a practice, “we need to understand how leaders do what they do well as the role of context in shaping what they do” (Coldren & Spillane, 2007, p. 16) A case-study of one principal with strong knowledge in writing described how she influenced teaching practice through routines that allowed her to connect with writing instruction. She reviewed student-writing folders to monitor and give feedback to students and teachers. She used student assessment data to analyze the effectiveness of instruction and to discuss instruction with teachers (Coldren & Spillane, 2007).

Writing instruction is essential for success in school and in the workforce. Yet, it continues to be neglected in our classrooms. The research is clear on best practices, and materials to support teachers are easily found. Writing instruction continues to be the least understood by practitioners. The leading force in a school is the principal. The instructional leadership he provides guides the instructional program of the school. The school’s leader positioned to promote instructional improvement in writing. The research leadership content knowledge is promising, yet it is undeveloped in the subject area of writing. We need to know what does leadership content knowledge look like in writing and how does leadership content knowledge influence the work of the principal?

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to describe how elementary principals use leadership content knowledge in their work to improve instruction and student learning in writing. My study will be guided by the following question:

How, if at all, does leadership content knowledge in writing influence the work of the principal?

This study will also seek to answer the following sub-questions:

What is leadership content knowledge in writing?

How does leadership content knowledge affect how a principal interacts with teachers in writing?

How do principals use leadership content knowledge when they think about their work?

### **Conceptual Framework**

*Leadership content knowledge* has been previously defined in this thesis as the overlap of knowledge of subject matter and instruction in leadership. It is knowing the subject matter and instruction in such a way that one can lead an individual or group to improve instruction. In this study, leadership content knowledge serves as a lens to focus on the study of how principals use what they know about teaching, learning and leadership in their administrative practice. It suggests that an organization or a leader may come to view and understand their work through the lens of what they know about teaching and leadership (Coburn, 2005; McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001; Nelson et al., 2004; Nelson & Sassi, 2000a, 2000b, 2005; Stein & Nelson, 2003). In this

study, leadership content knowledge provides greater specification about the frames in which principals lead instruction.

I am drawing on **sensemaking theory** and the concept of **leadership content knowledge** to provide the conceptual tools for this study of elementary principals implementing a writing reform. Sensemaking is a theory of how people in organizations come to understand situations. Understanding and learning happens in organizations through participation in social communities, engagement in meaningful discussions, and work and using resources that help participants to deepen their understanding. In thinking of how research and knowledge of teaching and learning can be integrated with leadership, one could begin by examining the organizational theory of sensemaking. Previous theories of instructional leadership do not take into account the interaction of the leader with others and the context of how knowledge is shared among groups (Leithwood & Hallinger, 1993).

In this study, sensemaking theory serves two purposes. First, sensemaking theory allows one to see the actions, decisions, and understandings between individuals such as the principal and teachers working together to improve instruction. Sensemaking, as an analytic approach, tries to explain how social context shapes the meaning making process. Decision-making happens in a social context, but the influence of social context is often overlooked.

Sensemaking theorists argue that individuals make meaning of an event by viewing it through a cognitive frame of references. Those frames include one's integrated set of beliefs and assumptions. The second purpose for this theory is the acknowledgement that sensemaking involves "a frame, a cue, and a connection - with frames tending to be past moments of socialization and cues tending to be present moments of experience" (Weick, 1995, p. 111). One implicitly or explicitly relies on a cognitive frame (a set of beliefs, values or assumptions). These frames act as filters or lenses on how a situation is seen (and from which sense is made). As the individual doing the observation and interviews in this study, I know that what I pay attention to will be determined by my "filter" or "lens" of writing instruction and leadership.

This study uses sensemaking theory to investigate how leadership content knowledge in writing influences the work of the principal. Practical judgment is the quick decision making that is involved in taking action. School principals make many decisions in the course of their work each day in complex situations. Exercising practical judgment includes making subtle decisions about what to pay attention to, interpreting the significance of the factor, and making a decision or choice (Lipsky, 1983). Sensemaking theory also suggests that what people pay attention to, how they make meaning of that information and how they act is based on one's previous experience (Weick, 1995). How does leadership content knowledge affect how a principal interacts with teachers in writing? Administrators make practical judgments several times each day. For a principal, practical judgment may be involved in what they pay attention to in a teacher observation, what they say when they coach a teacher, or what steps they take to implement a reform (Nelson & Sassi, 2000a).

The following chapter, Chapter 2, details the research design and methodology used in this study to determine how, if at all, does leadership content knowledge in writing influence the work of the principal.

## CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate how elementary principals use leadership content knowledge in their work to improve instruction and student learning in writing, I used a cross case study of three principals, all of whom were implementing Writing Workshop through the *Every Child a Reader and Writer* program. Yin recommends “case studies when the “how” or “why” questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (Yin, 1994, p. 9). My interest in how principals use knowledge about writing, instruction, professional development, and leadership in their administrative practice fits these conditions.

This cross case-study methodology enabled a rich examination and illustration of the work of the principal through interviews and observations and comparison to the work of other principals with different levels of leadership content knowledge. I knew from two pilot studies that the transformation of subject matter knowledge in writing for the purpose of writing was difficult to see and document, so I selected three principals with a range of leadership content knowledge to maximize my opportunities to observe principals using leadership content knowledge in their work with teachers. Observing these three principals helped me to understand the various ways that principals use content knowledge. Comparing three principals with different levels of leadership content knowledge allow consideration of whether content knowledge was transformed for the purpose of leadership. This provided evidence to answer the question: How, if at all, does leadership content knowledge in writing influence the work of the principal? Furthermore, focusing on three principals rather than a larger number allowed for an in-depth investigation necessary to examine principals’ knowledge and practice to connect how principals use leadership content knowledge to connect to the decisions and ideas in their work as school leaders (Coburn, 2005; March, Sproull, & Tamuz, 1991; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Nelson & Sassi, 2000a; Yin, 1994).

### **Writing Program Selection**

*Every Child a Reader and Writer (ECRW)* was an extensive writing program funded by the Noyce Foundation. I selected the *Every Child a Reader and Writer (ECRW)* program for three reasons. First, the program’s view of writing reform was that sustainability required developing expertise and leadership in the principals. A second reason for studying principals involved in the *ECRW* program was the underlying belief of the program that deep change in instructional practice requires ongoing support from the principal (Wilson, Duffy, Fiori, Halladay, & Mapuranga, 2006). The third reason for using the *ECRW* program as a site for the research was that as a principal also involved in the program, I had access to a number of principals who were willing to participate in interviews and observations. (The program is described in more detail in chapter 3.)

### **Data Collection**

Data collection consisted of two phases. The first phase was the initial interview phase used to determine the study sample and the second phase was the interview and observation phase of the three selected principals.



## Phase I: Sampling

I used a purposive sampling strategy (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to select participants who could help illuminate the connection between writing content knowledge and leadership. Specifically, I interviewed eight elementary school principals who were working in their schools to implement Writing Workshop within the *ECRW* initiative with the intent of finding three principals with high, moderate and developing leadership content knowledge. The purpose was to identify three principals to compare their practices to demonstrate that leadership content knowledge in writing influences principal practice. The contrast among the principals was intended to indicate how a principal with strong leadership content knowledge thinks or acts differently in their work with teachers than a principal with less strong leadership content knowledge.

I consulted with *ECRW* staff on principals who cover the range of leadership content knowledge in writing. As a principal involved in *ECRW*, I had the advantage of having met most of the principals through *ECRW* trainings and meetings. I contacted the eight principals from the larger pool through e-mail to arrange the initial interview.

The initial interview took place at the principal's school site and lasted approximately an hour. Each principal signed an informed consent to participate document outlining the purpose and procedures of the study and detailing the measures to be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the participating subjects. Each subject agreed to have the interview digitally recorded so that it could be transcribed. The initial interview included questions about the principal's educational and work experience, including training in writing as a teacher or principal. It also focused on the principal's knowledge of writing by asking questions about how students learn to write and the connection of reading and writing. The initial interview questions are included in Appendix A.

The interview also included the principal reviewing a sample of a third grader's writing from the informational genre where the principal was asked to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the writing (knowledge of writing), suggest how they would work with the student to improve the writing (knowledge of writing and instruction), and how to work with the teacher to improve the student's writing (knowledge of writing, instruction, and professional development). The purpose of this part of the interview was to measure the principal's relative knowledge of writing and knowledge of instruction. The principals' responses were compared to the *ECRW* commentary sheet provided with the anchor paper as a way of assessing knowledge of student writing and leadership content knowledge in writing. Principals who described the work with the student in a way that was consistent with the commentary provided by the *ECRW* Scoring Anchor papers were considered to have higher leadership content knowledge than an individual that did not have answers consistent with the anchor paper criteria.

Based on the information garnered through the first round of interviews, I selected three principals with a varied level of content knowledge in writing. I selected one principal with strong leadership content knowledge in writing, one principal with a moderate level of leadership content knowledge and one with limited leadership content knowledge in writing.

I used the following criteria to assess principal's level of content knowledge: knowledge of how students learn, knowledge of effective instructional practice in writing and knowledge of

leadership strategies. I developed the criteria for selecting the principals to be determined as having high, moderate, and developing leadership content knowledge by reviewing the work of Stein and Nelson (2003), Nelson and Sassi (2000a) and Coburn (2005). In addition, I also consulted the *ECRW* Leadership profile for practices, behaviors and habits of principals who promote strong school-wide writing programs (Every Child a Reader and Writer, 2009).

The criteria for selecting and classifying the three principals as having high, moderate and developing leadership content knowledge can be seen in Table 1. Indicators of high LCK in knowledge of how students learned was providing an example of using the connection of reading and writing in his work, understanding how children learn to write and identification of common misperceptions in writing. High LCK in knowledge of effective instructional practice was marked by extensive experience in teaching writing and scoring student writing, and a rich description of writing instruction that includes modeling, facilitating and guiding. High LCK in knowledge of leadership strategies was indicated by evidence of developing the capacity of the school, frequent engagement in conversations with teachers about student's writing, experience facilitating opportunities for teachers to learn and consideration of multiple steps and agreement needed to come to a complex decision.

Table 1

*Criteria for Classifying Subjects as Developing, Moderate or High Leadership Content Knowledge*

Source	Developing LCK	Moderate LCK	High LCK
<p>Knowledge about how students learn</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How children's knowledge develops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does not indicate reading/writing relationship</li> <li>Focuses on the product of writing vs. process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mentions relationship of reading and writing, but cannot articulate the mechanism by which learning one supports the development of the other.</li> <li>Provides more information on the process of writing</li> <li>Able to identify a few key developments in the process by which children learn to write, but misses a few and is not able to go into detail about any of them....</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describes benefit of using the connection between reading and writing/ provides examples or details</li> <li>Understanding of how children learn to write</li> <li>Able to identify the major developmental stages that children pass through as they learn to write. Able to describe most of these stages in some degree of detail.</li> <li>Able to identify common misperceptions or errors in writing.</li> </ul>
<p>Knowledge about effective instructional practice in writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What does good instruction look like?</li> <li>Characteristics of instruction and use of instructional material to support student learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited experience in teaching writing</li> <li>Focus on most surface features of the reform</li> <li>Teacher teaches content and students learn</li> <li>Supportive but not involved</li> <li>Little knowledge of assessment</li> <li>Limited description of good writing instruction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is an equal participant in staff development</li> <li>Uses <i>ECRW</i> writing tools (rubrics and anchor papers) to guide work with teaching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive experience in teaching students writing</li> <li>Good instruction is modeling, facilitating, and guiding</li> <li>Experienced with scoring of student writing in more than one genre.</li> <li>Describes multiple indicators for good writing instruction (in-depth answers)</li> </ul>
<p>Knowledge of leadership strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Characteristics of professional development that support teacher learning</li> <li>Link between teacher learning and developing instructional practice</li> <li>Leverage resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rely heavily on the expertise of others</li> <li>Focus on logistics of professional development</li> <li>Considers one or two steps to implement a complex decision</li> <li>Rely on <i>ECRW</i> or District to develop capacity of teachers</li> <li>Teacher observation and supervision is a symbolic routine rather than intervention or leverage point</li> <li>Provides limited feedback outside of the teacher evaluation process.</li> <li>Limited engagement with teachers about students' development in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Considers the multiple steps to implement a complex decision but acts on only one step</li> <li>Provides limited feedback to teachers through either evaluation or coaching process</li> <li>Has some conversations with some teachers around students' writing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arrange interactive social activities opportunities with right mix of expertise and appropriate tasks to spur learning</li> <li>Use of teacher content knowledge to improve teacher practice- partner teachers, grade level groups (deliberate grouping)</li> <li>Consider multiple steps, agreements and level of support necessary to implement a complex decision.</li> <li>Develop capacity of teachers within school</li> <li>Use teacher evaluation process to focus teacher efforts on school wide goals</li> </ul>

Source	Developing LCK	Moderate LCK	High LCK
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• writing</li> <li>• Plays role of cheerleader from the sidelines</li> <li>• Hierarchical structure of leadership (because I am the principal?)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequently engaged in conversations with teachers about students' development in writing</li> </ul>

## Phase II: Observations and Interviews of Three Principals

Criteria for subject selection into phase II of the study was also having three principals who were willing to participate in observations and interviews for up to four months, an opportunity to observe ongoing work in school-wide implementation of writing workshop, and an openness to share thoughts during the interviews. All of those factors being equal, I selected principals whose school demographics were most similar in order to minimize differences based on possible student or teacher populations.

I interviewed three principals that met the criteria for *high leadership content knowledge*. Two of the three potential high leadership content subjects were unable to participate in phase II of the study because the principal's and school's instructional focus for the school year was reading workshop rather than writing workshop and would not provide the opportunity to observe the principal leading the writing initiative. Three of the principals interviewed met the criteria for *moderate leadership content knowledge*. One was not interested in continuing to participate beyond phase I of the study. Of the two remaining subjects, I selected the principal who would provide the most opportunity to observe leading writing reform with fewer competing initiatives. The principal who was not selected with moderate content knowledge was in the first year of implementing a large federal magnet grant which would compete for time in implementing and supporting the writing reform. Finally there were two subjects that met the criteria for *developing leadership content knowledge*. I selected the one that did not work in my school district. The three principals who were selected and agreed to participate in phase II were Ann, Mark and Brenda. A detailed description of three subjects and their schools is in chapter 3.

**Data collection.** After selecting the three principals for the main part of the study, I began the second stage of data collection, observing and interviewing the three principals to investigate the link between knowledge and practice. In order to investigate the impact of leadership content knowledge on principal's leadership, I needed a way to sample principal's leadership practice. Following work by Nelson and Sassi (2000a), I used what they called *units of practice*.

A unit of practice is a small, focused moment of administrative practice and was intended to limit the attention of this study. For example, one could examine a principal's work with a teacher on how to implement the Writing Workshop model in the teacher's classroom or a grade level on improving instruction in a particular writing genre or with a whole staff on focusing on a particular strategy or teaching point throughout the grade levels. I identified one unit of practice with each of the three principals. The following criteria were presented for the unit of practice at the initial interview:

1. The topic of study must include ideas about writing instruction

2. The unit of practice would take place over weeks or months and have specific occasions on which practical judgment is used.
3. It must include making consequential decisions.
4. It must be observable.

I worked with the principals to identify a unit of practice for the study. Brenda, the principal with developing leadership content knowledge worked with her staff to get the teachers to share one piece of student writing with next year's teacher as a way of beginning a student writing portfolio. The three observations included a planning meeting with the literacy lead teacher and two staff meetings. With Matt, there was no clearly identified unit of practice but rather a general look at Matt's work in implementing *ECRW* at his school. Therefore Matt's observations included an afternoon of classroom walkthroughs, a staff reading and writing workshop unit planning session, and a professional development opportunity called a lab site. Ann's unit of practice focused broadly on professional development for teachers in writing and supporting English Learners through developing language. Thus her observations included two coaching cycles and a professional development session with the English Learner consultant. Table 2 is a summary of the observations and unit of practice for each principal.

I conducted three observations of each principal's work in staff meetings, walkthroughs or small group meetings with teachers. Each observation included a pre-observation interview, observation and post-observation interview. Each interview was recorded and transcribed and I took ethnographic field notes for each observation (Creswell, 1998). Documents used by the principal in the observations were collected and analyzed. A record of the dates of interviews and documents collected are included in the appendix.

The pre-observation interview included basic questions about what the researcher should expect to see in the observation and attempt to have the principal discuss the reasons for selecting the activity to be observed and the goals of the activity and how this activity fits into the overall goals of the principal's unit of practice. A sample of the pre-interview questions is included in Appendix B.

Following each observation, I reviewed the transcript of the previous interviews and the field notes of the observation and formulated the post-observation interview questions. Questions asked in the post-observation interview were different for each principal based on the activity and outcome of the observation. The post-observation questions focused on the observation, attempted to uncover the principal's thinking about decisions and actions, and to ask about the role of knowledge of writing. An outline of post-observation questions is also included in Appendix B. For example if, during the interview, it was observed that the principal directed one group in a different manner than another group, a post-observation question would ask why the principal directed the two groups differently.

Table 2

*Observations and Units of Practice*

Subject	Observations	Unit of practice
Brenda	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Planning meeting with Literacy Lead Teacher</li> <li>2. Staff Meeting</li> <li>3. Staff Meeting</li> </ol>	Developing a Writing Portfolio
Mark	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Classroom Walkthroughs</li> <li>2. Staff Unit Planning</li> <li>3. Lab site</li> </ol>	None identified
Ann	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Coaching Cycle and Debrief with Teachers</li> <li>2. Professional Development Session with EL Consultant</li> <li>3. Coaching Cycle and Debrief with Teachers</li> </ol>	Professional Development

**Data Analysis**

The data from the initial interview was used to select the principals to participate in phase II of this study but also used in the data analysis when comparing among the three principals in knowledge and how principals use that knowledge in their work.

I began data collection and analysis by reading the transcripts of the interviews and field notes from the observations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I analyzed field notes and interview transcripts for emerging patterns or themes, which guided the development of codes. I coded the transcripts and notes first by hand and then used the QSR Nvivo 8 software program. First, I coded the data using descriptive codes based on the work of Stein and Nelson (2003). I used a framework of themes under which I put all initial codes. The initial codes were 11 codes based on the coding framework suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) and included setting/context, activities, events and structures.

I developed a hybrid coding system employing both deductive and inductive techniques (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I did not know how principal's leadership practice would be impacted but began based on the work done in LCK in Math (Nelson & Sassi, 2000a; Prestine & Nelson, 2003; Stein & Spillane, 2005). I developed codes using a deductive process described by Miles and Huberman (1994) of determining emerging themes that demonstrate how leadership content knowledge was connected to decisions and ideas in administrative practice. I identified patterns that emerged from the data. When themes emerged, I coded the data a second time to verify initial themes or uncover disconfirming evidence (Creswell, 1998, 2003). The majority of the sub-codes fell into the two codes of events and activities.

One example of the hybrid coding system I developed is in the initial code of event. Brenda had 5 references to the sub-code of Examine Student Work and Ann had 12 references. A closer examination of those codes showed that Brenda discussed the examining student work in a superficial manner with a focus on logistics while Ann had several in-depth descriptions of examining student work as a tool to promote teacher learning.

I went back to the data a third time to recode the data set particularly around the code of Knowledge defined as acts, information or skills possessed by an individual. Knowledge had the subcodes of knowledge of professional development, knowledge of instruction, knowledge of writing, knowledge of subject (other than writing), knowledge of standards, teacher knowledge of writing, teacher knowledge of instruction and leadership content knowledge.

After the coding was complete, I began within-case analysis, analyzing how each principal used their content knowledge in their leadership practices. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that displaying data in a reduced, systematic way is a great way to develop the understanding of the researcher and later for the reader. Matrices are a visual display of two or more main dimensions to see how they interact or overlap to further the understanding of the data. I began to organize the data into code frequency matrices by individual case. I developed separate matrices for events, activities, and knowledge by case including the evidence from the interviews and observations. Then, I proceeded to cross-case analysis, paying particular attention to differences between the principals with high leadership content knowledge and those with moderate and developing leadership content knowledge. I used code frequency charts and evidence matrices to make contrasts and comparisons between subjects. Following the analysis of the data, I wrote memos to detail emerging patterns from the comparisons between subjects. Summaries of the themes and evidence provided an opportunity to clarify and support the identified themes.

### **Generalizability, Validity, and Reliability**

A common concern of case study research is that this research method provides no basis for scientific generalization. While this case study of three principals does not provide the opportunity to generalize to all principals, it does provide an opportunity to generalize to a theoretical proposition of leadership content knowledge. The goal is not to generalize to a sample, but rather to expand the theory of leadership content knowledge and generalize the knowledge in the area of writing (Yin, 1994).

Yin (1994) describes two types of validity that are pertinent to this case study; construct validity and external validity. Construct validity is establishing the correct operational measures for the concept being measured. To gather information on leadership content knowledge in writing, this study used multiple sources of evidence; interviews, observation and artifact review. The triangulation of data from these three sources was intended allow examination of information from three sources in order to justify themes. The second tactic that ensured construct validity is that I maintained a chain of evidence from the case study questions, to the case study protocols, to the data, to the coded data, to the case study report. This allowed me to go back to check the conclusions drawn from the data that are evidence of leadership content knowledge.

External validity in a case study requires analytical generalization from the results to a broader theory. To ensure that the findings from this study can be used to generalize to a broader theory, I used triangulated data from three sources; interviews, observations and artifact analysis. Clarifying the bias that I bring to the research will permit a fair portrayal of the findings. I explored confirming and disconfirming evidence to ensure that the findings are accurate and generalizable to a broader theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1994).

Reliability in a case study requires demonstration that the operations such as data collection and data analysis can be repeated with the same results. I developed a case study protocol which included information such as an overview of the project, the data collection procedures, interview and observation protocols, and the guidelines for developing a case study report (Yin, 1994).

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this study include a small number of principals and schools located in one 50-mile region in the San Francisco Bay Area. Three principals were selected using purposive sampling so that there was one principal for each category of leadership content knowledge in writing. More principals could have been included in each of the three categories or there could have been a larger continuum of leadership content knowledge across more than three principals.

This study was conducted from January to June of one school year. A longer study that covered one school year or followed the principals from January to December would show some of the important work that principals do at the end of the school year and the beginning of the school year to implement support for writing. More observations over a longer period would provide a broader picture of the work of the principal.

The context in which principals are situated impacts their work. Principals are influenced by their school district, school culture, and the staff and students at their school. While this study attempted to select three principals from similar settings, the three principals all worked under different conditions and with different resources so that the findings are not applicable to all principals.

In chapter 3, I describe the *Every Child a Reader and Writer* program, each of the three principals and their schools in detail. The findings of the analysis are described in chapters 4 and 5.



## CHAPTER 3: THE WRITING PROGRAM, THE PRINCIPALS AND THEIR SCHOOLS

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the *Every Child a Reader and Writer* program, the principals and their schools to set the context for the principal's work.

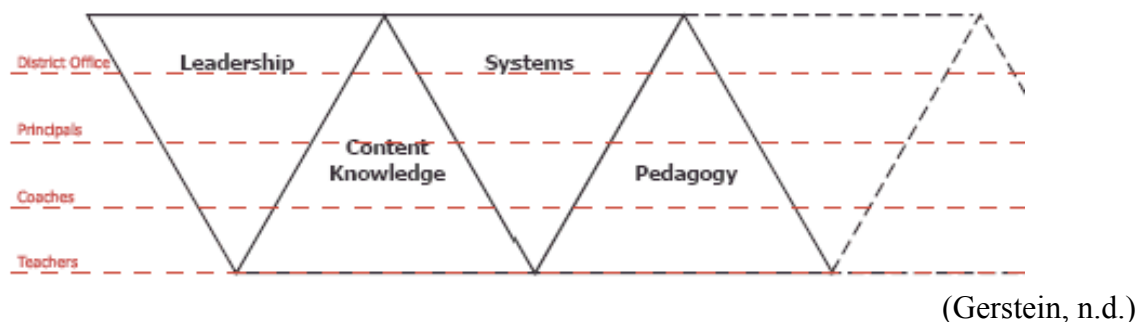
### **The Writing Program**

*Every Child a Reader and Writer (ECRW)* was an extensive writing initiative that relied heavily on teacher expertise. The cornerstone of *ECRW* was the Writing Workshop process of teaching writing. In order to be effective, teachers needed to understand content knowledge in writing, the performance standards and how to use the student writing to inform decisions about instruction. Teachers and principals new to the program participated in a three-day summer induction program and five days of training through out the school year. In the first two years of *ECRW*, the summer institute was five days long and in the third and subsequent years, the summer institute was three days followed by five days of classroom visits and instruction during the school year (Wilson et al., 2006). As they implemented Writing Workshop in their classrooms, teachers learned to use children's literature that modeled writing craft. At the same time, they read professional literature about writing and writing instruction, and wrote within the narrative genre themselves. Often, implementation included working with a coach, who observed the teacher during writing instruction, found resources, conferenced about student writing or modeled a lesson. Assumptions of the program were that adopting a school-wide writing workshop model would require most teachers to make significant changes in their practice and in their understanding of teaching, learning, and writing. The program assumed that substantial, deep change does not happen quickly and that teachers needed be supported during their process of change (Wilson et al., 2006).

The Noyce Foundation completed funding and support of the *ECRW* project in 2009, with the primary responsibilities of the program being turned over to the participating districts. In the final year of funding, *Every Child a Reader and Writer* prioritized professional development for the principals in order to sustain the program. As the Noyce Foundation ended both the financial and organizational support available to districts for seven years, developing principal expertise and support for how to lead a writing reform was a focus for the final years of funding.

The Noyce Foundation believed the sustainability of reform depends on developing expertise and leadership capabilities of teachers and principals. Principals attended induction training and professional development throughout the year, which included professional reading and support for developing and implementing school-wide vision of a writing program and making organizational change. Another component of the Noyce Foundation's theory of action was that actors throughout the system need to acquire knowledge and develop skills that will support the reform. The focus on the entire system can be pictured in this figure below (Figure 2).

Figure 2. A Systemic approach to education professionals' development



The Noyce Foundation believed that all participants require some knowledge in the four domains (leadership, content knowledge, systems and pedagogy), but the level of knowledge needed in each of the domains depends on one's role in the system. A principal needs an extensive knowledge of leadership and systems but have some working knowledge of writing content knowledge and pedagogy (Wilson et al., 2006). The approach is consistent with the theory of leadership content knowledge, providing an ideal opportunity to study how leadership content knowledge is developed through participation in professional development and how previous experience is used in the improvement of writing instruction at the school level.

### The Principals

All three elementary principals in the study: Brenda, Matt and Ann,<sup>1</sup> were implementing the *Every Child a Reader and Writer* at his or her school. All three principals were White, between the ages of 50 to early 60's and had at least 6 years of experience as a principal. The schools were similar in that they were elementary schools in the San Francisco Bay Area with API scores in the range of 728 to 768. The subjects were selected for the differences in leadership content knowledge and some of this was apparent in the subjects' previous experience and training as both a teacher and a principal. This chapter will describe the principal's career as a teacher and administrator, and school demographic information including school performance.

#### Brenda and Her School

Brenda was the principal that was identified as developing her leadership content knowledge in writing. She had the least leadership content knowledge in writing of the three principals. Brenda has been the principal of Foothill Elementary School in the Brook Unified School District for four years. Prior to that she was the principal at a K-8 school in Mexico for three years. She was a White woman in her early 60s and was fluent in Spanish. Brenda had 15 years of elementary school teaching experience with seven years of teaching Kindergarten and four years teaching first grade. She was a bilingual resource teacher serving students in Kindergarten through fifth grade for one year. She taught middle school for one year in Mexico before becoming a principal.

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<sup>1</sup> All names of principals, schools and districts are pseudonyms.

Foothill School in the Brook School District was an elementary K-5 school. Refer to Table 3 below to compare the demographic profiles for the three schools. Foothill School had 350 students and 18 teachers in the 2007-2008 school year. Sixty-three percent of the students were eligible to receive free or reduced price lunch indicating that these students' families earn less than the federal guidelines for poverty. Sixty percent of the students were English Learners, which means that these students come from homes where a language other than English was spoken and the student was not proficient in English based on test scores on the California English Language Development Test and the student's academic progress. The student population at Foothill was predominately Hispanic with 67 percent of the students being Hispanic, 11 percent Filipino, 9 percent Pacific Islander, and 7 percent White.

The 2007 Base Academic Performance Index (API) for Foothill School was 728. The API is a numeric index ranging from 200 to 1000 and is calculated from the results for all the students who participated in the previous year's statewide standardized tests. The state of California has set 800 as the API target for all schools to meet. Schools are also ranked statewide in deciles 1 to 10 (lowest to highest) based on the school's API compared to all other elementary schools. This is known as the statewide rank. Foothill's statewide rank of 4 means that relative to all elementary schools in California, Foothill School was in the fourth decile of schools, below the median based on the API of 728.

In Table 3 below, all schools API scores are compared to elementary schools that have similar demographics based on 13 characteristics such as student mobility, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, the percentage of students who are English Learners and the percentage of students with disabilities. This is known as the similar schools rank. Foothill School's similar school rank was 6. Compared to schools with similar demographics, it scored above the median in the Academic Performance Index with a similar school rank of 6.

Table 3

*Demographic Profile of Three Schools*

	Brenda (Developing LCK)	Mark (Moderate LCK)	Ann (High LCK)
School Name	Foothill School	Keel School	Wiley School
District Name	Brook Unified School District	Olympic Unified School District	Rancho Unified School District
School Size			
Number of students	350	532	370
Numbers of teachers	18	25.5	20
2007 Base API	728	747	768
2007 Statewide Rank	4	5	6
2007 Similar Schools Rank	6	5	6
Percentage of students on free/reduced-price lunch	63	48	43
Percentage of students who are English Learners	65	47	40
Student Race/Ethnicity			
Hispanic	67	54	38
White	7	36	27
Asian	3	4	14
African American	3	1	4
Pacific Islander	9	0	1
Filipino	11	2	5

Brenda's own personal experience learning to write was rather traditional. It was focused on skills and grammar with little instruction in writing. Brenda said:

My own preparation, personal preparation, through the grade levels; it was basically you get a writing prompt... In my day, we had a lot of skill building in terms of grammar. *A lot*. I remember in eighth grade, we had to do every single exercise in the grammar book, what's the name of it; in fact I still have it at home, English grammar book. A lot of spelling. Reading was just basically out of your basic text, the required book report occasionally, but not real formal writing, per se, in terms of process. It was just assumed that you were already going to know the spelling and the grammar and apply it. So it was very superficial. So that's how I learned how to write. Consequently that's probably how I taught it, too, when I was teaching. (Brenda, Initial Interview)

Brenda did not recall any course work or preparation in her teacher credential program around writing. As a teacher, Brenda did remember professional development in reading but not in writing. When asked how she taught writing as a teacher, Brenda said, "I would connect with themes going on in the classroom, reading themes, reading units, perhaps social studies or science units as well" (Brenda, Initial Interview).

At the time of the interviews and observations, Foothill School was in its third year of participation in *ECRW*. Teachers participating in *ECRW* training attended a summer institute to learn many of the structures of writing workshop. During the institute, the teacher would learn from consultants and trainers about the teaching of writing workshop. The institute also had the principal and teacher participate in the writing process as writers. In the first two years of *ECRW*, the summer institute was five days long and in the third and subsequent years, the summer institute was three days followed by five days of classroom visits and instruction during the school year. The model for the principal training changed throughout the years as well. Initially, it began with a heavy emphasis on leadership and then moved to a model more similar to that of the teachers. The focus was more on the content of writing. Toward the end of the initiative in 2008, the emphasis for principal training had a strong instructional leadership component (Wilson et al., 2006).

The Brook Unified School District was an *ECRW* partner district. In 2001, *ECRW* looked to expand the number of districts and schools participating in writing workshop. Approximately 10 districts participated as partner districts. An *ECRW* partner district sent teachers and principals to *ECRW* trainings including summer writing induction. There was no financial assistance to support coaching but partner districts sent coaches and teacher leaders to coaching training. Noyce gave principals in partner districts the same support as principals in core districts. The primary difference was that most core districts were in the process of rolling out the initiative to all of the schools in the district where most partner schools had only a few schools participate. In the Brook Unified School District, two schools were participating in *ECRW* including Foothill School.

Brenda had more professional development in writing as a principal than she did as a teacher. She had three years of training through *ECRW*. The first year, she attended the summer writing induction for third grade teachers and in the second and third year, she attended training specifically for administrators. This training was approximately eight full days over the school year each year.

Brenda enjoyed her role as the principal of a school implementing *ECRW*. She believed that the program has been a benefit to Foothill School. Brenda described the program, “It’s organized, there’s a sense of purpose, the routines, which I really like, too, and children crave and they need. And the final product shows you that it’s a program that works.” (Brenda, Initial Interview) She was proud of the work of the teachers and students.

### **Matt and His School**

Matt was the principal at Keel School in the Olympic Unified School District. This was his second year as the principal at Keel School and he had been an assistant principal and dean of students at three different high schools for a total of 16 years. Matt taught general education fifth grade for six years and special education for three years.

Keel School was a K-5 school in the Olympic Unified School District and was also located approximately 10 miles south of a major Bay Area city. There were 532 students and 25.5 teachers during the 2007-2008 school year. Forty-eight percent of the students receive free or reduced price lunch and forty-seven percent of the students are English Learners. Fifty-four

percent of the students were Hispanic and thirty-six percent of the students were white. The 2007 Base API for Keel School was 747. The statewide rank was 5 and the similar schools rank was also 5 of 10.

The school was configured so that half of the students in grades K-5 participate in a Spanish Two-Way Bilingual Immersion program. This is a model for bilingual education where English-speaking students learn Spanish and Spanish-speaking students learn English and Spanish. There was a graduated plan for moving from mostly Spanish instruction in the early grades to more English in the upper grades. In Kindergarten, all subjects are taught in Spanish with 30 minutes of English language development daily. By fourth and fifth grade 50 percent of instruction was in Spanish. The intention was to develop fluency and academic proficiency in both Spanish and English. Students attend the program for six years so there was little mobility in the classes. All teachers in the Immersion program are bilingual in Spanish and English.

Matt shared that he thought most of his training in writing came as an administrator. He vaguely remembered formal teaching in his college liberal studies course work. As a teacher, he remembered the training in writing to be a part of language arts training around how to teach a specific curriculum program. Typically, this would be a small part of one or two days of training provided by textbook publishers.

As a teacher Matt recalled the focus on the structure of writing compared to the content or craft of writing. Matt described how he taught writing as a teacher:

I definitely remember more of what we call “conventions” now, that stuff was still really strong, really big, and then but in regard to the content, the creativity of it, I mean there was like “ok write in your journals.” That was creative writing, with the journal writing, and so the teacher would check it like once a week and give it back, they’d just put a check mark on it that they read it, and that’s that. (Matt, Initial Interview)

Matt’s experience as a teacher teaching writing was very different than the writing instruction that was a focus of *ECRW*.

Keel School was in the core group of schools that originally implemented *Every Child a Reader and Writer* so his school had been involved in *ECRW* for eight years. *ECRW* began in the fall of 2000 with five schools in five core districts. The Noyce Foundation supported a literacy coach for each of the five schools. The literacy coach worked with at least one teacher at the school putting the *ECRW* model of writing workshop into place. The goal was to build the capacity of the teachers and coach, build the capacity of the school and then use the capacity of that one school to spread the initiative in the school’s district (Wilson et al., 2006).

Matt attended one week of *ECRW* Induction in the summer just days after he had been hired as the principal of Keel School and participated in the new principal’s induction for the first year. In his second year, Matt participated in *ECRW* administrator training. He also participated in a week-long *ECRW* Advanced Institute, which included the scoring of student work using the *ECRW* rubric. Working in a core district with full implementation of Writing Workshop provided the opportunity for Matt to learn from principal colleagues. Matt’s district

implemented writing workshop in each elementary school. It was a district-wide focus. When asked what he learned from other principals Matt said:

Everybody's kind of going through the same thing in regard to... *ECRW*, it's actually less about what's going on in the classroom and a lot more about how are we going to keep this going with them [*ECRW*] pulling out or not funding it fully anymore. (Matt, Initial Interview)

In his second year at Keel School, Mark was comfortable in his role working with teachers in reading and writing workshop.

### **Ann and Her School**

Ann has been the principal of Wiley Elementary School for eight years and a principal for 15 years total in the Rancho Unified School District. Ann taught for 16.5 years. Ann began her teaching career as a High School Physical Education teacher. Ann taught elementary school for 12.5 years, with five years in Kindergarten and five years the primary grades as well as a half-year stint in fifth and sixth grade.

Wiley School was a Kindergarten through fifth grade school in the Rancho Unified School District. There were 370 students in 20 classrooms. The school serves a diverse student population in grades K-5. Specifically, 38 percent of the students were Hispanic, 27 percent White, and 14 percent Asian. Forty-three percent of the students received free or reduced price lunch and forty percent of the students are English Learners. The 2007 Base API for Wiley School was 768. The statewide rank was 6 and the similar schools rank was also 6 of 10.

Ann believes that going through the process of teaching children to read and write has improved her personal writing. As a student, Ann struggled with writing. She shared her personal experience of learning to write:

As a student and a learner myself, writing was my worst subject. I cried through writing. I have memories of my dad – this was high school – sitting with me at night, trying to help me write these pieces, and I would just have no clue how to do it and what to do. (Ann, Initial Interview)

She obtained her elementary school multiple subjects credential through taking an examination and one of the requirements was an extension course through the mail on teaching literacy to children. As a beginning elementary school teacher, Ann taught a half-day Kindergarten class and worked in another teacher's class the other half of the day. Both teachers used the Lippincott workbooks to teach reading. The Lippincott series were basic reading texts that emphasized a strong phonics approach to teaching reading. Ann learned about a way of teaching early literacy known as McCracken phonics. The McCracken approach emphasized phonics as a spelling tool when teaching writing. She attended several week-long trainings in the summer and eventually attended a training of trainers because she wanted to learn more. Ann described McCracken as a strong phonics-based spelling program with reading and writing tightly tied together. She was able to move from using the Lippincott series and taught reading and writing crossing over curriculum through science and social studies.

In addition to her mail-in extension coursework in literacy and the McCracken training as a teacher, Ann attended two years of Reading Recovery training through a local college. The program includes extensive coursework and then watching lessons and critiquing them. Subsequently, Ann had to be critiqued in her teaching four times in each year. The training included having a teacher leader come to Ann's school to watch her teach and step in when it wasn't quite right. Ann described her training, "Reading Recovery training was the push for understanding of teaching reading. But the understanding for teaching of writing came strongly through the McCracken program" (Ann, Initial Interview). Ann has participated in Teachers College trainings in New York and California for four different week-long sessions. Throughout her educational career, Ann has participated in extensive professional development in reading which emphasized the interconnectedness of reading to writing prior to ECRW.

Wiley School has participated in *ECRW* for seven years and was a part of the second cohort of schools implementing the initiative. Like Keel School in the Olympic Unified School District, Rancho Unified School District was a core district that was involved with *ECRW* from the beginning. The district fully implemented *ECRW* at all schools and had district initiatives to support both reading and writing workshop. Wiley School was very active in *ECRW* with both Ann and the former literacy coach participating as a trainer at the summer induction and trainings throughout the school year.

Ann received training as a principal from the Noyce Foundation. She attended the summer induction institute each year for seven years, often acting in advisory or leadership roles. When Ann initially received training in *ECRW* she described advocating for content knowledge:

The teachers went off and had their sessions, but the principals got pulled aside and the principals were to have leadership training. I didn't want leadership training; I wanted training in what the teachers were getting training in because I'm supposed to be knowing what's going on and helping them and we had no clue. We raised such a ruckus that then the next year they allowed us to go through training with the teachers with a small amount of leadership pullout. The next year, we sat the whole time at the teacher's elbow in a grade level, which was much more helpful. (Ann, Initial Interview)

Ann has served a number of professional development roles for *ECRW*. She took one year off from her job as Principal of Wiley Elementary School to work for *ECRW* in which her major role was to train principals in literacy, specifically, leadership skills for writing workshop. This included providing three days during the summer induction and five follow-up days during the school year. *Every Child a Reader and Writer* produced a DVD on the Coaching Cycle as a structure for instructional leadership and model for developing a learning community at a school featuring interviews with Ann and the teachers of Wiley School. Ann also taught Reading and Writing Workshop trainings in the summer for Rancho Unified School District and provided training for the principals on reading and writing workshop. More so than the other two principals, Ann took a leadership role in her district and in *ECRW* in improving writing instruction.



The staff at Wiley School was trained in both reading and writing workshop and literacy serves as the focus of most staff meetings and professional development. When asked how she learns from teachers at her school:

I think the thing that's interesting in learning from teachers is when you present something and then watch what they do with it, when they go take off to go practice because, that is feedback looped to someone as a teacher, whether it's principal to teacher or teacher to kids, how your instruction then went forward, and so how to then modify your own instruction. Do I learn content from them? No. But I am learning through that process. (Ann, Initial Interview)

Relative to most principals that participated in *ECRW*, there were few that had Ann's level of expertise in writing and professional development. When asked how Ann learns from other principal colleagues, she responded:

I think the things that I learn from them are either an affirmation or another look at something from a different angle or another type of problem that arises because we all work in our own little world. I think most of the learning I did was just broadening my horizons of how people work in their environment and how people react to things and actually developing my facilitation skills. (Ann, Initial Interview)

All three schools from different school districts were participating in *ECRW* to implement writing workshop. Matt and Ann's school had been with *ECRW* for over six years and Brenda's school had participated in *ECRW* for 3 years. The schools were relatively similar K-5 grade elementary schools although at Mark's school half of the classes followed a Spanish Two-Way Bilingual Immersion program. The schools were relatively close in academic performance with the 2007 Base API ranging from 728 to 768. The schools ranged from a 4 to a 6 (on a scale of 10) in the statewide API rank.

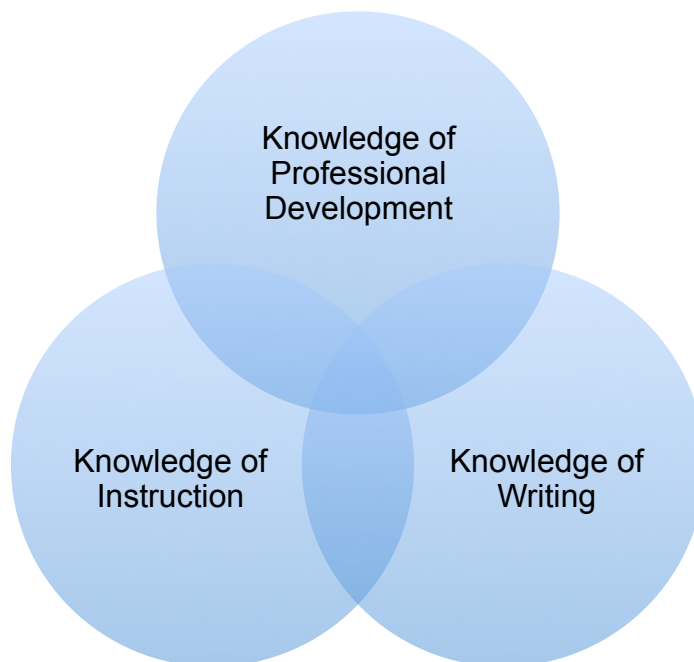
While all three of the principals had been administrators for at least 6 years, Ann had significantly more experience than the other two principals. She also had much more extensive experience in both participating in professional development in reading and writing and leading professional development in reading and writing. Brenda and Matt had more similar backgrounds in professional development in reading and writing as teachers and principals. The following chapter (4) on principal knowledge outlines the similarities and differences among the three principals in knowledge.

#### CHAPTER 4: WHAT IS LEADERSHIP CONTENT KNOWLEDGE IN WRITING?

Leadership content knowledge begins with the overlap of knowledge of subject matter and leadership practices (Stein & Nelson, 2003). The primary question of this study is how, if at all, does leadership content knowledge in writing influence the work of the school principal. I will answer this question in two parts. In this chapter, I am looking at what is leadership content knowledge in writing. In chapter 5, I will examine how leadership content knowledge influences the work of the principal.

Leadership Content Knowledge is the intersection of knowledge of writing, instruction and professional development. (See Figure 3.) Further, it is knowing the subject matter and instruction in such a way that one can lead an individual or group to improve instruction (professional development). In this study, leadership content knowledge served as a focal point to investigate how principals used what they know about the domain of writing itself and effective instruction. In this chapter we focus on the principals' knowledge of writing, instruction and professional development using extensive interviews and a student-writing artifact. We will interrogate how principals with different levels of leadership content knowledge use that knowledge in practice in Chapter 5 through those methods plus observation. This chapter is intended to produce data to warrant the claim that principals differ in their leadership content knowledge.

Figure 3. Leadership content knowledge in writing: Three domains



### **Knowledge of Writing**

I define knowledge of writing as knowledge that is specific to the subject domain of writing. It is the knowledge of the *content* of instruction. The substance of the knowledge of writing would not be the same as knowledge of mathematics or science. These differences were evident in the three principals as they worked with writing standards, as the principals proposed instructional strategies for working with the students to improve their writing, and offered suggestions for working with the students and to improve the writing craft. Ann's responses about writing indicated in-depth knowledge of the process of writing, grade level and informational genre standards, and a greater focus on the fine details of writing instruction. In contrast, Brenda's knowledge of writing at times seemed limited. Both Brenda and Matt's responses focused on the general features of writing workshop.

Two sources of data were collected to assess the principals' knowledge of writing. The first source was an evaluation of a piece of student writing wherein each principal was asked during the initial interview to analyze the writing and provide suggestions for working with the student, and suggestions for working with the teacher to improve the writing. This information was used to select and categorize subjects into three levels of partial leadership content knowledge: (1) developing; (2) moderate; (3) and high leadership content knowledge. The second source of data came from eight interviews with each principal over a span of four months. In this chapter, I will describe the differences among the three principals in each of the three categories of knowledge.

As a measure of the principals' knowledge of writing and their knowledge of instruction, each principal was asked to look at a piece of third grade student writing from the informational

genre. The student writing was an anchor paper used by *ECRW* to demonstrate an example of student work based on the rubric. (See Appendix C for *ECRW* Rubric, Student Writing Sample and Commentary). The principals were asked to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the writing (determining their knowledge of writing), suggest how they would work with the student to improve the writing (determining their knowledge of writing and instruction), and how to work with the teacher to improve the student's writing (determining their knowledge of writing, instruction, and professional development). The principals were asked to complete this task without being given the rubric or commentary from *ECRW*. I then compared the answers to the *ECRW* commentary sheet provided with the anchor paper as a way of assessing each principal's knowledge of student writing and leadership content knowledge in writing. The measure of their knowledge of writing was how closely each principal's description of the writing matched the *ECRW* rubric and commentary. Principals who were able to describe the work with the student in a way that was consistent with the commentary provided by the *ECRW* Scoring Anchor papers were considered to have higher leadership content knowledge than an individual who did not have answers consistent with the anchor paper criteria.

The principals' analysis of the anchor paper of third grade information student writing titled "Exiting Bamboo Eaters" showed wide differences in their understanding of the quality of student writing and was contingent on each principal's knowledge of the genre standards for third grade informational writing. The *ECRW* genre standards reflected the state standards in writing and were also based on rigorous national standards developed by the *National Center on Education and the Economy*. In this response to an example of third-grade student work was scored at 3 on a 5-point rubric, a score that indicates "needs revision." *ECRW*'s (2009) rubric reflected the state standard for a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade expository piece of writing. Commentary in the *ECRW* manual states:

This Score Point 3 paper exhibits the structure of an information book, with a table of contents and a dedication. The primary reason for its remaining in the 3 range is the sketchiness of the information. It also lacks an appropriate introduction to the topic and a conclusion.

Characteristics of this paper:

- There is an obvious organizational structure – questions followed by related information.
- Facts and details describe and develop the topic ("special thumb for grabbing things tightly").
- Uses limited specialized vocabulary ("classification"), along with the illustrations and a map to convey information.
- There is not enough information about pandas for the writer to seem like an expert on the topic. (*ECRW*, 2009, 10324)

Ann's (high LCK) description of the student writing was the closest to the *ECRW* analysis of the anchor paper. Ann categorized the piece as a "3" and included comments that almost mirrored the characteristics above. She cited specific examples of what was expected from the third grade standard, indicating that she had a detailed understanding of the standards:

To [earn a “3” on third-grade informational paper, it should] have a specific message, point of view, something that you’re trying to convey to the reader. This is, I think, actually just an all-about book that’s not even well organized because — let’s see. I guess they do fit the topic that it’s not a — Is it a panda or a bear? That it’s — they have their own classification because they are different from bears and raccoons, but it doesn’t say why. It doesn’t get into any of that piece. ‘What do pandas look like? Well, you know what, they have eyes and they’re black and white,’ that’s pretty baseline. That’s a Kindergarten response. Why does the panda look like a human? Because he sits like a human and that they have special thumbs. Why is that important? What is it specific and special about this bear that makes that important? ‘Pandas live high in the mountains.’ It’s like a chicken or the egg — they live there because the bamboo’s there, but they — what if the bamboo is somewhere else? There’s more than that. .... It doesn’t have — there isn’t any strong voice coming through except you get the idea that the child likes panda bears. It looks like it was very formulized instruction. Maybe the child got to pick their topics for the table of contents, but there’s no author’s note. (Ann, Initial Interview)

Ann went beyond the student writing to talk about evidence of the teacher’s instruction. She suggested from her analysis of the student writing that the instruction may have been very formulized based on strength of the external structure of the paper and the weakness of the content of the writing, specifically in the limited facts and details to develop the topic.

Further, Ann was very specific and detailed in her response concerning how she would work with the student.. Her responses reflected knowledge of the standard, as she would question the student in-depth to understand why the topic was meaningful to the student, develop a controlling idea, and elaborate on ideas by adding supporting details. Ann’s detailed knowledge of the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade writing standard (and her knowledge of Writing Workshop) guided her steps as she assessed student writing. She reported that she would begin by questioning the student about the importance of the chosen topic. By determining the reason why he or she picked the topic, she would have the student choose the facts and details to support that reason in order to develop a controlling idea on the topic. In questioning the student, she would be teaching him or her about the important features of informational writing, such as supporting details and focused information. Ann went on to suggest the need to improve the structures of the sentences:

We need to talk to about structure of sentences because the structure of the sentences — ‘Panda looks like a human because. Pandas have paws and special’ — that’s very basic writing. The writing needs to be more interesting, would be one way to put it, but with more clauses and phrases. (Ann, Initial Interview)

Ann’s response demonstrated a clear and very specific understanding of what is required as standard in third grade informational writing. Specifically, she mentioned the elements of reporting information about a topic with which the writer has interest or experience, attempting to develop a controlling idea or perspective on the topic, and she elaborated on ideas about a topic using supporting details. She knew what was expected of the student and would use a questioning strategy to help the student take the next steps in writing development. The

questioning was to help move the third grade student's writing toward demonstrating sufficient and relevant information and developing a controlling idea or perspective on the topic. (See *ECRW* Informational Rubric-Grade 3 in Appendix C.) Here's an example:

With the student, I'd sit down and ask the student, 'Why are you writing this paper? Why is it important to you?' And they don't know — 'I just like pandas.' You like pandas. Why? What's special about pandas? What else do you know about pandas? Why are they different? Go search that out. Check it out and begin to get an idea about what is it about pandas that we need to really pay attention to. Are there a lot of pandas in the world? Are they endangered species? Is there something specific about their habit and behavior that we need to learn about? We always learn things from animals, from the animal kingdom or, as people, to preserve and protect them or what is it? What is the reason you want to convey that topic? That's what you start from. Then everything that you speak to in here has to convey that thought. Do the things that you've picked help you convey that thought? That would be a first point. (Ann, Initial Interview)

The teaching points that Ann suggested were high-leverage points that reflect a point where specific, targeted instruction would make improvement in the students writing. One example was that in a particular situation a small teaching point focused on transition words could have made a big impact on a student's writing:

I was also noticing that the transition words the kids had were meager. And he could've done a huge — even if you do nothing else but take a regular piece and put in about four or five great transition words, the piece miraculously changes its depth. That's what I did with one of the fourth-grade classes. They were just amazed at what could happen if they just put in these better transition words instead of "then" or "next" — all of a sudden, without warning, before I knew it — it changes. (Ann, Post-observation 2 Interview)

She cited examples that were quite specific. Ann's knowledge of the grade level standard for the informational genre was extensive and detailed and she was able to focus on the key areas for improvement for the student's writing.

In contrast, Matt, whom I identified as having moderate leadership content knowledge, demonstrated basic knowledge of the standards for third grade informational writing. He provided some details about what one would expect to find in a third grade informational piece, but considerably fewer than Ann. For example, he did not describe the expectations for the genre as either the ERCW model nor as Ann did. Matt shared less specific detail about the grade level expectations for the genre of informational writing for third grade indicating that he had less LCK than Ann. He described the piece of student writing as something that has potential, but was still in process of writing and revision. Matt's response reflected less depth of the genre and grade level expectations than Ann. He described the paper:

It's really highly organized. It doesn't wander about, there's no tangents.... So I mean it is a little thin, but ... they stick with what their table of contents is, so it is organized, it is specific, there is information, that they understand kind of what an

informational was supposed to be.... But there's a lot of potential.... I mean, this is something that would have been a really good paper, like halfway into the process, because you have things that you can work from.... (Matt, Initial Interview)

He talked about the organization of the paper and the need for more details yet concluded that more work was needed for this to be at standard, which is close to the *ECRW* anchor paper commentary that described the paper as needing revision. He mentioned one of the elements of the standard for informational writing: organization.

Matt suggested adding supporting details. When asked to describe how he would work with the student, he said:

In informationals, they should have a huge bank of facts, and then it would have been really easy: 'Ok, Johnny, I want you to go back and you're going to find me all of the facts about a panda or a bear. Ok, next you're going to tell me all the facts about what a panda looks like, that's an easy one.' And then you'd just work with them on, 'Ok, how to put it in a complete sentence. Good. Ok, and then see how you can chunk them in here....' Because really, these should be, each of these should be ... it should be three times that size. So it's just the detail. (Matt, Initial Interview)

Matt is generally familiar with the third grade standards for informational writing. For example, he suggested that there was room for improvement and gave a specific example of what the piece needed and how a teacher could work with the student to improve the writing. Matt mentioned developing more facts, putting the facts into complete sentences, and grouping those facts together. Ann had a clear link between her assessment of the student writing to the suggested instructional response. Matt's suggested instructional response was not as tightly connected to the specific standards for the informational genre at third grade. He did not specifically cite any of the standards of informational writing such as elaborating on ideas about topic by using supporting facts and details or including sufficient, relevant information to convey a knowledgeable stance (Every Child a Reader and Writer, 2009).

Matt's assessment of student writing was generally correct but lacked specific detail. Matt's responses were focused on the broader structures of Writing Workshop with a brief description of the structure (i.e., the mini-lesson should be short and tight). Matt stated that he had some experience with teaching writing from his previous experience as a teacher and high school administrator. He described his learning curve as a principal new to elementary school and with limited experience in Writing Workshop. He said:

When I walked in at first, I'm like, I don't know anything, and then I'm like I know all of this stuff, it's just labeled differently! And the way it's delivered, I had to get used to the mini-lesson, and how that should be delivered, and how it should be really short and tight and super focused. What I've been doing this week actually is I've been going through with the literacy coach and just picking out the really good things in each classroom that the teachers are doing. (Matt, Initial Interview)

He understood the structure of the mini-lesson from the training and had experience observing lessons with the literacy coach. He cited a classroom visit that he had done in that week. He was clear which standards and rubrics were used by teachers.

In contrast with Ann and Matt, Brenda, whom I identified as the principal with developing leadership content knowledge, described the paper as strong, well organized with good, complex sentence structure. She scored the information writing as a “5.” This assessment conflicts with the *ECRW* commentary sheet on the anchor paper, which described the paper as needing revision. She demonstrated little knowledge of the third grade writing standard. For example, she described the writing as well organized with good sentence structure using complex sentences:

I can see right off the bat, this child has his work very well organized. He’s following some criteria. Your title ... you have a dedication here, table of contents, so if this is third grade, it’s probably a third grade standard. And of course you want to address your standards. Very neat in appearance. It looks like it’s been well thought out. Illustrations to go with the writing. (Brenda, Initial Interview)

Based on the initial features of organization and illustrations, she focused on the organizational structure and did not mention the limited vocabulary and lack of facts and details in the student writing. She did mention addressing the third grade standards but did not speak to any of the specific elements of the standard other than the organizational structure.

Each principal was asked how he or she would work with the individual student whose writing sample was evaluated. The purpose was to determine if a particular principal knew strategies for a teacher to use to improve student writing. Based on limited knowledge of the standard and provided only with minimum detail, Brenda incorrectly identified the writing as strong. When asked what she would see as the student’s next step of development, Brenda said, “It’s difficult to say because the level of writing is already very sophisticated, so I think in terms of this youngster, just continue writing.” (Brenda, Initial Interview) She did not compare it to a rubric or cite any specific standards used in evaluating student work.

Brenda was confused about the difference between the Every Reader and Writer program and Writing Workshop and another program used to teach writing, *6 Traits*. One grade level in particular was interested in using *6 Traits* and Brenda was not confident in addressing the reasons it was inconsistent with the *ECRW* program. When asked about the two programs, Brenda stated:

The district has given training on *6 Traits*. And I’ve talked briefly with a person at the district about it, and it’s why not (the training) for Noyce... It’s very hard and very expensive, whereas *6 Traits* — which is, from I what I understand, an assessment piece. It’s much easier to train. But there’s a sense that — and you hear it — the district is going toward *6 Traits*, but it’s not eliminating Noyce. It’s a matter of: ‘I have to learn too; I’m in the process of learning. How does it fit



in?’ And I think that’s what the teachers need to learn, too, that they’re not substituting things. We need to get further clarification on that. (Brenda, Post-observation Interview)

Brenda was honest in relating that she wasn’t clear about the difference between the *6 Traits* and *ECRW* writing programs. She would seek clarification from someone at the district office concerning the two programs. Brenda identified as being an outsider to the writing program and learning along with the teachers, but not as an expert.

Ann’s knowledge of writing was much richer and more comprehensive than that of either Matt or Brenda. She was much more specific and more extensive concerning how she would work with the student than the other two principals. Matt’s analysis of the student writing was generally correct and closer to the *ECRW* standard than Brenda and thus provided evidence that he has greater LCK than Brenda. Brenda’s knowledge of the standards and expectations for the third grade student writing was limited.

In summary, the differences in knowledge of writing among the three principals were evident in three areas: the knowledge of writing standards; the match of the instructional response to the assessment of student writing; and the suggestions of improving writing craft. More specifically, the differences among the three subjects were in knowledge of the standards for third grade informational writing, the level of detail of the response concerning how to work with the student, and the degree to which the suggested instructional response matched the assessment of student writing. In response to the anchor paper, Ann’s knowledge of writing was extensive and much deeper than that of Brenda or Matt. Ann’s responses differed from Brenda or Matt’s responses because her strong knowledge of the standards for the third grade informational writing allowed her to identify the weakness of the writing and address those weaknesses with instruction specifically to develop a controlling idea and support that idea with relevant information. She was able to identify the high-leverage point for improvement that would make a difference in an individual student’s writing and gave the example of using transition words or using clauses and phrases to make the writing more interesting. Matt had a general understanding of the standards for third grade information genre but he spoke more generally of improving the writing by adding details. Brenda demonstrated limited knowledge of writing, and she incorrectly assessed the student writing as being strong and thus stated that the student just needed to keep writing.

### **Knowledge of Instruction**

In this study, I define the knowledge of instruction as knowledge about how to effectively and efficiently help students learn. Knowledge of instruction includes knowledge about effective teaching presentation that results in student learning. This knowledge applies to instruction in all subject areas and is not specific to writing.

All three subjects were asked to describe exemplary writing instruction. The responses reflected differences in the focus of the principal and the specificity and detail with which the principal spoke of exemplary instruction.

When asked what good writing instruction looks like, the three subjects' answers differed by the way what features of instruction were emphasized. Brenda (developing LCK) answered by describing the external features of the writing workshop classroom:

I'll start with the organization of the room, which hits me when I go in, and I know there's a writing connection in the room. I see the posters. The ideas that have been generated by the students on a specific theme, they're posted there. I see the graph of the circle graph, with the mini-lesson carved out as well as the independent work, and revisiting. I see the rituals in place, for example, the first part of the ten minutes the students are seated comfortably on the floor. There's a place for them. I see the teacher with an easel or some writing paraphernalia, where she's able to generate lists or write things down for the children. I see a confident teacher who knows where she's going and what she's doing. I see her referring to resources in the room, to the charts, so it's not just a one-time lesson regarding the charts. I see the partner-talking, or the partner-sharing. Of course, these are all the rituals in place, but you can tell if they've been well taught, because the children are comfortable in these procedures. (Brenda, Initial Interview)

The description of good writing instruction that Brenda gave focused on the external features of the classroom like the charts or the easel rather than on the instruction. She spoke generally about the rituals and routines of writing workshop such as students being seated on the floor for the first ten minutes or partner sharing. In the description of the instruction, Brenda noted the structure of the Writing Workshop and said little about what the teacher was doing:

What does good writing instruction look like? Number one, it's well planned. Number two: I'm just going to say I really like the Noyce structure of the ten minute mini-lesson, the forty minute independent work, and the ten minute gathering at the end. And each one of those mini-lessons needs to be well planned, whatever element you're talking about. Some research on the part of the teachers. Of course, they are in training, but any continued research that they have to do after that. But a lot of planning. You just can't go about this willy-nilly. You really do have to plan, and have training." (Brenda, Initial Interview)

Brenda's focus is on the external features of what Writing Workshop looks like without discussing what the teacher was doing or what the students were doing. She referred to how time is spent and that the mini-lessons needed to be well planned but did not offer more information about what the teacher was doing.

As with Brenda, Matt's (moderate LCK) response to the question about exemplary instruction reflected the room environment. His answers reflected much of the same focus on environment as Brenda yet he was able to provide more detail about writing instruction than Brenda. He stated that by looking at the room environment, he was able to identify the genre of writing the class was working on, which was based on the evidence of student writing and charts he had seen in the room. Matt talked about a recent visit he made to classrooms:

Just the environment of the room. I mean, a lot of times, if you go into a room, you can go in — and that's a part of what I've been doing this week ... just walked around, did a little gallery walk around the room, and you can completely know exactly what they're working on, exactly what the unit of study is, the genre, exactly where they were a week ago, exactly where they're trying to go, and that's really powerful. (Matt, Initial Interview)

Matt's focus on instruction was on the students' activity rather than the teacher and lacked specific detail about the teacher's actions. He described good instruction as totally interactive, meaning that students were fully engaged. He spoke generally about instruction:

They're very excited about what they're doing, but they're also pushed really hard to do their best. And to have very high standards for everybody. Doesn't make any difference what their level is, they all have to be pushed hard to reach their potential. (Matt, Initial Interview)

When asked what he wanted to see in an exemplary lesson, he prioritized clarity with the kids. He mentioned asking a teacher about the context of the lesson (what was taught before) but did not go into specific detail about what the teacher was doing during instruction. He stated:

I'll go around and I'll ask a variety of kids, 'What are you doing, do you know what you're doing?' and so on, so forth, so that's crucial. Obviously they have to have that to begin with. I'll also go back and take it, 'What has led up to this particular lesson? Have you been working on this or was it just delivered today?' And that's something else, the scaffolding is really important they have that. (Matt, Initial Interview)

Matt's response about an exemplary lesson talked about the students working, and his questioning them about their work. He did not describe what he expected to see or hear from students in response to his questions to determine clarity of the lesson. The detail in his answer was comparable to the detail provided by Brenda wherein he spoke generally about the external features of writing workshop and good instruction. He also provided little detail about the important specific components of what the teacher did during good instruction.

In contrast, Ann's (high LCK) description of good writing instruction included much more specific and detailed information focused on the instruction that the teacher provided during Writing Workshop. Ann's responses reflected a deep level of knowledge of instruction. She spoke not only of her expectations of the structure of writing workshop but also of her expectations of the instruction. Specifically, she expected to see the teacher select one point to teach in the mini-lesson, teacher modeling, strategy lessons, and differentiation. Ann stated:

I expect workshop structure. I expect them to hold to the 10- to 12-minute mini-lesson with one element of teaching that's based on student need and is in a logical sequence of flow from what they did before, to where they are today, to where they're going to go. The teacher has in their mind a clear model of what the end product's going to look like, if it's going to be at standard or above and then broken that down to all the bits they need to learn across time to get them

there. I expect lots of — more use of teacher model writing actually even than just the mentor text. Mentor texts are good, but the teacher’s model is closer to something the child can actually take on. The teacher will use their writing model over and over and over like a mentor text so the kids know the story in and out and they can find the strategies, because they’re in there and embedded. I expect the teacher to follow the workshop structure and go around and not only one-on-one confer to help a child where they are, but literally more strategy lessons where they’re doing a whole other small mini-lesson taught within that time to hit the kids where they are. And I absolutely expect that struggling children, whether they’re EL or whatever, are worked with especially every single day. I also expect them to push the GATE (gifted and talented) kids up. Whether you hold them back and say, ‘I expect this of you,’ or you pull them and do a re-teach or confer with them — because every group needs their support and their push to go forward. If you don’t do that, if you only teach the mini-lesson and expect everybody just to take on to this mini-lesson, that’s not going to get you anywhere. (Ann, Initial Interview)

Ann’s description of an exemplary lesson focused on what the fine-grain detail of what the teacher was doing during instruction rather than on what the physical features of the lesson were (How did the room look? Where were the students sitting?, etc.) She defined the expectations for exemplary writing instruction to get students to standard in a particular genre well beyond using the structure of Writing Workshop. The teacher must be clear about what the end product will look like and what the important features are for a piece of writing to be at or above standard. Ann expected the teacher to produce a model of the end product to be used throughout the unit, because students can more reasonably attempt to emulate the teacher’s model than the children’s literature used to model the writing craft. She discussed differentiation of instruction because she expected the teacher to address students with special needs (such as gifted and talented students or English Learners), by providing them with extra support through the teaching of small group strategy lessons.

Ann elaborated on picking one clear teaching point and the importance of being able to restate that objective several times throughout the lesson. She stated:

Good writing instruction absolutely looks like the teacher has to have one clear teach point in their head, and they need to be able to state it in one clear sentence. State the objective in one clear sentence. It literally almost seems to be the first sentence out of their mouth, and they need to restate that objective at least two or three times throughout the lesson because children don’t all listen together at the same time. Sometimes there are some who’ve been sitting there for 10 minutes before their brain turns on. Sometimes they hear the first sentence and then they turn you off and then they might listen later. You need to make sure that your message is clear and consistent. It’s visible on the chart what the tracks of the teaching are, that the — actually, the highest recommendation is that the teacher actually writes the objective at the top of the chart for the day and that whatever directions the children will have, not the teaching piece always, but at least the directions are written out so there isn’t any excuse that they don’t know what they need to do, and that the teach piece is modeled and the model’s clear on the chart

as well. The lessons that I've seen that fail are when the teachers don't have a stated teach piece.... (Ann, Initial Interview).

Ann stated that the purpose of instruction was to give students a strategy to move them forward as writers. She spoke very specifically about what instruction is: modeling, guided practice, and then writing independently. Ann discussed focused teaching of strategies:

I always ask them, 'How did your lesson move the kids forward as writers today?' If they didn't give them a strategy that they can use to move forward, then you need to rethink what you need to do. And the teaching is not telling; it has to literally be modeling the instruction in front of them, letting them have a chance to take on that model right in the mini-lesson, the act of involvement, before they're sent to go write. (Ann, Initial Interview)

The difference between what Ann described as exemplary writing instruction and what Brenda and Matt described is in the level of detail and specificity that the principal described instruction. Ann's detailed responses provided many examples of what she expected from teachers in writing instruction, such as her response to the evaluation of student writing. Her answers about supporting the teacher reflected the ability to identify what the teacher was doing and what needed to happen next to improve instruction in writing. She knew what was expected of the student as she had strong knowledge of the standards but then she was able to match the suggested instructional response to the needs of the students. In her initial interview Ann discussed her former role as a teacher:

The biggest piece is being able to watch it — know what they're supposed to do, what that should look like. Figure out underneath that what are all the tasks that the child has to be able to do in sequential order, and then go back and go, 'Where do we need to start?' And I remember, as a teacher, always telling myself when a lesson failed: 'The kid showed you, yet again you took too big of a leap forward.' You take this leap of faith and you think they can do it, and they bomb. You go, 'Okay there were things I didn't connect with,' and that is still the case. You really have to be able to take the task apart and then figure out how to back way up, provide lots of understructure before you even ask them to do the writing they need to. (Ann, Initial Interview)

Ann's description of exemplary instruction could be reduced to being able to break down the task, determine the points that need to be taught, and provide the instruction and support for students one small step at a time.

Further evidence of Ann's deep understanding and simplification of good instruction was shared after a classroom visit. When describing how a teacher needs to practice story-telling with her students, Ann said, "She had it backed up to the known first. You really need to teach everything through something that's more known and add each little piece on." (Ann, Post-observation Interview 1)

There was substantial difference among the three principals in their knowledge of instruction, in their focus and the specificity and detail with which each principal spoke of

exemplary instruction. Brenda's response indicated her focus on the external features of Writing Workshop rather than on instruction or student work. Matt also focused on the external features, but also attended to student engagement. Both Brenda and Matt's descriptions of exemplary instruction were of a general nature. Ann's responses described exemplary instruction with great depth and clarity, providing evidence of the important knowledge necessary for improving writing instruction. It is important for administrators to recognize good instruction when they see it and encourage good instruction when it is deficient (Stein & Nelson, 2003). Ann's knowledge of instruction was vast and deep and went into fine-grain detail. The significance in the knowledge of instruction among Ann, Brenda and Matt is that Ann closely matched the instructional response to the needs of the student based on her judgment of the student writing.

### **Knowledge of Professional Development**

Knowledge of professional development is knowledge about how to most effectively help teachers learn to teach writing. It includes working with teachers individually as well as in small groups. Varying level of the principals' knowledge of professional development reflected the same differences in specificity and detail among the three subjects that were present in the previously discussed knowledge of instruction and knowledge of writing. The responses reflected differences in the level of specificity and detail of the response as to how to support the teacher, the degree to which they could cite examples from previous experience, and their ability to differentiate support for teachers.

Principals differed in the way that they spoke about how they would work with the teacher to improve instruction for the piece of student writing that they assessed in the initial interview. First, the three principals differed in the level of specificity with which they were able to talk about ways to support teachers. When Brenda was asked how she would work with the teacher to improve the writing, her response was limited. She evaluated the student work as adequate, and that the student merely needed to just keep writing. "I don't know whether he's one of the highest or in the middle, and it probably doesn't matter. They just need to keep writing, keep practicing." (Brenda, Initial Interview)

The beliefs of teacher learning from the three principals varied and reflected a difference in knowledge of professional development. As in the other dimensions of knowledge, Brenda spoke broadly about how teachers learn. For example, she mentioned many aspects of teacher learning, such as teacher training that should be ongoing, teacher motivation, teacher collaboration, but did not delve into any particular aspect of teacher learning, including writing. Her responses lacked depth or specific examples of how she addressed these aspects of teacher learning and writing in her work. Brenda shared her beliefs of teacher learning:

It's not a one-session kind of a thing, it's ongoing.... So just like Noyce has provided the ongoing training, and the touching base again, the continued practice. The buy-in, too. They have to really be motivated to take this on, and to implement it in their classroom, and to just keep doing it, doing it. The consulting amongst themselves. We have a teacher planning day, and this provides a very important forum for that communication with the grade level teams — that they bounce off one another, and ask, 'Well, how did you do this, and I did it this way, oh that's a good idea,' a lot of that sharing. So in terms of.... It's got to be

ongoing. Whatever training you get really should be ongoing as much as possible. (Brenda, Initial Interview)

Brenda felt that it was best if the training was ongoing and that teachers learned by talking with other teachers. She did not speak of specific examples of her work with teachers on professional development.

Matt's knowledge of professional development was stronger than Brenda's but remained general to all teachers. His responses to questions about teacher learning did not differ depending on a particular teacher's individual need. His response was more detailed than Brenda's, demonstrating that he was familiar with the specific expected components of a piece of informational writing. However, his suggestions concerning how to work with the teacher to improve the writing remained quite general, e.g., talking about the process or determining where they could improve instruction to help the student add more details.

Matt suggested beginning with the teacher by asking, "What was the process in working with this guy [student]?" in order to ascertain what the teacher had already done in determining the next steps. He also suggested that by starting at the beginning, he would not offend the teacher if the student had demonstrated remarkable progress. He would begin by asking a general question about the process and from the teacher's response find certain points to improve writing. He identified one focus point in the student's writing; adding supporting details. He described his general process of working with the teacher:

I would talk about exactly the process from the very beginning to the final copy, and then maybe locate certain points to where there could have been ... they could have enriched their teaching a little bit to bring them further ahead with their details and things like that. (Matt, Initial Interview)

He did not identify a specific focus in working with this teacher to improve the writing craft but rather suggested a general process to work with all teachers.

In comparison, Matt and Brenda's responses similarly reflected a general knowledge of what is important for professional development. They lacked detail and were not specific to a teacher or grade level and did not differentiate based on student or teacher need. For example, Matt said that training should be ongoing and that teachers learn from talking with other teachers. He spoke about teachers in general, and did not give examples of his work from grade levels or working with teachers individually. Matt stated: "Depends on the personality, but I think that learning from each other is really big, is really huge. Continuing their education... that can be formal classes, seminars, workshops, things like that, having strong conversations about literacy with other teachers" (Matt, Initial Interview). Matt's response concerning how he believes that teachers best learn new instructional approaches sweeps broadly across the opportunities for teacher learning without providing specific details as to how that is done at his school.

Ann went beyond Brenda and Matt's general approaches to supporting teacher learning. She cited highly specific ways to work with the teacher and cited examples of how she did this in her previous experience. This is significant because it suggested that she spent more time with teachers working to improve writing and provided evidence of her skill in pinpointing strengths

and weaknesses in student writing and matching it with an appropriate instructional next step. She was also able to provide the teacher with the next step to support her learning. Ann's response to working with the teacher was strongly tied to the specific information she gathered from looking at the student writing.

Ann's response for teacher support was, again, detailed and specific to the teacher or small group of teachers. She was able to identify the trajectories of teacher learning. Ann's response also reflected the ongoing nature of the work of professional development, the involved role of the principal and the need for teachers to discuss writing with other teachers. Her response reflected a belief in a more direct, active role of the principal in the teacher learning through carefully constructed coaching structures. Ann shared her beliefs on teacher learning:

We pick a new concept to think about, we talk about what it would look like, how you could do it. They try it on and then they tell me how it's working, and it's not working, and their frustration, and how they think they're going to go next. Just getting someone else to bump the ideas off of, and with the knowledge and understanding that there's no perfect lesson. We're all working on this together; the goal is that you just keep trying. Get out there, try new things, see how it works, don't be afraid to take on challenges. Failures happen — that's how we learn." (Ann, Initial Interview)

Ann's beliefs about teacher learning were that teachers need the opportunity to take a risk and try something new, and she reflected on how to implement it, and then reflected on the effectiveness; she has a clear and well-articulated understanding of her role in teacher learning. She said, "We pick a new process to think about, we talk about what it would look like.... We're all working on this together." (Ann, Initial Interview) While Brenda and Matt shared the belief generally that teachers learn from talking to each other, Ann — based on her experience as a facilitator — had concrete suggestions for improving the facilitation of teachers talking to each other in a professional development session:

What I've discovered is, lots of times the talking is much richer than what comes out on the KWL chart. You really have to go around and listen in, which you and I learned as facilitators. And you have to plant some of that stuff up there, and you also have to have a queue in your head of the things that you want to come out and listen for. And when you get it, make sure it gets up there." (Ann, Post-observation interview 2)

Her suggestion was to use knowledge of professional development to enrich the sharing of teachers talking in the whole group. Her belief was that the rich discussion occurred in teacher partners and that the role of the facilitator was to frame the whole group sharing to ensure that that the richness of the partner conversations was shared with the whole group.

In summary, when asked about his or her belief as to how teachers best learn new instructional approaches, Brenda and Matt both spoke broadly while Ann provided fine-grain detail of supporting and differentiating teacher learning and illustrated her knowledge of professional development for writing. Brenda and Matt both thought that teachers benefited from ongoing training and through conversations with other teachers. Ann spoke again in great



detail, citing multiple examples from her experience in facilitating teacher learning. Overall, the differences in responses of working with the teacher to improve writing mirrored the previous principal responses of working with the students to improve the writing. Brenda offered no suggestions. Matt's response was again general and could be used for most teachers. Ann's response was both detailed and extensive with a close match between teacher need and support offered. This tight connection between teacher need and support offered revealed a strong foundational understanding of the trajectory of teacher learning and a strong knowledge of writing and instruction.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter provides preliminary evidence that there was substantial difference in the leadership content knowledge of writing and instruction across the three principals. Brenda's knowledge across the three domains of knowledge of writing, knowledge of instruction and knowledge of professional development was developing. Matt was higher than Brenda and so was labeled moderate leadership content knowledge, and Ann's was consistently substantially higher than the two other principals. Brenda focused on the surface features of writing workshop and incorrectly assessed the student writing as strong. She gave limited suggestions for the student or the teacher to improve the writing. Matt was also focused on the surface details of writing workshop and provided general suggestions for the student and teacher in improving student work. Ann had extensive leadership content knowledge, as was evident in the extensive, detailed suggestions that she gave for the student and teacher to improve the writing based on her assessment of the student writing and knowledge of the standard.

In this chapter, I show three principals with different levels of knowledge in writing, instruction and professional development. In Chapter 5, to follow, we'll examine observation data, plus other interview and artifact data to show how leadership content knowledge influences principals' practice.

## CHAPTER 5: HOW DOES LEADERSHIP CONTENT KNOWLEDGE AFFECT HOW A PRINCIPAL INTERACTS WITH TEACHERS ABOUT WRITING?

In this chapter, I argue that principals' different levels of leadership content knowledge led to quite different leadership practices. In the previous chapter, I tentatively showed that the three principals had different levels of knowledge about the content of "writing" as a process-oriented skill and writing instruction, and professional development in the area of writing. The previous chapter focused on knowledge and this chapter will focus on leadership practices. The focus now becomes: How does leadership content knowledge in writing influence principals' support of writing instruction their schools? More specifically, I show that: first, the greater the leadership content knowledge, the more aspects of instruction the principal attended to, moving beyond surface features of instruction to underlying pedagogy and assessment; second, the greater the leadership content knowledge in writing, the greater the amount and level of detail in the feedback principals are able to give to teachers; and third, leadership content knowledge also influenced how principals designed professional learning opportunities for teachers and how they supported individual teachers through differentiation.

This chapter illustrates how leadership content knowledge matters for a principal's leadership practice by demonstrating how leaders with different levels of leadership content knowledge influence instruction. To make these claims, I draw on data from principal observations and interviews. Three principals were observed three times each in their work implementing and supporting the *Every Child a Reader and Writer* program. The data collected was from observing and interviewing the principals before and after each observation. The data includes the same initial interview in Chapter 4 that was reanalyzed to determine how each principal described exemplary instruction and evaluated a piece of student work. A table detailing the topics and length of each interview and observation is in Appendix D. Observation and interview transcripts were analyzed for emerging patterns or themes. Initial codes were developed using a deductive process of identifying patterns that demonstrate how leadership content knowledge is connected to decisions and ideas in administrative practice.

### Focus on Instruction

The three principals differed in their focus on instruction in three ways: how they gathered information about the writing program at their school, what he or she prioritized in their work, and how the principal's guided the focus of the teachers. First, the level of LCK was related to how the principals gathered information about writing instruction at their schools. More specifically, it influenced the level of depth and breadth of information they gathered. The greater the leadership content knowledge, the more aspects of instruction they attended to, moving beyond surface features of instruction to underlying pedagogy and assessment

### Brenda

Brenda, the principal with a developing level of leadership content knowledge, had strategies for monitoring writing that focused only on the most superficial representation of instruction: lesson plans. Essentially, she monitored whether teachers were delivering writing instruction consistent with *ECRW*, but did not take steps to delve into *how* they were delivering this instruction. Brenda required that teachers submit lessons plans weekly and reviewed the

plans as a way of monitoring instruction. She said: “I demand lesson plans, or require lesson plans every Friday, so I can see that Noyce writing is included in their lesson plans, and I know they’re continuing in some way, shape or form” (Brenda, Initial Interview). She was the only principal who spoke of requiring teachers to hand in their lesson plans. She did not mention that she looked to see what specifically was being taught in writing, nor did she discuss looking for the quality of the instruction through the lesson plans — simply that it was being taught. As we saw in Chapter 4, Brenda’s knowledge of writing and instruction were both general and superficial. Requiring lesson plans to see that writing was being taught reflected Brenda’s superficial knowledge of writing because she did not gather information about what was taught, or the quality of instruction, or if the students were learning. The evidence Brenda was collecting was to confirm that it was being taught rather than looking beyond the plans for details of instruction. It is only evidence for the teacher’s intent to teach writing workshop rather than the outcome of the instruction or the quality of the instruction.

Brenda also collected information about the writing program through classroom “walk-throughs.” Walk-throughs are a commonly known structure among principals wherein the principal walks through a series of classrooms, staying 3 to 5 minutes in each class, to gather information about student learning and instruction. Perhaps because her knowledge of instruction was shallow, she focused mainly on completing a certain number of classroom walk-throughs rather than focusing more specifically on what she saw or what she looked for in instruction while making these short visits to classrooms. Brenda hoped to make the walk-throughs a regular part of her routine: “If I can come up with a realistic schedule for myself, even if it’s four a week, and just really make a point of going in during the writing on some occasions and just following it a bit more closely....” (Brenda, Final Interview). Brenda discussed completing the walk-throughs of classrooms but did not indicate in the interviews an instructional focus of the walk-throughs, or what she saw while participating in walk-throughs.

Brenda’s limited knowledge of writing influenced what she paid attention to while in the classrooms. She mainly focused on the external features of Writing Workshop such as the charts in the room or the easel and area for students to gather at the front of the room rather than on the content of the instruction. As a principal with largely procedural knowledge, Brenda was limited in her understanding of what was happening in the classrooms she observed. When she described exemplary instruction, her focus was on what the classroom looked like and on the surface features of writing workshop. Brenda said:

I can see when I go into the room, when it’s writing time, how the lesson is going. Just by the organization, the posture of the children, their demeanor, as well as the teacher herself, the confidence going through the lesson. I can think of one right off the bat, where the teacher modeled in terms of, she had written something. She presented it to the students to let them see or understand or hear an example of what could be done. (Brenda, Initial Interview)

Brenda’s limited knowledge thus limited her ability to lead instructional improvement at her school. She could recognize surface features of writing workshop including routines and procedures. She knew the writing vocabulary and jargon, but wasn’t able to work at a deeper level with the teachers. When asked of a time in a faculty meeting that she used knowledge of instruction or knowledge of writing, Brenda replied with broad strokes about writing workshop,

“I know what the on-demand is. I know what it takes. I know what the looking at a final piece. What all that means and all of these steps” (Brenda, Post-observation interview).

Brenda’s focus on external, surface features of writing workshop, in turn, influenced what teachers focused on. For example, when Brenda worked with teachers on writing portfolios during two staff meetings, she focused on external, surface features of writing. This appeared to encourage teachers to focus on these external features as well. When Brenda focused on sharing a piece of writing, the debate about the process of how to physically get the writing from one teacher to the next as opposed to examining the process, the content or quality of the student writing or the writing instruction. Brenda focused on superficial, logistical details of sharing a piece of writing and she guided the teachers to pay attention to the logistical issues around collecting student writing, scoring it, and passing it onto the next teacher.

Across the eight interviews, Brenda identified the portfolio as an important element of a school-wide writing program and prioritized staff meeting time to getting that started with a single piece of student writing being shared from teacher to teacher. I observed two staff meetings where the focus was on the logistics of sharing the student writing. Brenda did not indicate that other meetings were used to talk about the process and purposes of the portfolio. She did follow up during some grade level meetings to inquire about the work done on collecting student work and identifying a portfolio. During the staff meeting, much teacher debate centered on what type of writing would be used, how it would be evaluated or grouped (high, medium or low), if someone would copy the work, and where it would be stored rather than on how this would improve teaching and learning.

Brenda: It sounds to me like we are going to take a final published piece at the end of the year.

Teacher 1: Are we going to make copies of the piece and give the students the original?

Teachers 2, 3 and 4 [in unison]: No.

Teacher 1: After all of that work, I would want the student to have their paper.

Teacher 5: We can leave it up to the teacher.

Brenda: You just need a sample.

Teacher 2: That [copying] would be way over the top.

Brenda: Okay, we are going to keep one sample and pass it on.

Teacher 6: Fiction or non-fiction? ....

Brenda: This is it. Make it easy. Kim is taking notes. You are going to use a piece that has gone all the way through the writing process and grade it using the rubric.

[Kim, the teacher taking notes, read back the minutes stating the agreement to use one piece that has gone all the way through the writing process and compared to a rubric].

Teacher 7: Do you include a rubric with each one?

Teacher 3: Yeah, this is getting complicated.

Lucy, Teacher Leader: It is paper management. One person per grade level holds onto the papers. Not in the cum [cumulative folder]. Avoid burdening the office.

Brenda: One folder per grade level, alphabetical. I will hold in my office.

(Brenda, Observation 2)

These staff meetings did not discuss the instruction provided by the teacher but did discuss whether the work would be “published” (completing the writing process), or “on demand” (done in one or two sittings with no teacher input or feedback).

Brenda explained her focus on logistical issues when debriefing the first staff meeting. When asked about her response to the logistical issues that came up and her thinking around her response about taking care of them, Brenda stated:

It is pretty typical. Whenever there’s something proposed to a group of people, people understand things differently, as we all know. Some are auditory learners, some are visual learners, and so questions pop up in their minds. “How do I do this?” It’s the same with children. It’s the same with the parents. You may propose one thing to them and you’ve got all of these questions, which is good. The clarifying questions are good: they’re necessary so that everybody is comfortable with whatever decision is made. I’m glad they make all those questions. You just take each one and answer it, figure out what’s the best way to handle it and make it easy for them. Just make it easy. (Brenda, Post-observation Interview 2)

Brenda dealt with the logistics in order to help make it easier for the teachers to pass on a piece of student work. There was no discussion about the content of instruction or of the student writing. Brenda’s focus was on establishing the portfolio rather than using it as a tool to measure student growth or for teacher reflection on her instruction. She focused on the logistics and removing the obstacles to changing teacher practice. Throughout eight interviews and three observations, Brenda did not discuss the content or quality of the student writing or the writing instruction when she talked about sharing the portfolio from one teacher to the next. (Each grade level was directed to develop a rubric and the teachers were to score their students’ work). At the end of the first meeting she intended to go to grade level meetings to “pull out whatever rubrics they’re using and just discuss that, just and wait and see how much more, in terms of next steps, they’re going to be needing” (Brenda, Post-observation Interview). Brenda’s limited knowledge of writing resulted in a narrow goal of collecting the student work without discussion of the value of using it to inform the instruction or as an opportunity for teachers to learn.

## **Matt**

Matt, the principal with moderate leadership content knowledge, demonstrated a greater focus on instruction and a more developed knowledge of writing than Brenda. His moderate leadership content knowledge in writing influenced how he gathered information about the

writing program and what he paid attention to his in work. It also influenced how he guided the focus of the teachers.

Matt collected information about the writing program through walk-throughs. He looked for posted daily schedules, clear teaching points, and student work in reading and writing workshop. Matt did walk-throughs regularly and was more involved in the writing program than Brenda. This influenced the level of depth and breadth of information gathered. With greater leadership content knowledge than Brenda, Mark attended to more aspects of instruction, moving beyond surface features of instruction to underlying procedures and routines of writing workshop. Looking for clear teaching objectives and evidence of student work provide evidence for Matt's deeper work beyond the surface, external features of Writing Workshop.

He used the structure of walk-throughs at times to monitor teachers' work in a general sense, and spoke of his expectations with all teachers. He said, "There are other times... I check the specific lesson to make sure that there are certain elements in every lesson." (Matt, Post-Observation Interview 1) Matt's moderate knowledge of instruction and writing allowed him to be more involved in working with the teachers around writing than Brenda. His major role, however, appeared to be limited to one of supervising and monitoring the work of the teachers in the area of writing.

Matt prioritized planning logistics to try to maximize time and opportunities for teachers to collaborate or participate in professional development. He considered what teachers needed in general throughout the school rather than differentiating based on what individual teachers might need. His belief was that teachers needed time to work together to plan, and that such collaboration served all teachers. His group approach to supporting teachers was reflected in his focus on creating common planning time for teachers to work together:

Here's a schedule and it looked okay, and then we fit things in. It worked okay. It didn't hurt the academic program, but we could have improved. Now the academic program is there.... [pointing to the center]. We have got common planning time, like Joe, fourth grade teacher, has arts. Jane, fourth grade teacher, has music (Matt, Final Interview).

Time for grade levels to plan units was built into the monthly schedule. Matt arranged the meeting calendar so that the last Wednesday of the month an after-school staff meeting was committed to planning the reading and writing workshop units for the next month to six weeks. This was a sizeable time commitment of an hour each month for grade levels to work together. Matt's expertise was not in the writing craft or the details of instruction but he did use his moderate knowledge of an extrinsic feature of writing workshop (unit planning) to build the structure into his staff meeting routines. Although Matt's role was more involved with teachers than Brenda's, he was still an outsider who was organizing and supporting the work of the literacy coach and the teachers. Consistent with his moderate leadership content knowledge, he supported the generalities of writing workshop.

While grade level groups were planning, Matt walked around and monitored the work of the teachers to make sure they were on task. During the observation of the grade-level planning sessions, he sat with a grade level that was resistant to participating in the planning and did not

come prepared because they wanted to do the planning in the classrooms. He noted that the he would follow up with them after the meeting:

Just to make sure that they're planning, to make sure that they got all — that they're all on the same page, to make sure that — basically, to finish doing the work that they should have been doing and finished on Wednesday, that they got started on Wednesday. (Matt, Post-observation Interview 2)

Matt's focus on the external features of writing workshop was evident as he monitored the planning work of the teachers rather than monitoring the instruction of teachers or learning of students. Like Brenda, he concentrated on the logistics surrounding the writing program. He was not involved in the specific details of the grade-level planning (either what was being taught, or how it was being taught) and only considered whether the grade levels were planning.

### **Ann**

In contrast, rather than focusing on logistics in her work with teachers, Ann focused her leadership for instructional improvement on the following: observing instruction; engaging in reflective, collaborative discussions with teachers, and improving writing instruction. Ann's knowledge of writing, instruction and professional development infused her routines around improving instruction. She was deeply involved in improving instruction by observing and giving feedback on writing instruction. Her involvement in instructional improvement was much deeper than that of Matt or Brenda, who both worked on external, logistical planning.

There are many competing demands on a principal's time and the challenge is how to spend one's limited time on activities that will influence instruction. She spoke about her instructional focus on writing:

You have to take it on as if it's the most important mission in your entire life. It's the wedding you're planning for, it's the birthing of the newest baby. It has to be all encompassing, and you have to push everything — find a way to get your other jobs done outside of this focus. (Ann, Initial Interview)

She spent significant time in the classroom observing instruction and giving specific, detailed feedback to teachers about writing instruction and what she observed from students in the classroom. She met regularly with grade levels to review student progress and examine student work. Using that information, the group decided how to support students and improve instruction.

Ann transformed her knowledge of writing and instruction into her practice as an instructional leader and developed a routine (coaching cycle) to gather information from teachers about instruction and student learning. Ann used the coaching cycle to get into each classroom every nine weeks for three weeks in a row for 30 minutes each visit. The coaching cycle was designed with the teacher teaching a 10-minute mini-lesson, 10 minutes of observation of student work and 10 minutes of teacher reflection and feedback with Ann.

One of the primary functions of coaching cycles is to gather data. Ann explained that "it's a data-gathering time, so I can judge and see where we are and then go back and have

conversations about big areas of talk, of successes and needs, places to go” (Ann, Pre-observation 1). She used the coaching cycle to look for patterns in classrooms and then used that information to plan professional development. She stated, “Coaching cycle is a feedback loop for professional development. Like we did a few cycles and it became clear that we needed to work on controlling idea. After gathering information, this is our best guess for what we need” (Ann, Observation 1). From observations in multiple classrooms during two observations of coaching cycles, Ann was able to see a recurrent theme across classrooms that needed to be addressed.

Ann’s extensive leadership content knowledge enabled her to notice and discuss subtle points of teacher’s practice, which resulted in specific improvements in student writing. For example, one fine point that surfaced during the first observation of coaching cycles was the need to address the teachers’ use of inauthentic questions. Following the coaching cycle observations and reflection at the lunch-time debrief with the Kindergarten teachers, Ann wanted to discuss the use of inauthentic questions versus straight telling during instruction. She chose not to share it because she felt the conversation needed to be driven by the teachers’ reflections. She planned to discuss it later, in a staff meeting or professional development. She said, “It’s something that needs to be shared because it isn’t — I’ve seen it not just their rooms; I’ve seen it in a couple other rooms” (Ann, Post-Observation 1).

Using her expertise in writing and instruction, Ann was able to identify the important concepts in the lesson, know how children learn those concepts, and then was able to determine if students had learned those concepts by looking at the student writing. In contrast, Brenda’s focus on the superficial and logistical aspects of student work led the teachers to look at the student work in a superficial manner. Ann’s ability to analyze student work at a deeper level resulted in teachers focusing on student work by asking thoughtful, reflective questions. Ann encouraged teachers to look at the student work through her questioning. I observed two teachers refer to looking at student work as the third question in the coaching cycle — “Did they take on the lesson based on your instruction?” A third grade teacher said, “I’ll go back and look at the students’ work” (Third Grade Teacher 1, Ann Observation 3). In another third grade classroom coaching cycle visit, Ann asked, “What are you noticing about their writing? In their words or their level of language?” The teacher said, “I need to look at their writing.” (Third Grade Teacher 2, Ann Observation 3) Both teachers responded to evaluating the instruction by looking at the student work as evidence of student learning.

In summary, Brenda had basic, cursory knowledge of writing and instruction, which led to a focus on the superficial, logistical issues in her instructional leadership for writing. Matt’s knowledge was stronger in instruction than Brenda’s, but his work still was mostly focused on logistical issues. He also focused on creating time and routines for teachers to interact around planning for writing instruction. Thus, both Brenda and Matt worked to support writing instruction logistically but had limited involvement with actual instruction. Ann, with high leadership content knowledge, focused her work on the fine-grain details of writing instruction. Differences in leadership content knowledge among the three principals resulted in different practices to collect information about the writing program at his or her school. The greater the leadership content knowledge, the more aspects of instruction the principal attended to with Brenda paying attention to surface features of instruction to Ann attending to writing instruction in fine grain detail.



## Feedback

A second way that principal leadership content knowledge influenced the practice of the principal was in the feedback that the principal gave to teachers. All three principals felt that positive feedback was important for teachers because it allows teachers to improve writing instruction. There were dramatic differences among the three principals regarding how they gave feedback to teachers and the specificity and detail of the feedback given. The greater the LCK in writing, the greater the amount and level of detail in the feedback that principals gave to teachers. Brenda gave limited direct feedback to teachers around writing. Matt spoke generally with teachers regarding writing, and Ann's feedback was specific with an instructional focus. This difference in feedback paralleled the differences in knowledge of writing and instruction of all three principals.

### Brenda

Brenda gave feedback to teachers that was limited in the amount, specificity, and detail. For example, Brenda stated that she gave feedback after walk-throughs, visiting each classroom for two or three minutes, and she would leave a sticky note with a positive comment for the teacher. Her feedback was very general and was applied to the teachers as a group. I observed at the end of a staff meeting that Brenda had the staff write out the letters d-e-c-i-s-i-o-n-s on the bottom of the agenda and praised the staff for making decisions in that meeting. This feedback was less specific to writing instruction than the feedback that I had observed with Ann. Brenda also noted that she provides feedback to teachers after a formal observation as a part of the evaluation process, and said, "If there's anything I think needs to be tweaked, that really doesn't have to be put on the evaluation. We'll talk about it informally. Have you thought about doing this? Or this might be something you might want to try?" (Brenda, Final Interview) Brenda conducted classroom observations as a part of the formal teacher evaluation process, and used the same questions that Ann does in the coaching cycle. Brenda described her process of questioning the teacher, prior to writing the formal observation feedback:

Without the observation being written up. I don't think that's important. I think it's important to touch base and have this conversation in a non-threatening manner, go through these questions, and they inevitably jog their memory about something, and they'll say, 'You know, next time I think I'll do it this way, or that way.' So we do talk about their processes and pinpoint things in writing, and they themselves come up with things, like I say, that they should change or that maybe they should do in a different way. (Brenda, Initial Interview)

I did not observe Brenda give specific feedback about writing nor did I observe her working with or talking individually to teachers about writing. She did not speak about specific feedback that she gives to teachers in any of the interviews.

### Matt

The feedback that Matt gave was universal, meaning that it could apply to most teachers or most subject areas. This is consistent with his overall profile. Matt's knowledge of instruction and writing was stronger than Brenda's and he gave more positive and constructive

feedback. However, his feedback was more generalized, less detailed, and not as focused on instruction as compared to Ann's very specific feedback. The examples that he shared about feedback to teachers were also general. For example, Matt gave feedback to teachers after walk-throughs by writing them a card. He said, "I usually give them a card of thanks for letting me come in and check out their class and this is what I saw, this is what's great, this is what you need improvement on, and so there's that model." (Matt, Post-observation Interview 1) He tried to get the feedback to them quickly, either the same day or the following day. He felt that positive feedback was important to teachers and the school. He said, "There's never a time that it is not good to praise. You can praise somebody in public, you can praise somebody formally, you can praise somebody informally. You can never do enough of that." (Matt, Final Interview). The feedback that I heard Matt give or that he shared with me in interviews was of a general nature about writing workshop and teachers and not specific to one teacher or one lesson.

Matt spoke in generalities about how he also used the formal teacher evaluation process to give feedback. He provided positive, general feedback and then provided some next steps to consider or look at. He said:

I've got about a third of my staff being formally evaluated this year, and so that's the whole thing about, 'Well that was great, but what about trying this?' And continually being on that, 'ok so that worked better, so what else do you need to look at?' My teachers are really good about self-reflection. (Matt, Initial Interview)

His feedback to teachers in the evaluation process was positive with suggestions for improvement or something to consider. His interview answer reflected a general strategy for giving teachers feedback following a formal observation. Matt did not share details of the feedback he specifically focused on following a lesson observation or a specific questioning or reflection process that he routinely followed. I did not observe him giving feedback to teachers about writing.

## **Ann**

Ann has very strong knowledge of instruction and writing and that was reflected in the specificity and the instructional focus of the feedback she gave to teachers. Ann observed classrooms routinely using the coaching cycle. The feedback Ann gave immediately following the instruction and short observation of students working was very specific to the teacher and the observed lesson or the work that students were doing. The feedback specifically addressed what the teacher had taught in the mini-lesson and what skill or strategy the student was able to demonstrate. In the observation of the third grade coaching cycle, Ann reflected with the teacher about the specific lesson and what she noticed about the student work:

Ideas that you are noticing are what? [then Ann went to list them by counting them on her fingers. Ann shared about her conversation with one of the students talking about the book.]

The student knew the book very well but didn't have an idea about the character. The book was Problem with Tinkerbell. The student has a thought but can't interpret to find evidence. It is probably something you talked about but they were not able to do it

in their own work. So your expectation is to have them find evidence but they are working on interpreting. (Ann, Observation 3)

Ann acknowledged the teaching point of the lesson, which was to find evidence in the book to support a point. Ann stated that the student is still working on interpreting the meaning of the book. She is able to find the link between what is missing for the student to be successful because she is knowledgeable about how students learn. The feedback she provides to the teacher is that the student is still working on a previous stage before she will be able to meet the teacher's expectation.

Positive comments given were very specific to the individual teacher's instruction or the specific group. The teachers received this feedback directly following instruction so it was specific to their lesson. During the coaching cycle, Ann said to a Kindergarten teacher in a coaching cycle, "I lost count of how many times you mentioned your objective. Five or six." (Ann, Observation 1) Ann said to another Kindergarten teacher, "Your lessons are tight and build on the next thing you need to do." (Ann, Observation 1) Each time, the feedback addressed a specific component of the instruction that Ann identified as contributing to strong instruction. When discussing a struggling student, Pam said to another teacher "She has lots of other kids to look at. There is a strategy that you did- you gave them the sound bites of what it will look like....You framed for them the way it will look" (Ann, Observation 1).

In summary, the difference among the three principals in the specificity, detail and instructional feedback given reflected their leadership content knowledge in the area of writing. Greater leadership content knowledge in writing resulted in more feedback and more detailed feedback. Brenda and Matt both gave generalized feedback and most of it could apply to other instructional subjects. Ann's feedback during the coaching cycle was specific to teachers about particular lessons. She was able to identify a link between student writing or student work and the next steps for the student and the teacher.

### **Designing Professional Learning Opportunities**

The three principals' various designs of professional learning opportunities reflected the differences among them in leadership content knowledge. LCK influenced how principals designed learning opportunities for teachers and how they supported teachers through differentiation. Specifically, the three principals designed different professional learning opportunities for teachers, used different strategies for enacting changes in teacher practice, had different theories of changing teacher practice, and played different roles in improving writing instruction.

#### **Brenda**

A recurrent theme with Brenda was one of school logistics around the writing program. She felt her role was to get everything in place so the teachers could be trained and be successful. Brenda had 24 references to the code, "plan logistics," which involved the coordination of tasks with individuals, schedules, or materials. She made several references to getting things in place. She spoke of the beginning of her school's work in the *ECRW* initiative:

Make sure that they, that at the beginning of the few years that we had, they were on those rosters, make sure they were all there [teachers were signed up for training]. Provide the substitutes; get that all out of the way at the beginning of the school year. Just give them the calendar at the district office, then all the substitutes are in place for the whole year. (Brenda, Initial Interview)

She did not look at what kind of training teachers needed beyond the initial training, which was provided by the Noyce Foundation as a part of *Every Child a Reader and Writer*.

Perhaps because Brenda's knowledge of professional development was very general, she relied on the teacher leader or the Noyce Foundation for professional development. At Brenda's school, the professional learning opportunities were provided by the Noyce Foundation as part of *Every Child a Reader and Writer* training or by the literacy teacher leader. The standard treatment for all teachers was that they receive the *ECRW* training. There was little continued learning after the initial training. What training there was the responsibility of the teacher leader. The literacy teacher leader worked as a classroom teacher and was paid for the extra time she supported writing workshop outside of her classroom. Brenda's involvement in the professional development was at the surface and logistical level, providing resources and organizational support for teachers to get training. In order to provide all teachers with the initial training in Writing Workshop through *Every Child a Reader and Writer*, Brenda worked with the district office to arrange the substitute teachers and pay for the substitutes with school funds. Brenda said about her goals, "My goal next year with the three new hires, there is a one week-long training during the summer in Santa Clara.... That's my goal, to have everybody trained." (Brenda, Final Interview)

Perhaps because Brenda had a shallow understanding of professional development and a limited knowledge of writing, she relinquished the role of instructional leader to the literacy teacher leader. At Brenda's school, the teacher leader was responsible for providing the expert voice and facilitating teacher learning in writing workshop. Brenda cited the teacher leader's expertise:

She's the one who's doing the program in her room. And she's the one that lives Noyce. And she is really, I would say, an expert in the making. She refers to resources well as someone says in such and such a book. She has that facility. (Brenda, Post-observation Interview 3)

Brenda provided minimal guidance to the literacy lead teacher. She discussed steering the teacher leader to which teachers might need help. Brenda said: "I might point out that it seems like such and such a teacher might need a little bit more help in such and such an area because I haven't seen — or it's not reflected in lesson plans." (Brenda, Post-observation 1)

Brenda and the teachers relied on the teacher leader's expertise in literacy. This was evident in my third observation of Brenda when the staff was discussing the student work to be shared with the teacher the following year and the teacher leader was not present at the meeting. During a heated discussion around the use of the program 6 Traits Brenda said, "I wish Lucy [the literacy teacher leader] were here" (Brenda, Observation 3). At another point in the discussion at the same meeting, a teacher suggested that they defer to the expertise of the absent teacher

leader when the teacher said, “Let’s have Lucy [the teacher leader] put it in a memo about on-demand vs. a published piece” (Brenda, Observation 3).

Brenda did not provide guidance or significant direction about the professional learning of writing for the teachers in her school. She provided support by identifying the teacher leader and providing funds to pay her for her extra work. She relied on that position to provide the learning opportunities for the teachers. This is not the same as an overall model of professional development for the teachers at the school and based on Brenda’s reflection during the interviews, she did not guide the professional learning of writing at her school. Brenda merely guided the work of the teacher leader by pointing out who might need extra help based on her surface level of knowledge of what instruction was taking place in the classrooms (based on reviewing lesson plans). Brenda played a behind the scenes role in supporting teachers and had little direct interaction with supporting instruction directly.

There were limitations to relying only on a teacher leader for leading the professional development at the school site. Brenda did not have an overall model in place for supporting teachers and describes the use of the teacher leader to be an ineffective model for teacher learning. She expected that the teacher leader, in her role as expert, could provide learning opportunities at staff meetings, and she stated:

Although I must say last year, we did a little bit more in terms of utilizing faculty meeting time, which I gladly give up, for the teacher leaders to give some mini lessons to the teachers. It hasn’t happened this year, though. (Brenda, Initial Interview)

In addition to not using the teacher leader to present during staff meeting time, Brenda felt that teachers did not approach the teacher leader for help and stated:

We have found that as a teacher leader, I think people are reluctant to call upon her because she is a peer. I am thinking that. She does have a lot of expertise. She has given many workshops. She has conducted staff development for the faculty. She’s very capable. But in terms of her being invited into classrooms, it hasn’t happened yet. (Brenda, Post-observation Interview 3)

Brenda was hoping that the teacher leader would coach teachers in the classroom or visit other teachers’ classrooms, but that was not yet in place. As Brenda stated:

[There were] one or two new teachers that really sought her out, but the rest of the teachers did not say, for example, ‘Can you please come in my room, see how I’m doing this and give me some feedback?’ or ‘Can I go into your room and see how you do this?’ etc. No, that didn’t happen. (Brenda, Final Interview)

The teacher leader was not sharing information on writing at staff meetings nor was she sharing her expertise with teachers because teachers were not seeking out the literacy teacher leader. These were all things that needed to be orchestrated by the principal, but because Brenda had minimal involvement in professional learning at her school, she did not do these things. She identified herself as being an outsider to literacy activities, not heavily involved in the details of writing instruction.

Brenda's knowledge of writing and instruction was limited and superficial. This lack of knowledge was reflected in her practice as a principal leading the writing reform. Her focus on the surface features of a school-wide writing program was consistent with her answers about exemplary writing instruction, which focused on the surface features of writing workshop such as the use of time, charts hanging on the walls, and students sitting on the rug for the mini-lesson. Her focus on professional development did not address the details of teacher instruction just as her analysis of student writing did not address specific standards or writing craft.

Brenda had limited knowledge of the rubrics used by *ECRW* to score student work and was unclear about what the rubrics were and how and when they could be used. When asked about teachers collecting student work and comparing it against a rubric (each grade level was going to develop their own rubric), she was unclear about which standards they would use. She thought that the teacher leader had shared some national writing standards but she would need to confirm to make sure those were the standards being used. She said, "I'm not sure if they are using them, to be honest with you. I think she's provided them. I'll have to talk to her again because I don't remember them now" (Brenda, Post-observation 2). This reflects both her superficial knowledge of the writing program and her minimal involvement with writing instruction at her school.

I did not observe Brenda scoring student work nor did she discuss scoring student work or using rubrics for teacher professional development in any of the interviews. She did discuss looking at samples of student work more generally. She described a time that the staff looked at student writing samples across grade levels:

At the beginning, when we were doing Noyce, we had — beginning first and second year. I think what we did is I had them go in the cafeteria, and I labeled cafeteria tables as K-1, 2, 3 and they put out their writing. The teachers were able to go table by table. And I had a little piece of paper at the end with pencils, and they would jot down a little comment. And that was very helpful to see the progression. (Brenda, Final Interview)

While Brenda had some experience looking at the student work, there was little reference to evaluating the work other than categorizing it as high, medium or low, and looking at the progression of grade levels and making comments. In talking to Brenda about plans for next year, she stated that her hope was to look at student work more often: "What I'd like to do now after seeing these samples is have more samples sent my way or, as you suggested, as a group look at samples a little bit more frequently throughout the year" (Brenda, Final Interview).

Brenda's limited experience in using student work and her focus on the superficial aspects of examining student work resulted in her guiding teachers to look at the student writing in a superficial manner. She guided teachers to focus on superficial aspects of writing instruction, as was evident in her work with the teacher leader and teachers regarding selecting student writing for a portfolio. Discussion in two staff meetings was focused on selecting the one piece of student work to be shared and how it would be physically exchanged between the teachers. The student work was intended to inform next year's teacher about each student's skills and ability in writing at the end of the previous year, yet the discussion referenced earlier focused simply on the logistics of how the work would be shared rather than any conversation on the student work itself or the writing instruction.

Overall, Brenda's contribution to improving teaching and learning was focused on the logistics of professional development. All teachers received the same initial training from *ECRW* and Brenda focused on the logistical aspects of getting the teachers that initial training. She delegated the responsibilities of teacher learning to the literacy teacher leader and provided minimal guidance to orchestrate a school-wide professional development plan.

### **Matt**

At Matt's school, professional learning opportunities in writing were more varied and extensive than at Brenda's school. They included *ECRW* training in reading and writing workshop, working with a literacy coach with a high level of training, ongoing lab site learning opportunities, and time for teachers to plan reading and writing workshop units together. With moderate content knowledge, he was able to offer general suggestions about working with a teacher to improve informational writing that would apply to most teachers. This was consistent with Matt's beliefs about teacher learning. He believed that teacher learning was ongoing and needed to occur in the context of the classroom and the school as a routine part of the school day. Matt said:

Teachers, because of the expertise on our staff, they don't have to go anywhere. They'll have to just go next door, and that's really, really cool. Logistically, it works. And we have a really, really strong coach, and so it works really well.  
(Matt, Pre-observation Interview 3)

One school structure, the lab site, provided the opportunity for differentiation at the grade level. The lab site, which was grade-level group coaching by the literacy coach, was an opportunity for teachers to set their own goals or ask for support in an area in which they wanted to learn more. The lab site consisted of two or more teachers at a grade level working with a coach during writing instruction. One teacher taught the lesson and the literacy coach coached that teacher, and the second teacher observed the coaching. There were a few variations of the structure, but it was on-the-job, ongoing grade-level training. Matt's role in the lab site was like Brenda's — organizing the logistics of the scheduling. The literacy coach was responsible for the content of the lab sites and Matt often observed them. Matt said about his observer role in lab sites, "I don't try to get in on conferring. Michelle [the literacy coach] can coach with the conferring. She says "why don't you \_\_\_\_\_. Why don't you try \_\_\_\_\_" (Matt, Observation 3).

Matt supported differentiated professional development through the lab sites at different grade levels. The lab site differentiated support for teachers because the teachers involved set the focus and the goals for the work. He stated:

The teachers come in with needs. I'm not exactly sure how to roll this out or that out, so they have specific things that they're looking for or that they need demonstrated. And so that's where it stands. The outcomes depend on who's observing and who's participating. It depends on where they are — some need some things and others need other things (Matt, Pre-observation Interview 3).

The lab site I observed included one Kindergarten teacher conducting a writing lesson, a second teacher observing the lesson, and a literacy coach coaching the session. The outcome of the lab site depended on who is observing and participating. In this lab site, Mark identified the focus of the lesson with two Kindergarten teachers on the English Language track to be fine tuning writing instruction delivery to accommodate English Learners as 16 of 20 students of each class were English Learners. In another lab site described by Matt, another grade level did a lab site where each teacher involved did a different component of the lesson to ensure that it was tightly planned and that the teachers had consistent expectations and directions for the students (Matt, Post-observation Interview 1b).

In contrast with Brenda, Matt worked closely with the literacy coach at his school and provided direction for the teacher professional development through his work with the literacy coach. He observed the lab sites almost weekly. Mark and the literacy coach met to establish a schedule and Mark supported the work of the literacy coach by supporting the logistics and organization of lab sites and unit planning.

Matt had teachers involved in the planning and delivery of professional development. His general knowledge of writing and instruction was evident in the structures that were in place in the school. He set up the structure of a leadership committee to plan professional development and get feedback based on the professional development sessions already had:

We have input. We have surveys. At the end of every year, we have a survey that says these are the staff development meetings. And we do a map for each one, how successful is it, how useful was it, and so we look at that. And then throughout the year, we'll always — guys, what are you looking at? It actually really cranks up in about April. This is what we did. We've been giving you surveys. You're giving us our input on that. What do you think we need? And then we compare the two. (Matt, Final Interview)

Matt spoke generally about teachers needs and provided training or planning opportunities that were the same for all teachers.

Matt provided the opportunities for teachers to learn from each other and through the structures and routines developed at the school like the lab sites. Matt was more engaged in teacher learning than Brenda, which was reflected in the way he talked about teacher learning and the way he structured learning opportunities. Matt, like Brenda, supported the learning at the school by providing logistical support for the teacher to be out of the classroom and making sure that all teachers have the training. He said:

I'll cover a class for a half day to have them go visit another teacher that's super expert in one part of *ECRW*, a part that they're struggling with. So that's one thing. Make sure that all of my teachers have gone through all of the summer workshops so that they're all up to speed. Continue the lab sites. Make it part of our staff development every year. (Matt, Initial Interview)

Matt, however, was more involved in the writing program than Brenda, taught in classes, and orchestrated the learning opportunity of lab sites at his school.



Matt was generally involved in professional development in writing at his school and felt more comfortable talking about instruction with teachers than Brenda. He did not cite a specific example of conversations that he had with teachers about improving instruction but did speak generally about his role in helping teachers recognize areas for improvement. As he stated:

Teachers are pretty introspective. They get it. They know. But it's my job as the educational leader to just get them or move them to that recognition to where — and I've never had a point where they — if it's really off and they're like, it was the greatest lesson ever — they don't — they might just miss it a little bit. They might think — I could have done this. What about if you try this? Well, yeah, but — oh, okay, yeah, now I see it. It's usually that kind of a conversation. (Matt Final Interview)

Again, this quote reflects the generalized nature of his work. It could apply to most teachers following most observations. He did not cite a specific conversation that he had with a specific teacher and his suggestions were not specific to a teacher, a lesson or a grade level. Matt's spoke generally about how teachers learn from working and talking with each other. His answer about professional learning for teachers again speaks to most teachers and professional development in general. He said:

I think that learning from each other is really big, is really huge. Continuing their education, and that can be formal classes, seminars, workshops, things like that, having strong conversations about literacy with other teachers. And this can be informal, formal.... (Matt, Initial Interview)

Overall, Matt's LCK led to leadership practice that was engaged in professional development, focused on logistics and routines. He spoke of supporting teachers, in general, and provided the routine of unit planning each month. He did differentiate professional development for teachers at different grade levels through the lab site. Matt's role in professional development was to provide support for logistics and monitoring to ensure that teachers are planning. There was little attention to the content of the instruction or the content of the reading and writing workshop units that were planned.

## **Ann**

Ann's well-developed leadership content knowledge meant that she was able to be deeply involved in professional development to improve writing instruction. Ann worked with teachers to score work against an established rubric and talked specifically with teachers about strengths and weaknesses in student writing. Ann knew the writing standards well but, more importantly, she knew how to use the *ECRW* rubrics as a tool for scoring and comparing student writing and for determining the next steps.

Ann was actively involved in scoring the student work and had an understanding of the developmental stages for student learning, which led to much richer conversations among her teachers. On a professional development day in May, she worked with the staff to score a student writing prompt (a writing assessment). Ann described the importance of scoring student work. "They absolutely tie it to their student's progress. I see that as a whole, as if you're — but

if a teacher is not married to the progress of the children, isn't any progress going to happen (Ann, Final Interview).

Scoring student work was a regular part of the work that she did with the staff. Ann described the process as:

What's really fun is when we do our writing scoring, and I say, 'if you think you got a 4, I want to see it,' because we don't even — we look at the 3's and the 4's and the — when someone says, 'I think I have a' and we read it and go, 'all right, somebody else needs' (to score this) — so lots of people read the same one and go, 'yeah, that's a 4.' (Brenda, Final Interview)

The student work was used to guide the teacher's instruction, and looking at it provided direction for next steps. Ann discussed working with a teacher:

What can I do to help you to figure out what your kids see next? ... you have to figure out what they need next. Where can you go for help? .... Go to the anchor papers, go to the rubrics, go back to your — pull your kids' papers out and hand-score them yourself and figure out where the holes are, that will direct you, and then what's the next small piece and sequence? (Ann, Post-observation Interview 1)

Ann also used the student work to guide the professional development with teachers. She used the findings from the student work to identify the teacher's next step of learning. She said, "I thought to myself, yet again, here's a hole for us." You really have to be reflective about yourself and you've really got to be noting the kids' work." (Ann, Post-observation Interview 3).

Ann's response included a specific example of how she used the *ECRW* rubric to evaluate the student work and use it as a teaching tool for the teachers to learn about the concept of controlling idea. The rubric can be used to assess student writing but it also can be used as a tool for teacher professional development. It acts as a reference point for developing teacher knowledge around improving instruction in the different writing genres. By knowing the standards and using rubric for third grade informational writing, Ann was able to cite the important standards and use the rubric as a tool to help guide teacher learning.

Ann cited a time when she used the *ECRW* rubric for informational writing for third grade to identify exactly where the teachers needed extra support. She taught them about the concept of controlling idea and worked with the teachers to develop a social studies unit incorporating this concept. Ann said:

I thought, 'Oh, my gosh, these don't even meet standards,' so we were meeting together. I told them to bring their papers and I pulled out the rubric without any anchor papers or anything. I said, 'Let's read through the rubric, and I say, 'What do you think this part right here means? — which was organizing structure, controlling idea. They had no idea. I had to say, 'A controlling idea is a perspective of why you want to write this piece. It's not an all-about book,' which is what theirs were. And they went 'Oh, my gosh. What would a controlling idea be?' and I said, 'Clearly, this is real tough for you,' because we do not have any mentor texts that are written this way, but this is how we're

expecting children to write.... We went at it through an investigation point of view and then problem solving.... And they write much differently now. The writing was pretty low, pretty flat in third grade until we went through that. (Ann, Initial Interview)

Ann cited a specific example of working with a group of third grade teachers who were unfamiliar with the concept of “controlling idea” and how she worked with them to learn it while teaching a Social Studies unit.

In addition to Ann’s own expertise, she was able to bring in other expert voices to work with the staff. An English Learner consultant who was working with the school district provided professional development and expertise around improving instruction of English Learners. Ann said:

We can get there on our own with our own professional development, but I just think it’s important to have that outside voice to help you go remember these things because he has a lot — he has his own repertoire of ideas and things. i.e, Expertise in working with English Learners. (Ann, Post-observation Interview 1)

In addition to Ann’s work with an English Learner Consultant, she and her staff are going to work with instructors next year from Teacher’s College of Reading and Writing Workshop. This is high-quality professional development from an organization known in the field to be on the forefront of literacy instruction. Ann said:

You have to just keep barraging Teachers College with requests, and I tried all last year and got nothing and then I thought — you know what, I’m going to start calling again now for next year. Who knows? They finally said, ‘We will have time for you.’ I don’t know when. I don’t know anything. But at any rate, it’s going to happen and we’re going to be able to have teachers from other schools to come and sit and watch while they’re working with our kids. And we’ll try to blend those folks into the training so I can sell that seat time because I got to pay for it with something. I’m not going to pay for it with my good looks. (Ann, Initial Interview)

Ann was going to invite teachers from other schools to participate with her school in training from Teacher’s College in order to help fund the expense of the training. The leveraging of resources is a way of getting access to experts in the field of reading and writing. As a single school, they might not be able to afford to have the expensive training, but by offering seats to teachers from other schools, they can recoup the cost and provide the training to the teachers of Ann’s school. This was another example of a practice that was not demonstrated by the other principals. It is an overlap of creative use of maximizing limited funding and valuing the expert voice of Teacher’s College and the English Learner consultant. Ann had the highest level of knowledge of professional development of the three principals and strongly valued the expert opinion. She was capable of providing ongoing professional development for her teachers but also sought outside resources.

Ann used her well-developed understanding of writing instruction to differentiate professional development opportunities for teachers whom she judged needed different things to develop his or her writing instruction to the next level. She used the routine of coaching cycle to provide an opportunity for reflection and learning for teachers. I observed five occasions in which Ann gave specific direct feedback with an instructional focus to teachers about the specific lesson she had just observed, the work that the students were doing, or in response to something the teacher said in his or her reflection. For example, I observed two separate coaching cycles on two different days with Kindergarten and third grade teachers. The structure of the reflection always began with Ann asking, “What was your objective?” After the teacher answered, Ann would ask, “How did you model it?” “What did you see or are you expecting to see? (a link to examining student work).” “Who struggled and what did you do to support her? Or what will you do next?” She would also use the questioning to give lots of positive feedback or make suggestions for how the lesson could be improved or what the students needed. (Ann, Observation 1 and Observation 3). In both coaching-cycle observations, I saw Ann and the teachers debrief the coaching cycles in the staff lunchroom during lunch by Ann starting with the question, “What happened today?” With little input from Ann, the teachers primarily talked about their lessons. One of the primary purposes of coaching cycles was reflection. Ann said:

They reflect, and then if she doesn’t initiate something to talk about — the goal is reflection — so I try to ask her about a particular child or something, just so she spends time reflecting on that child. Not that she wouldn’t anyway, but I feel like if you do that in process, it’s a reminder that you always think about all children. (Ann, Post-observation Interview 1)

As Ann observed the teacher instructing and the students working, she identified high leverage points where a change would improve a teacher’s instruction. This happened in the context of writing workshop and was individualized to each teacher at the grade level. When assessing Ann’s leadership content knowledge, there was a strong link between the assessment of student writing and the specific instructional response of the teacher. Ann also was able to make a strong match between the individual teacher need and the support she provided to the teacher. Using the observation of instruction and reflection with the teacher to closely match the next steps for instructional improvement with teacher need is an important component of leadership content knowledge that was not evident in the work of the other principals.

Ann had different expectations and support for a new teacher as compared to what she expected of a more experienced teacher, and she explained the support she would give to a new teacher. In response to the question “how do you keep all of the teachers on the same page in terms of the quality of the work, the expectations, and the rigor?” Ann’s response was:

What I expect out of her is a whole lot less than what I expect from somebody else. The support I would give her would be different where I would ask and support and push. For instance, whether it’s goals conferences or meeting about grade level or coaching cycle, I would ask her more questions like — How is it going for you? What do you need for help? What are you struggling with? — and then I’d spend a whole lot of time praising and supporting what she’s done and what’s the next little piece. For someone who’s worked at it for a very long time and is doing it really, really well, I would ask those same questions, but I would pose more questions about — What do you think about

this? — that's maybe an avenue they've not talked about before. What are you thinking about this part? There's another little place to think. (Ann, Final Interview)

As demonstrated in her answer to questions about how to support the teacher, Ann used her knowledge of professional development to help teachers identify the next step in his or her learning. Matt responded to more generally about support for teachers when questioned about promoting consistency among the teachers. He said:

A lot of collaboration, a lot of planning time for the teachers. A lot of release time for them to see because a third of my teachers have been here for less than three years. For those teachers' release time, I'll cover their class while they go and observe another teacher. (Matt Post-observation Interview 1b)

When Brenda was asked about getting teachers on the same page so that grade levels were equally committed to writing, how they judge student work and how they plan together, Brenda felt that the sharing of student work across grade levels and teachers was going to help with the consistency. She identified getting the process of sharing student work established and identifying which rubric the staff would use as being the next steps in the process to ensure consistency. Matt discussed how to support teachers in general and Brenda stated that they would continue doing the work that they are doing in sharing student work and identifying rubrics. In general, when asked about supporting teachers to promote consistency, Ann facilitated a reflective process for a new teacher and described different expectations for a new teacher.

Perhaps because of her strong LCK, Ann also was able to support teachers to differentiate instruction for students. In addition to differentiating support for teachers, Ann also used the coaching cycles to help teachers discuss differentiation for the students, whereas Brenda and Matt had no references to differentiation for students. In addition to using the coaching cycles to differentiate support for teachers, Ann used this opportunity to help teachers reflect on the differentiated support that teachers gave to students, including English Learners. When asked about supporting English Learners following an observation of a professional development session, she stated the following :

The other piece to support that is going in during coaching cycles, whatever, and go up to the EL child and watch and listen and so then the teacher sees you're going to the EL child, they're going, 'I goofed, I missed.' Or I'll say, if they don't pull in the EL child, I might even go say, 'How's Johnny doing? What do you think about Johnny today?' And that gives them yet again another reminder. You need to go, how will you frontload this for that kid? (Ann, Post-observation Interview 2)

Ann's work around differentiation was providing the teacher with specific feedback to improve teaching in order to provide support for students. A second example of Ann's work around differentiation for students followed the second observation, in which she stated:

Looking around the room, she didn't go in and immediately check in with those kids that needed to be checked in with. And it's that whole concept that — they do many times. I want them to have that inbred that this is what you have to do all the time, every lesson

all the time, and it's a lot of work. But you've got to do it. And it's not just checking with one or two. It's like pulling those two or three that are really struggling and giving them the one book that you've done together as a class, asking them about that character — 'What do you remember about the evidence?' Okay, that's what you're going to do. You guys talk about it. Now you can write and help each other out. That's what she should've done at that moment in time, and she didn't. Those are the places where we can get to. And we can get there on our own with our own professional development." (Ann, Post-observation Interview 2)

One way that a principal influences teaching practice is promoting differentiation for students. It was significant that Brenda and Matt did not have references to differentiating for students and that Ann did have references, because it provided evidence for one way that a principal with strong leadership content knowledge in writing could influence teaching practice. Through this system of coaching cycles, Ann was able to get the teacher to reflect on how she was supporting all students. Ann gathered her information about individual teachers, grade levels and the staff as a whole, observing writing instruction, and having collaborative discussions with teachers. Her strong leadership content knowledge enabled her to influence instruction by working with teachers to differentiate for students.

Ann went on to suggest the role of the facilitator in sharing the big ideas that come from the teacher partner discussion. She presumes that the facilitator of professional development needs to have an active role in getting the whole group to share the richness of the small group conversations:

And nobody wrote it down in their small groups. Having been a facilitator lots of times myself, you have to think of these things, because when you walk away then you come back, you have to regenerate the conversation. It's much better to take everybody's notes and then take the big ideas and add to the chart and then go back and ask people if they remember what they meant and get ideas. (Ann, Post-observation Interview 2)

Ann's experience as a facilitator gave her the perspective regarding how that session could have been stronger. She would have played a larger role by focusing on the big ideas of the discussion and asking individuals or partners to elaborate on those ideas to the larger group. There was a distinct difference in Ann's role in professional development.

Ann's strong knowledge of writing and instruction helped her assess student learning and the instruction, and decide on the next step for an individual teacher or across groups of teachers. She used the structures of student work analysis and coaching cycle to guide the teacher learning. Ann's theory of teacher learning is reflected in how she worked with teachers. She tried to find something that was going well, give praise, and find the next step for growth. For a teacher with a messy room, Ann felt that one could make suggestions for improvement by focusing on students:

And you can get at it through the kids.... I'd say, 'I really saw that strongly today, and I did see this child do this, which is exactly what you wanted.' Then the next step was, 'If you want him to perform that way all the time, what structures in

your room can you put in place to help him be independent?’ Then she has to look around her room. ‘Oh, well, he needs books in his hand all the time. Oh, how do I do that? Oh, I need to organize. Oh, how do I do that? Oh,’ She has to back herself up to that place. You can’t say, ‘If your room was better, he could’ — she had to get there on her own. (Ann, Final Interview)

By determining what the teacher is doing well and what the next steps are for the teacher learning, she was supportive as she pointed out the need for improvement. She described her style as indirect:

Instead of going in and saying, you should do that, just go in and say, how’s it going? I saw some of the kids having trouble coming in line. Oh, I know, such and such. Can I help you? What can I do? It’s always what can I do, but I hardly ever come in straight, shoot at them. I wouldn’t ever want anybody to do that for me. (Ann, Initial Interview)

Ann, like Brenda, addressed teacher resistance by taking obstacles off the plate, and she worked on defining the problem and seeing it from the teacher’s perspective while still maintaining an instructional focus. The difference between the two principals was that Brenda’s focus was on external, logistical obstacles and Ann’s focus was on removing the emotional obstacles to take small steps forward to improve writing instruction. Ann described how she worked with a resistant teacher by seeing the issues from the teacher’s perspective:

First, you define the problem. And then you look at the problem from the other person’s viewpoint. If it’s somebody who doesn’t want to be trained or do writing workshop because they already know how to teach writing, thank you very much, you look it from — instead of from your eyes, what is their perspective? Probably they don’t want to do it because — Yeah, it’s a lot of work. I don’t want to have to work that hard. I’m fearful that I won’t be successful. Whatever those strategies are that — reasons, you define them, then you say, knowing that — I need to take the excuse off their plate. What does it mean to take that away if they’re fearful? Make it not be a fearful place. Ask them why they’re fearful or make some guesses and provide all the things so fearful goes away. Let them then see the success of their work, and you actually see the growth, so slowly taking away the reason why they won’t do it. Sometimes it’s just plain — I don’t want to have to work that hard, and you can’t make me. The answer to that is: yeah, but this is the school’s focus. These are all the ways in. Which one will you take? Which small piece will you take on? — It could even just be — can you have just one try to have just one teach point, whatever you do, whatever it is?— Find a way that they can get in. Name it, look at it from somebody else’s eyes, take that excuse off the plate, and then what does that mean for you as a principal, what do you do about it? May not be that you do it, maybe that somebody else helps, and then how do you celebrate and congratulate and absolutely make that person feel like however small contribution, they’re a part of the big picture? But if you don’t go through those steps, you just do the confrontational thing, you don’t get there. (Ann, Final Interview)

Ann uses her own reflection to think deeply about her work. This level of reflection was not evident in the other two principals.

Ann had sophisticated knowledge of professional development and used that knowledge in her work as principal. She was able to look at student writing and diagnose it with an instructional strategy. She provided the same support to groups of teachers by looking at the staff needs and matching it with an effective response to changing a particular teacher's practice. Her structure of coaching cycle provided the opportunity to try something, reflect individually and, in grade levels, get feedback and then plan how to improve in the context of classroom instruction. She related her theory of teacher learning and the effectiveness of coaching cycle:

I think they better their current practice by seeing it in action. That would be huge, seeing and then talking about it and letting them — that's why the coaching cycles work so well because if we pick a new concept to think about, we talk about what it would look like, how you could do it. They try it on and then they tell me how it's working, and it's not working, and their frustration, and how they think they're going to go next, and just getting someone else to bump the ideas off of, and with the knowledge and understanding that there's no perfect lesson. We're all working on this together; the goal is that you just keep trying. Get out there, try new things, see how it works, and don't be afraid to take on challenges. Failures happen — that's how we learn. (Ann, Initial Interview)

Ann, like Matt, provided opportunities for teachers to discuss their work with each other. Following each coaching cycle, she and the teachers gathered together in the lunchroom during lunch to debrief the day. In this setting, Ann did not control the conversation but rather allowed teachers to share what happened during the coaching cycle. Ann stated:

I wish it would be a lot deeper, but I realized early on I have to back out of it because when it's me directing, then it has that feel of Ann's thing. But if I just sit back and allow them to talk and share, it's amazing the little things that they'll say that when they walk out the door, they're still talking about it and they're figuring out how to do it, or if you pose a question and then they try to answer it, they're still working on it. They're raising themselves up where they're ready to go, what they need to do without making it too difficult because sometimes people want to know what they've done really well, and they don't want to have to move to the next thing. Each of them gets to tell what they think went really, really well. They're validating themselves and the others get to hear how well they did. They're hearing the good pieces and they're going to want to move to the good piece they don't have that they'll ask questions about. (Ann, Post-observation Interview 1)

In my two observations of coaching cycle debriefing, Ann sat and listened to the teacher's talk about what they learned and what they were thinking about their next steps. She did not direct the conversation. When asked about a recurring theme that she saw and if she would address it in the coaching cycle debrief, Ann said:

I have to let them share and see what they say because if either one of them brings



up something more important, then that's what we talk about. But I will bring it up with the staff because we are doing this EL conversation, we are pushing, and so what does that look like and sound like? ... And then the teachers can go with it at their own rate, at their own grade level. And then it gives them the leadership. (Ann, Post-observation Interview 3)

Ann was comfortable working with both individuals and groups of teachers around improving instruction within the craft of writing. She frequently led professional development at her school, and made the link between writing craft and writing instruction. She could lead those sessions because of her strong leadership content knowledge. She was able to transform that knowledge in a way that the teachers learned to improve their teaching. She both demonstrated and explicitly stated what the teachers needed to do in this activity and in the writing mini-lessons taught during writing workshop. Ann related:

We did a whole group conversation ... where we were talking about 'Jack and the Beanstalk.' And as hard as they were trying, their level of talk was really, really low. And I had to stop and say, 'Let's just do a stop and talk about what we're doing.' This is the story. This is what I see. This is what I think. Think about it for a minute. Now, back out. Now, we're going to go back in to process. I'm going to ask a question again, and all of a sudden, it shifted. And I stopped later, I said, 'What did I do to shift you?' And they said, 'You were very upfront, clear and direct about what was there so we could connect.' I said, 'See, that's the difference between I think what we've been doing and what we need to do. Just like in your mini lesson where you say something directly, I needed to show you that directly. Now, you could move forward and connect.' (Ann, Final Interview)

Ann directly and explicitly demonstrated the need for improvement by pointing out what she observed the teachers doing and what needed to be done in a whole group professional development. Ann could lead professional development because of her strong leadership content knowledge in writing and asked others to lead when the topic was beyond her expertise.

In summary, leadership content knowledge in writing influenced how principals designed professional learning opportunities and how they supported teachers through differentiation. All three principals had different levels of involvement in providing professional learning opportunities for the teachers, and so the question becomes: How do principals influence the teaching of writing? The three principals worked from different theories and used different strategies in teaching professional development because they knew different things. Brenda's ability to design learning opportunities was limited, which was consistent with her limited knowledge of professional development and writing. Brenda shared little information about how she would differentiate support for teachers depending a particular teacher's experience or skill. Her focus was on providing baseline training in writing workshop for all teachers. She was less involved in the instructional responsibilities at her school than Matt or Ann, and she relinquished her role of instructional leader to the literacy teacher leader to support the professional development of teachers. This proved to be an ineffective model as Brenda felt the teachers did not seek the help of the teacher leader. It was an ineffective model because it did hold the expectation that ongoing professional development in writing would be an expected school

routine. Matt was involved with providing the structures of professional development around writing. He used the lab site opportunities and worked with a literacy coach to differentiate support to teachers. His moderate level of leadership content knowledge was reflected in his attention to external factors of writing workshop and professional development such as providing teachers time to plan and supporting lab sites through logistical organization. In contrast, Ann had a system of leadership moves and routines, such as the coaching cycle, which focused on helping teachers learn about improving writing instruction in the context of the teacher's classroom.

Another difference in the work of the three principals in teacher learning was that Ann's work and, to a lesser degree, Matt's work in professional learning for teachers was routinely part of the work done in the course of the school year and school day. For Matt, the structure of teacher planning was built into the monthly schedule and so did not involve great organization and effort on his part to get the planning session scheduled each month. For Ann, the routine of coaching cycle allowed her the opportunity to: observe writing instruction regularly; observe and evaluate students working and the writing of students; and provided the opportunity to engage in a reflective discussion with each teacher during the grade level debriefing at lunch. This was a part of the ongoing work of the school and Ann and the teachers all knew the roles that they played in each activity.

### **Conclusion**

Based on how they focused on instruction, gave feedback to teachers and designed learning opportunities for teachers, the three principals differed dramatically in how they were able to influence the teaching of writing. In focusing on instruction, the activities ranged from determining teacher-need based on reviewing lesson planning to monitoring classroom instruction to routinely observing writing instruction and student work and engaging in reflective collaborative function. What the principal focused on and what he or she guided others to focus on was a result of different levels of knowledge. Because Brenda had limited leadership content knowledge, she focused on logistical details of basic training and external features of writing workshop and relinquished her role of instructional leader in writing to the teacher leader. Matt, with moderate leadership content knowledge, also focused on logistical details but was able to set up routine systems to allow teachers to work together to plan. Ann, with extensive leadership content knowledge, prioritized improving writing instruction; she focused on student writing and standards to train teachers to look at student work in order to pinpoint the next step of learning for both their students and themselves. She was able to identify a high leverage point of improvement that would make an important difference in students' writing or teacher instruction. In designing learning opportunities, the principals differed — from providing logistical support, to making sure every teacher had the basic *Every Child a Reader and Writer* training, to logistically setting up lab sites for the coach to work with small groups of teachers, to ongoing routine observation, reflection and feedback. The routine nature of the work seemed to be a feature of Ann's work. She initiated routines that provided opportunities to lead reflective conversations in the classroom and facilitate collaborative discussion among the teachers.

The complexity and depth of the strategies used to enact changes in teacher practice differed based on the degree of leadership content knowledge of each principal. Ann, the principal with high leadership content knowledge provided specific, detailed feedback to

teachers immediately after observing writing instruction and taking into consideration the student work. Brenda and Matt, the two principals with developing and moderate leadership content knowledge were not observed to be giving this detail of feedback to teachers. Leadership content knowledge was also a factor in each the principal's ability to differentiate support for individual teachers.

### Summary of Findings

The greater the leadership content knowledge, the more aspects of instruction principals attended to, moving beyond surface features of instruction to underlying pedagogy and assessment. Ann, the principal with high leadership content knowledge in writing, observed instruction regularly and facilitated reflective discussions with and among the teachers to improve writing instruction. She could identify the important concepts in the lesson, know how children learn the concepts and then identify that the students' learning by looking at the evidence of the student writing. Matt, with moderate leadership content knowledge, attended to more aspects of instruction than Brenda. He moved beyond the surface features of writing workshop to underlying routines and procedures. He monitored classrooms and teacher work for quality and compliance for example, he targeted classroom walkthroughs looking for a clear teaching objective. His work focused on writing instruction but around logistical issues such as creating monthly time for teachers to plan writing and reading units together. Brenda, the principal with developing leadership content knowledge, had limited direct interaction with teachers in writing. She focused on the superficial aspects of writing such as ensuring that writing is being taught through reading weekly lesson plans. She also guided teachers to look at student work in a superficial manner.

The greater the leadership content knowledge in writing, the feedback increased in amount and in the level of detail given. In the area of feedback, Ann gave specific direct feedback to teachers regarding the writing instruction. She used student work as evidence of effective instruction and student learning. This led to rich conversations with the teacher about the teacher's next steps in instruction. Matt gave general feedback to teachers that could apply to teachers in all subject areas. I did not see Brenda give feedback to teachers.

Leadership content knowledge also influenced designing professional learning opportunities for teachers. Ann established a school-wide routine of the coaching cycle that provided ongoing opportunities to observe instruction, guiding the teachers to reflect and for the principal to give feedback regarding a specific lesson and giving a grade level the opportunity to reflect together. She routinely scored student work with teachers against an established rubric and used that rubric for professional development with the teachers. Mark routinely participated grade level specific professional development grade level lab sites in writing where the teachers in a grade level would watch a teacher teach a lesson and then the teachers would observe the coach working with the students. Brenda's role in designing professional development for teachers was in setting up the training for all teachers through *ECRW*, which was a basic level of training required of all teachers participating in the program. She relied heavily on the teacher leader for ongoing professional development yet that was an ineffective model as Brenda shared that the teachers rarely sought out the help of the teacher leader. She did not use student work in her leadership practice nor did she help teachers use student work or rubrics in meaningful ways.

Comparing the work of three principals with different levels of leadership content knowledge in writing resulted in drastically different practices in three primary areas: attention to instruction, feedback given to the teachers and designing and differentiating learning opportunities for teachers. This chapter demonstrates that different levels of LCK led to different instructional leadership practices. The outcome of this study was an in-depth description of how three principals used leadership content knowledge in their work as principal supporting writing at their school. The following chapter, Chapter 6, will outline the important implications of these findings.

## CHAPTER 6: WHAT'S NEXT?

The purpose of this study was to describe how three elementary school principals use leadership content knowledge in their work with teachers on writing instruction. This study sought to understand what leadership content knowledge in writing looks like and, how principals use leadership content knowledge in their leadership practices. Chapters 4 and 5 outlined three primary findings about how leadership content knowledge in writing influences the work of the principal.

1. The greater the leadership content knowledge, the more aspects of instruction the principal attended to, moving beyond surface features of instruction to underlying pedagogy and assessment.
2. The greater the leadership content knowledge in writing, the greater the amount and level of detail in the feedback principals are able to give to teachers.
3. Leadership content knowledge influenced how principals designed professional learning opportunities for teachers and how they supported individual teachers through differentiation.

The findings of this study indicate that principal practice is strongly influenced by leadership content knowledge in writing. This chapter discusses the importance of these findings for research on instructional leadership and for the day-to-day work of a principal working to improve writing instruction at his or her school.

### **Implications for Research on Instructional Leadership**

In this day and age, there is enormous pressure on school principals to focus on instructional leadership. It has been documented that school leadership is the second most important factor in student learning after classroom teaching (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Marzano et al., 2005; Waters et al., 2003).

This study contributes to the research literature by investigating the link between principal's knowledge (Chapter 4) and principal's practices (Chapter 5). Robinson (2010) argues that the link between leaders' knowledge and leaders' practice is understudied: "While the link between leader's pedagogical knowledge and effective instructional leadership seems obvious, there are very few studies of the relationship between leaders' knowledge and practices" (p. 7). Here, I show the three principals do different things as instructional leaders because they know different things making the link between leadership content knowledge to a principal's work supporting writing instruction. The principal with high leadership content knowledge developed effective routines to observe teachers, offered them specific, direct feedback about instruction based on the evidence of student work, and facilitated the learning of teachers at many different levels. The principal with the least leadership content knowledge had little direct interaction with teachers around writing, gave limited feedback to teachers, and only contributed to teacher learning by providing substitutes and arranging for the teachers to get a one-size fits all training.

In the literature, there are very few studies of an instructional leader's knowledge and how that knowledge influences the work improving instruction. By comparing the work of the

three principals of different leadership content knowledge in writing, this study reveals that leadership content knowledge in a subject specific area matters in the work of the principal. This study begins to open the curtains behind the private work of instructional leadership to show just how principals support teachers in improving instruction and what kinds of competencies they need to do so. It is important to document and describe principals who are successful in order to share that information with all principals. Prestine and Nelson (2003) state, “unless this theoretical framework is identified and articulated, it seems likely that instructional leadership ideas will be fluently employed by a small minority of practitioners capable of intuiting the larger picture for themselves” (p. 53).

This study also contributes by focusing on instructional leadership in writing. Prior research has shown that principals lead in different ways in different subjects (Burch & Spillane, 2003, 2005; Stein & D'Amico, 2000). Research on principals' content knowledge demonstrates that content knowledge is important and can influence the work of a principal. Principals' leadership content knowledge influences how they observe classroom instruction, work with teachers and structure teacher professional development (Coburn, 2005; Nelson & Sassi, 2005; Nelson et al., 2001; Overholt, 2008; Stein & Nelson, 2003; Szabocsik, 2008). Studies that examined the differences in leadership between reading and mathematics found that in literacy reforms, the expertise was often held among the staff members and principals played a more prominent role in leading literacy instruction than math instruction (Burch & Spillane, 2003; Stein & D'Amico, 2000).

This research echoes existing studies in literacy and mathematics, showing that when leaders gain a deeper understanding of effective teaching practice in a subject area, they were able to modify administrative routines to support them (Nelson & Sassi, 2000b; Overholt, 2008; Szabocsik, 2008). And, it extends it by moving the study of leadership content knowledge into a new subject matter, writing.

Much of the existing work on LCK is theoretical rather than empirical. Thus, this study extends this line of research by showing how leadership content knowledge influenced the work of the principal. Stein and Nelson describe the use of LCK in math in different instructional leadership roles from an elementary principal doing classroom observations, an associate superintendent leading a curriculum adoption committee, and a district office designing district-wide mathematics educational reform. By showing three principals with different levels of leadership content knowledge performing the same role, this study demonstrates how leadership content knowledge influences the work of the principal in the subject area of writing.

### **Implications for Instructional Leadership Practice**

This study also contributes to the day-to-day work of a principal striving to improve instruction at her school. First, it provides a vision of what instructional leadership might look like with strong leadership content knowledge. While the research has argued that it is important for principals to act as instructional leaders (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2008; Marzano et al., 2005; Waters et al., 2003), there is some debate on what is an instructional leader – and most of them involve characteristics rather than knowledge. This study provides a description of the work of a principal to improve instruction in writing and begins to create a

framework for understanding how leadership content knowledge contributes to teaching and learning.

One way in which expertise is transmitted among a profession is by studying outlying experts. Ann is such an expert. By studying how a principal with high leadership content knowledge uses that knowledge in her work improving instruction, we can document expertise in implementing writing reform. It is important that an understanding of instructional leadership is articulated and illustrated in order to take leadership expertise from a few exceptional individuals and share it with all principals working to improve instruction and student learning (Prestine & Nelson, 2003).

In this study, routines were an important element of professional learning opportunities at two of the schools (coaching cycles and lab sites). Coldren and Spillane (2007) found that “routine nature leads to a degree of efficiency that enables instructional leadership” (p. 392). They recommend that policies that involve the design and implementation of leadership tools that would allow effective practices that are proven effective on a small scale be implemented in many schools with flexibility to tailor the practice to a school’s particular context. In this study, Ann with high leadership content knowledge developed the coaching cycle, an effective routine. The coaching cycle provided a structure where Ann observed instruction regularly. The teachers knew what to expect from the follow-up discussion following the lesson because it was the same questions; What was your objective? How did you model it? What did you see or are you expecting to see? (a link to examining student work) Who struggled and what did you do to support the student? What will you do next? Teachers knew on that day of the coaching cycle that they would be meeting with their grade level colleagues to debrief their lesson. The routine of the lunchtime debriefing was as simple as “What happened?” The system also allowed Ann to make her way through each of the grade levels for three weeks in a row every nine weeks.

Another important implication for principal practice is that school districts should take into account subject specific leadership content knowledge when recruiting and hiring principals and provide learning on how to impact teacher learning through leadership. Principal’s professional development is often overlooked when districts implement instructional reform. Others who have studied leadership content knowledge in reading also suggest specific content focused professional development for principals (Coburn, 2005; Overholt, 2008; Szabocsik, 2008).

Third, this study suggests that in order to lead instruction reforms where teachers are working to improve instruction, principals need support in developing leadership content knowledge. Leadership content knowledge is important so how would a principal acquire it? Districts and outside reform agencies should consider subject matter content knowledge and pedagogical expertise for principals when designing professional development (Coburn, 2005). Often, the reforms focus on changing the teacher’s instructional practice and overlook the leadership skills and subject matter specific content knowledge that is important to the long-term success of a reform. One study in math and two studies in reading have demonstrated that leadership content knowledge can be developed through professional development (Nelson & Sassi, 2000b; Overholt, 2008; Szabocsik, 2008).

I suggest two junctures for increasing content specific leadership content knowledge; administrative pre-service programs and professional development programs for principals. Administrative Pre-service programs are in a position to improve subject specific focus in leadership content knowledge. Currently, most principal pre-service programs focus on the administrative aspects of the job and do not discuss subject specific curriculum or instruction. Principal training programs should have a curriculum specific focus for administrative pre-service programs. Coburn (2005) suggests:

Leadership credential programs have a strategic opportunity to train a new generation of school leaders who are well in contemporary approaches to reading instruction and can think strategically about how to use that knowledge to engage in leadership practices that support change in instructional practices. (p. 503)

Professional development for administrators needs to include knowledge of instruction in a specific subject matter as well as how to use that knowledge to improve instruction throughout the school. That would include increasing knowledge of subject matter content, how it is learned and how it is most effectively taught. In this study, the principal with high leadership content knowledge was able to identify the important concepts in the lesson, know how children learn those concepts, and then was able to determine if students had learned those concepts by looking at the student writing. Nelson and Sassi (2005) recommend:

As efforts to improve elementary mathematics instruction continue, educators will be well-advised to include plans for helping school and district administrators improve their own knowledge of mathematics, how it is learned, how it is taught, as part of systemic plans for instructional improvement. (p. 175)

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this study include a small number of principals and schools located in one 50-mile region. The entire length of the study was relatively short from February to June. Extending the length of the study to 18 months would allow more opportunity to see the work across school years and demonstrate long-term planning and incremental school change. The three principals all worked under different conditions and with different resources so that the findings are not applicable to all principals. This study did not look at principal effectiveness or measure student outcomes.

### **Future Research**

One area for future research would be the types of leadership content knowledge needed in specific roles in leading a reform. In this study, all three principals were essentially performing the same role of implementing a writing reform as an elementary school principal. If this were a district initiative, what would be the leadership content knowledge required of a Director of Curriculum and Instruction or an Assistant Superintendent? One could study a principal, a district level administrator and a group of district administrators implementing a writing reform and exploring what is leadership content knowledge in writing and how is it different than the leadership content knowledge used in the role of principal. Stein and Nelson (2003) argue that different administrative roles required different knowledge based on the function of the activity



in Math. The Noyce Foundation believes participants require some knowledge of leadership, content knowledge, systems knowledge, and pedagogical knowledge but level of knowledge needed depends on one's role in the system. What would leadership content knowledge in writing look like in those different roles?

There needs to be more research on what is leadership content knowledge in different subject areas. Predominately, the work has been done in mathematics with some work in the area of reading. Leadership content knowledge is a fulcrum point that can be used to leverage improvement in instruction. By having knowledge about content, instruction and professional development and knowing how to use that knowledge that allows an administrator to improve instruction, there exists the opportunity to have an impact on teaching and learning. Clearly this small-scale qualitative study is just one small step in understanding leadership content knowledge in writing.

Finally, one area that has the potential for further study is research of principal leadership content knowledge in different subject areas. For example, if a principal has high leadership content knowledge in reading and is only developing content knowledge in mathematics, what implications does that have for the work of the principal across subject areas? Is there a way for a principal to develop leadership content knowledge in a subject area where he may be weak? Stein and Nelson (2003) hypothesize that a principal who has a foundation of leadership content knowledge in one area, can learn leadership content knowledge in a second subject area. They describe a situation called postholing where one uses what they know in one subject area to develop the skills and routines in a subject area. Coburn (2005) also saw something similar in reading. No comparison of leadership content knowledge of multiple subject areas comparing a principal's knowledge in one subject compared to another subject.

Improving instruction is an important focus at this time of intense scrutiny of school improvement. The study of leadership content knowledge and the actions of the principal in improving instruction is an important step in the study of instructional leadership.

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## APPENDIX A

## Initial Interview Protocol

**Research Question:** How, if at all, does leadership content knowledge in writing influence the work of the principal?

This study will also seek to answer the following sub-questions:

- What is leadership content knowledge in writing?
- How does leadership content knowledge affect how a principal interacts with teachers in writing?
- How do principals use leadership content knowledge when they think about their work?

Greetings. Obtain subject consent. Ask permission to record.

Identifying information at the beginning of tape.

Good afternoon. I am here with \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ Elementary School.

I would like to begin with a few background questions about you.

How long have you been a principal?

How long have you been a principal at this school?

How long has your school been involved in the Every Child a Reader and Writer Initiative?

Explain the study-I am looking at how principals use what they know about writing and instruction in their work.

First, I would like to ask you some questions about writing-

How have you learned about writing instruction over the course of your career?

1. Professional development attended as a teacher
  - a. What kind of approaches did it emphasize?
  - b. What were the implications of the approach for classroom writing instruction?
2. Professional development attended as a principal
  - a. What kind of approaches did it emphasize?
  - b. What were the implications of the approach for leadership in writing?
3. Coursework
4. Conversations with colleagues?
5. What do you learn from teachers in this school about writing?

In your view, how best do students learn to write? (Why? Can you give me an example.)

In your view, what is the relationship between reading and writing?

What does good writing instruction look like? What would you like to see in classrooms? Can you give me an example?

How would you know when you saw good writing instruction? (criteria for success)

Share 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student informational writing.

What are the strengths of this paper? What are the next steps for this student? How might you work with this student's teacher to improve this students' writing?

What kinds of things do you do to support teachers in their writing instruction?

How do you see your role in this process?

How do teachers best learn new instructional approaches? What kinds of conditions best facilitate this learning?

Where else might we see you using writing, instruction and leadership in your work with teachers?

Could you describe what that would look like?

In what ways do you use what you know about writing, instruction and leadership in your work with your teachers?

I heard you say \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. Is there any other way you use leadership content knowledge in writing?

Where would we see that work?

Could you describe what that would look like?

Brief explanation of my study and time commitment

- Going from 6 initial interviews to three subjects
- Need to observe from February to June- at least 3 visits
- Time commitment

Explain *unit of practice* and conditions

1. The topic of study must include ideas about writing instruction
2. The unit of practice would take place over weeks or months and have specific occasions on which practical judgment is used.
3. It must include making consequential decisions.



4. It must be observable.

Negotiate unit of practice

What would you feel comfortable with me observing?

- How could I see it?
- When could I see it?
- Are there particular dates that we could schedule to observe this? (Get out the calendar)

Thank you very much for your time today. The next steps are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. Do you have any questions or concerns?

## APPENDIX B

### Pre-Observation and Post-Observation Interview Questions

#### **Pre-Observation Questions**

1. Briefly describe your staff and the session that you have planned?
2. What are the goals of this session?
3. Why did you choose these goals (and/or activity)?
4. How are you going to determine if you were successful in reaching these goals?
5. How does this session relate to broader goals for your staff or your school?
6. How comfortable do you feel with the content of this session? What have you done to prepare your self to lead this session?
7. What difficulties and/or misconceptions are you anticipating? What will you do to address these difficulties?

#### **Possible Post-Observation Questions**

Follow-up questions regarding strategies used.

1. How do you think the session went? How do you feel about the session?
2. What do you think the teachers were learning? What made you think that?
3. Questions about particular moments when LCK was evident- what strategies were being used? Attempt to open window into principals thinking. Don't assume LCK. Ask how the principal understood the situation.
4. Is there a next step with your staff? What is the next step? How will you support your teachers in moving forward? How will you follow this session?
5. How did you draw on your prior knowledge in planning or conducting this session?

Appendix C

Student Writing Sample, ECRW Rubric and Commentary

**INFORMATIONAL •• GRADE 3**

Informational writing capitalizes on children's natural curiosity about the world around them. Being proficient in informational writing underlies effective learning in all content areas. Teaching children how to write about what they already know begins in kindergarten and increases in complexity throughout the grade levels as they learn how to incorporate research. In informational writing, children progress from simple statements or lists, to the ubiquitous "all about" papers of the early grades, and then to more sophisticated ways of organizing their knowledge. In order to do this, students need to be taught to analyze and classify that information. Students need to learn to support their presentations with references, graphs or drawings, and to project the sense of authority that comes from knowing one's subject. Informational writing includes reports, feature articles and literary nonfiction. Listed below are the essential elements of informational writing. The expectations for this specific grade are articulated in the rubric.

**Elements of Informational Writing**

- ◆ **Conveys information and ideas**
- ◆ **Establishes a context**
- ◆ **Develops a controlling idea with supporting facts and details**
- ◆ **Elaborates ideas**
- ◆ **Groups related facts and ideas**
- ◆ **Includes specialized vocabulary**
- ◆ **Conveys a knowledgeable stance**
- ◆ **Includes specific strategies and structures to convey information and engage the reader**
- ◆ **Provides a sense of closure**

<b>5 = Exceeds Standard</b>	<b>4 = Meets Standard</b>	<b>3 = Needs Revision</b>	<b>2 = Needs Instruction</b>	<b>1 = Needs Substantial Support</b>
<p>Reports detailed, specific information about a topic with which the writer has personal interest/experience</p> <p>Introduces the topic, providing a context</p> <p>Creates an obvious organizational structure to group facts and supporting details, including, but not limited to paragraphs</p> <p>Presents a controlling idea or perspective on the topic</p> <p>Elaborates on ideas about topic by using supporting facts and details</p> <p>Uses specialized vocabulary and features, such as diagrams, maps, etc., to convey information</p> <p>Conveys a knowledgeable stance through the use of sufficient, relevant information and level of language</p> <p>Provides a concluding sentence or section</p>	<p>Reports adequate and specific information about a topic with which the writer has personal interest/experience</p> <p>Introduces the topic, providing a context</p> <p>Creates an obvious organizational structure to group facts and supporting details, including, but not limited to paragraphs</p> <p>May attempt to develop a controlling idea or perspective on the topic</p> <p>Elaborates on ideas about topic by using supporting facts and details</p> <p>Uses specialized vocabulary and features, such as diagrams, maps, etc., to convey information</p> <p>Includes sufficient, relevant information to convey a knowledgeable stance</p> <p>Provides a concluding sentence or section</p>	<p>Reports information about a topic with which the writer has personal interest/experience</p> <p>Introduces the topic, sometimes providing a context</p> <p>Creates an organizational structure with most related facts grouped together</p> <p>May attempt to develop a controlling idea or perspective on the topic</p> <p>Uses facts and details to describe or develop topic</p> <p>Uses some specialized vocabulary and features, such as diagrams, maps, etc., to convey information</p> <p>May include sufficient, relevant information to convey a knowledgeable stance</p> <p>May provide a concluding sentence or section</p>	<p>Reports information about a topic but typically lacks adequate and/or specific information pertinent to the subject</p> <p>May have an introduction</p> <p>May attempt to organize the information with some related facts grouped together, parts of the text may be disjointed</p> <p>Uses facts and some supporting details to describe topic</p> <p>May use some specialized vocabulary and features, such as diagrams, maps, etc., to convey information</p> <p>May include information to convey a knowledgeable stance</p> <p>May have a concluding statement</p>	<p>Reports limited information about a topic</p> <p>May provide an introduction</p> <p>May lack organization</p> <p>Has few details</p> <p>May use simple diagrams, charts or illustrations as appropriate to the text</p> <p>May have a concluding statement</p>

**Exciting Bamboo  
Eaters**

Written and Illustrated by

I-3-10324

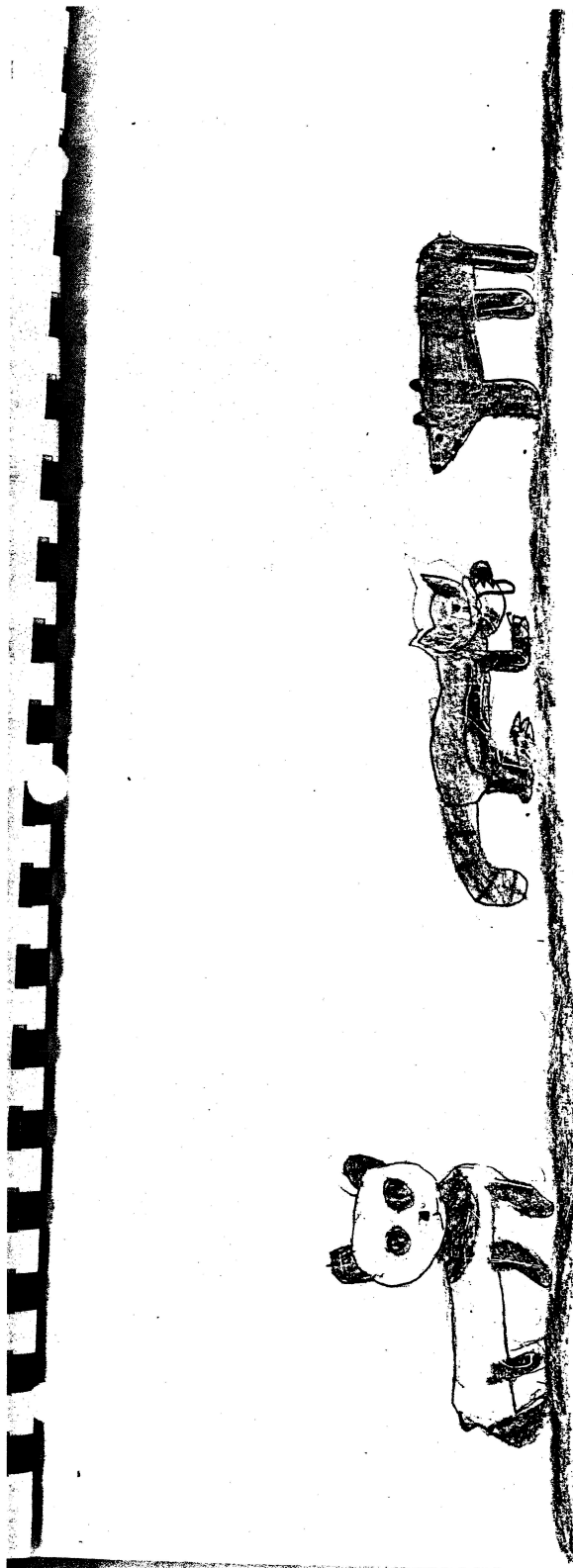
Dedication

I dedicate this book to my Grandma because she looks  
out for me.



Table of contents

What is a panda ?	Pg. 1
Appearance	Pg. 2
Pandas Look like humans	Pg. 3
Habitat and food	Pg. 4
Author's Note	Pg. 5



Is a panda or a bear?

I bet you thought it was. Giant pandas are not bears or raccoons. They have their own classification because they are different from bears and raccoons.

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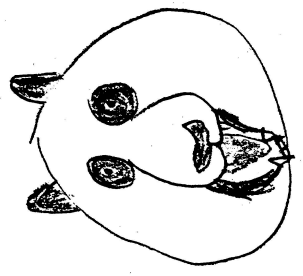


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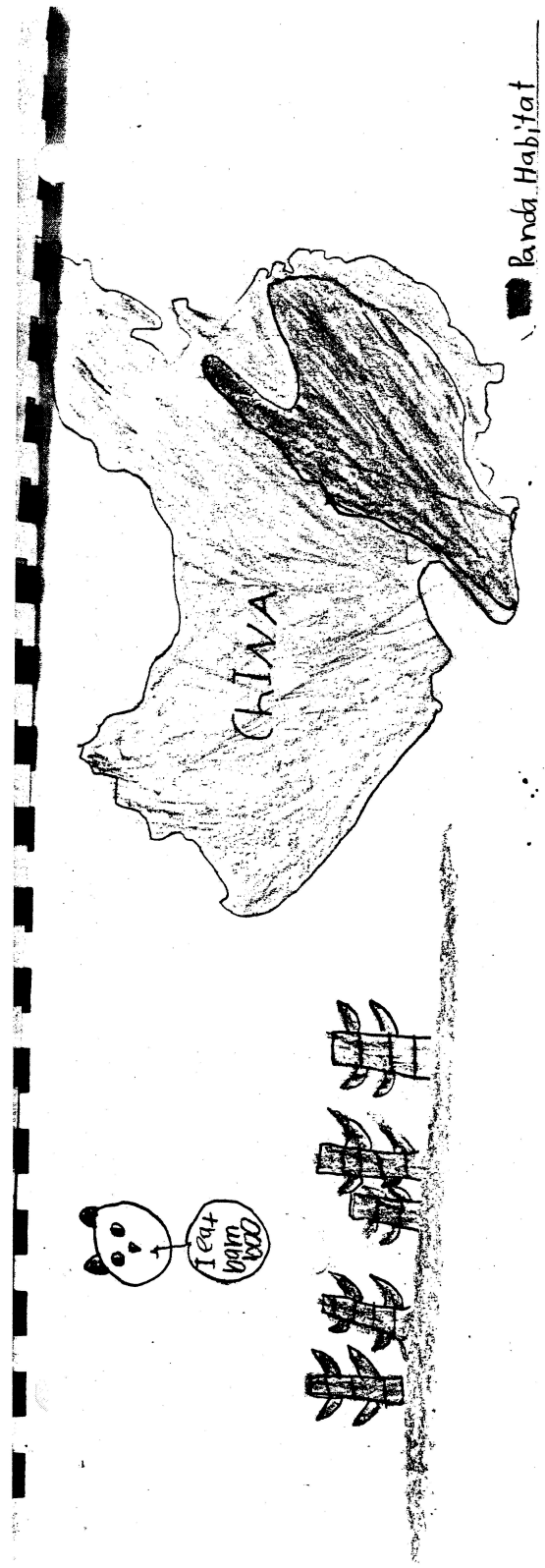
What do pandas look like?

Pandas have big faces and big eyes and have big black patches around their eyes. They have a black and white furry body. The black and white color helps them to hide from their enemies.



Why does a Panda look like a human?

A Panda looks like a human because it sits like a human  
 being and eats like a human being. Pandas also have paws  
 with a special thumb for grabbing things tightly.



Where do pandas live and what do they eat?

Pandas live high in the mountains of South West China.  
 They live there because that's where bamboo grows. They are  
 called pandas because pandas means bamboo eater. Pandas  
 could spend sixteen hours a day eating bamboo.

4

**THIRD GRADE INFORMATIONAL  
SCORE POINT 3 – CENTER  
# 10324 "EXITING BAMBOO EATERS"**

Commentary:

This Score Point 3 paper exhibits the structure of an informational book, with a table of contents and a dedication. The primary reason for its remaining in the 3 range is the sketchiness of the information. It also lacks an appropriate introduction to the topic and a conclusion.

Characteristics of this paper:

- ◆ There is an obvious organizational structure – questions followed by related information.
- ◆ Facts and details describe and develop the topic (“special thumb for grabbing things tightly”).
- ◆ Uses limited specialized vocabulary (“classification”), along with illustrations and a map to convey information.
- ◆ There is not enough information about pandas for the writer to seem like an expert on the topic.

## APPENDIX D

## Interview and Observation Topics and Duration

		Brenda	Matt	Ann
Initial Interview		30 minutes	38 minutes	69 minutes
Observation 1	Pre-observation Interview 1	7 minutes	5 minutes	2 minutes
	Observation 1	Meeting with Literacy Lead Teacher 40 minutes	Classroom Walk-Throughs 75 minutes	Coaching Cycle and Debrief 90 minutes and 30 minutes debrief
	Post-observation Interview 1	17 minutes	1a- 8 minutes 1b- 20 minutes	8 minutes and 24 minutes
	Documents from Observation 1	Handouts from ECRW Principal Mtg	Pamphlet and letter describing immersion	One K teacher lesson plan
Observation 2	Pre-observation Interview 2	6 minutes	7 minutes	10 minutes
	Observation 2	Staff Meeting 80 minutes	Unit Planning 75 minutes	Professional Development with EL Consultant 60 minutes
	Post-observation Interview 2	27 minutes	13 minutes	32 minutes
	Documents from Observation 2	Staff Mtg Agenda	Letter from parent organization, unit of study for 1 <sup>st</sup> grade and 11x17 planning sheet	Handouts from R's presentation
Observation 3	Pre-observation Interview 3	5 minutes	5 minutes	4 minutes
	Observation 3	Staff Meeting 80 minutes	Lab Site 45 minutes	Coaching Cycle and Debrief 120 minutes and 30 minutes debrief
	Post-observation Interview 3	23 minutes	15 minutes	15 minutes
	Documents from Observation 3	Staff Mtg Agenda 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade writing evaluation sheet	Lesson plan	Nothing
Final Interview		46 minutes	52 minutes	92 minutes