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**TEACHERS WHO TEACH WRITING: Practices of Teaching
in the Writing Classroom**

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This article presents the findings of a multi-site case study which was designed to explore the teaching practices of primary school teachers who teach writing in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The case study spanned four schools, representing four major geographical zones and varying student population sizes. The practices of 10 primary school teachers were observed. Data were collected over a period of 12 weeks through observational check lists, field notes, and interviews. The research was guided by four questions: (1) What are the writing instruction practices of primary school teachers in St. Vincent and the Grenadines? (2) How are these practices delivered by those teachers? (3) What are the factors which influence teachers' practices, and (4) What are the challenges faced by those teachers in the delivery and implication of their practices? Findings indicate that teachers utilise a combination of traditional skills-based and process-oriented practices in their instruction.

Introduction

Recent research in literacy has tended to focus heavily on the aspect of reading and the instructional practices inherent therein, while less attention has been paid to writing and writing instruction (Bridge & Hiebert, 1985; Graves, 2003; Kress, 1982). This, however, does not negate the importance of writing and the impact that poor writing skills ultimately has on students. Students who do not become competent writers are unlikely to realise their educational, occupational or personal potential (Graham, MacArthur, & Fitzgerald, 2007).

Given the significance of writing in the lives of students, the way writing is taught is of paramount importance. Graham and Perin (2007), through their meta-analysis of 20 writing instruction interventions, delineated 11 best practices in the teaching of writing. The ten most effective interventions and their effect sizes identified in that study were: strategy instruction (0.82), summarisation (0.82), peer assistance (0.75), setting product goals (0.70), word processing (0.55), sentence combining (0.50), inquiry (0.32), prewriting activities (0.32), process writing approach (0.32), study of models (0.25) and grammar instruction (–0.32).

Although the results of Graham and Perin's (2007) study should not be regarded as absolute in writing instruction practices, they do provide necessary guidelines and benchmarks on how best practices in writing instruction should be perceived. Additionally, other researchers have presented findings in tandem with those of Graham and Perin (2007). The importance of teaching writing as a process, the use of pre-writing activities, the utilisation of technology, teacher modelling and the use of models, as well as the integration of reading with writing, have all been validated by research (Atwell, 1998; Bogard & Mc Mackin, 2012; Calkins, 1994; Deane & Quinlan, 2010; Graves 1994; Lacina, 2003; NTRC, 2007; Peterson & McClay, 2012; Tompkins, 2012; Troia, 2014).

Teachers' writing instruction practices

Generally, the instructional practices of teachers of writing appear to be fall within the confines of the traditional skills-based approach and the process-oriented approach (Raimes, 1991; Troia, 2008). Practices associated with the traditional skills-based approach include the teaching of grammar in isolation, the production of single drafts, teacher-dominated

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editing, and writing viewed as a product. This approach maintains that the writing process is linear (Connor, 1987). Practices characteristic of this approach also include the provision of sentences, poems or other pieces of composition to be copied from the chalkboard and the use of worksheet and workbooks (Bridge, Cantrell, & Compton-Hall, 1997).

Conversely, with practices associated with the process-oriented approach, the focus of writing is not on students' finished work but rather on what students think and do as they write (Bunting, 2000; Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Tompkins, 2004). Teachers who utilise this approach advocate practices such as, the viewing of writing as a process not product, teaching writing in the context of reading, teaching grammar in context of students' writing, conferencing and peer activities (Tompkins, 2010; Troia et al., 2011).

Research has indicated that teachers who teach writing engage in a blend of practices across a practice continuum, with the traditional skill-based and process-oriented approaches at opposite ends of the spectrum (Lipson et al., 2000; Troia et al., 2011). In Cutler and Graham's (2008) national survey, data were gathered from a random sample of Grade One to Three teachers. Of the 174 teachers who responded to the questionnaire, 72% stated that they utilised the process approach combined with the traditional skills approach. Of the teachers surveyed only 20% reported using only process approach, and only 6% reported using a traditional skills-based approach. Even when the orientation of teachers' writing instructional practices seemed to lean either to the traditional skills-based approach or process-oriented approach in writing instruction, their practices did not appear to have complete linear adherence. Rather, they appeared to utilise a compendium of practices across the continuum ranging from traditional to process-oriented (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Troia et al., 2011).

Research Context

While data exist about the writing practices of teachers in other countries, very little documented material exists that would shed light on the instructional practices of teachers who teach writing in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Teachers' practices are governed by the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Harmonisation Language Arts

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Curriculum, a policy document which includes outcomes and activities for the teaching of writing. Teachers also prepare students for national tests (Grades Two and Four) as well as the Caribbean Primary Exit Assessment (CPEA), which all consist of writing components. There is, however, a paucity of data regarding the actual practices of the teachers in the 68 primary schools across the state. Further, little is known about the factors that influence the way these teachers execute their practices, and the challenges they face while doing so. This research is also of significance to me as a lecturer at the Division of Teacher Education (DTE) in St. Vincent. An exploration into the writing practices of language arts teachers will prove to be an invaluable resource and link to theory, in my own writing classroom with novice teachers.

Framework

The exploration was framed within the context of activity theory credited to the work of Vygotsky (1980) and Leont'ev (1981). This theory purports that human behaviour and thought are influenced by the following aspects: the subject (individual or group of individuals in the work environment), the object (the objective or motive of the subject), mediating artefacts (tools and resources), rules, community, and division of labour (see Figure 1). These aspects are assumed to influence individuals' cognition and behaviour, as an individual's thoughts and actions cannot be divorced from his or her environment (Engeström, 1999). Therefore, as depicted through the interrelatedness of the arrows in Figure 1, all behaviour is mediated and influenced by several factors which exist in an individual's environment and mental processes. When applied to the field of education, this would indicate that the actions of the teacher in the classroom are impacted by his/her resources and tasks, the policy that governs his/her classroom instruction, the educational community (other teachers, students, society), and the teacher him- or herself.

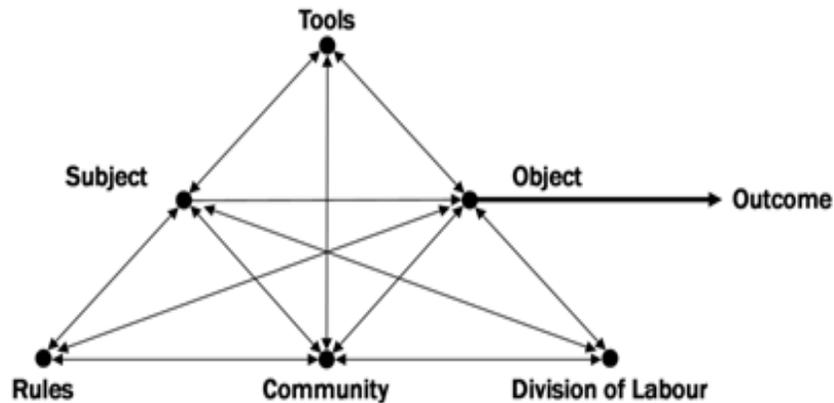


Figure 1. Engeström's elaboration of Leont'ev's activity theory

Activity theory was used to frame this multi-site case study as it allowed for the exploration not only of teachers' writing instructional practices but also of the factors which influence the practices utilised. The study employed qualitative methods to gather and analyse data regarding writing instruction practices in the primary schools of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and was driven by the following problem statement:

The writing instruction practices utilised by teachers have a significant impact on the writing skills and competence of students, thereby making knowledge of such practices indispensable to the development and success of writing programmes in any country; however, currently there exists a dearth of published data relating to the writing instruction practices of teachers at the primary level in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the extent to which current writing instruction reflects best practices described in published literature.

The research was conducted in order to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the writing instruction practices used by teachers who teach writing in the primary schools of St. Vincent and the Grenadines?

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2. How are writing instruction practices delivered by teachers who teach writing in the primary schools of St. Vincent and the Grenadines?
3. What are the factors that influence the classroom practices in writing instruction used by teachers who teach writing in the primary schools of St. Vincent and the Grenadines?
4. What are the current challenges faced by these teachers in the delivery and implementation of writing instruction practices?

The purpose of this research, therefore, was to investigate the writing instruction practices used by teachers who teach writing in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the methods through which those practices were delivered, and the factors and challenges which may affect the choice and delivery of those practices. Such an exploration sheds light on the current practices used by primary school language arts teachers thus adding to the current body of knowledge particular to St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and the Caribbean in general. Such information may also prove vital to the area of Teacher Education by creating a possible link between the nature and content of writing instruction pedagogy offered to pre-service teachers and their later in-service classroom practices.

Methodology

The Design

The study was conducted within the parameters of qualitative research and followed a case study approach. The case study was selected as the most suitable as it allows for the study of a bounded phenomenon within the context of that phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). This multi-site case study sought primarily to describe and explore observed behaviour.

Sample - The Sites

Four schools were purposively sampled for the research. Schools were selected from the four major geographical zones of the main island and included a mixture of large and small student population, urban and

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rural location, and government and parochial administration. To preserve the identity of the participants, the schools were renamed the Mt Charlotte, Mt Patrick, Mt George and Mt Andrew primary schools.

Sample - The Participants

All language arts teachers from the Grades Three and Four classes were sampled from the four schools. In the case of the largest school which had three Grade Three and three Grade Four classes, two classes of each grade were randomly selected. Pseudonyms were used to preserve anonymity. Table 1 below outlines the pertinent characteristics of each participating teacher.

Table 1. Characteristics of ten participating teachers

Participant	Experience	Qualification	Grade	School
Anne	Over 30 years	Teacher trained	3	Mt. Andrew
Joan	Over ten years	Teacher Trained; CETT trained	3	Mt. George
Kim	Over ten years	Teacher Trained; Degree in Special Needs Education	3	Mt. George
Mia	Less than five years	Teacher Trained	3	Mt. Patrick
Petra	Over twenty years	Teacher Trained	3	Mt. Charlotte
Jane	Over ten years	Teacher Trained; Degree in Counselling	4	Mt. Andrew
Mary	Over twenty years	Teacher Trained; Degree in Educational Management	4	St. George
Maude	Over twenty years	Teacher trained; Degree in Literacy	4	Mt. Charlotte
John	Over twenty years	Teacher Trained	4	Mt. Patrick
Rose	Less than ten years	No teacher training	4	St. George

Data Collection Tools

Data were collected primarily through observation. The entire data collection period spanned 15 weeks. Teachers were observed for 10

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hours each. I sat in each teacher's classroom and wrote down all writing instruction practices observed. These field notes were further substantiated by the observational checklist.

Data were also collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted after the observational period and each session lasted for approximately 30 minutes. Questions from the interview guide included:

1. Do you use all or some parts of the process approach when you teach writing (brainstorming, drafting, editing, revising and publishing)? If so why?
2. You answered no to the above. What practices do you use in your writing? Why do you do so?
3. Do you conference with the students individually as they write? Explain why/why not.
4. How are the topics selected for the students' pieces? Why is this process used? Are the topics chosen from different genres?
5. Do you use technology in your writing class? Explain how. Explain why you do or don't.

Data analysis

The data collected through observation, field notes and the observational checklists, were organised according to date observed. Units of data gathered from the observation and interviews were formatted into codes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). A code book was kept to ensure that similar units of data received a related labelling or code. Descriptive coding was used in which a word or phrase described the unit or chunk of data; for example, 'pre-writing activity' was used to label or code that unit of data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Microsoft Office Word tracking, balloons and comments options were utilised to insert codes into the transcribed data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). From these codes, common patterns or themes were then identified and categorised.

Analysis of the data collected from the semi-structured interviews, followed a similar pattern used in analysing observed data (Marshall & Rossman, 2012). All interview data collected from the semi-structured interviews and follow-up telephone interview were transcribed and typed.

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Using the balloon and comments feature in Microsoft Word, codes then were inserted to identify chunks of data considered to be of importance. These were subsumed into themes of common areas as expressed in individual teacher's responses. Each theme was then carefully cross referenced for occurrence among other teachers.

Data Findings

Research Question 1: What are the writing instruction practices used by teachers who teach writing in the primary schools of St. Vincent and the Grenadines?

The writing instruction practices of the teachers observed were as diverse as their personalities and the locations of their schools. Yet these practices were common enough to be recognisable from site to site. Teachers were observed in their classrooms and this observation was supported with field notes and an observational checklist. Figure 2 provides a page of the observational checklist utilised.

Research based criteria indicators	
Writing Practices	Comments
Student involvement in writing topics selection	
Writing workshop	
Grammar instruction in context	
Prewriting/brainstorming activities	
Drafting activities	
Revising activities	
Editing Activities	
Publishing activities	
Integration of reading and writing	
Use of variety of resources	
Integration of curriculum writing standards	
Collaborative writing	

Figure 2. Sample of observational checklist

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The practices observed were: the use of teacher-created text, use of the writing process approach, the integration of reading with writing, the teaching of writing as a separate strand, the teaching of writing in the context of a literacy block, the use of technology, 'telling' instead of showing, use of other resources (as alternatives or additions to the prescribed text), conferencing, instruction in a variety of genres, and the instruction of grammar. Teachers' selection of these practices demonstrated not only the diverse nature of these practices but teachers' propensity to combine traditional skills instruction with some best practices associated with the process-oriented approach. This blend of practices was demonstrated regardless of the teacher's age, gender, training level or tenure.

Best practices observed

Of the best practices advocated in research, seven were observed among the practices of teachers; two teachers were observed teaching summarisation; eight were observed advocating peer assistance; two used word processing activities in their instruction; five used inquiry activities to begin writing instruction; six utilised pre writing activities; six utilised some form of the writing process approach, and seven used models in their instruction. None were observed using the research validated best practices of strategy instruction, setting product goals or sentence combining (Graham & Perin, 2007).

Research Question 2: How are writing instruction practices delivered by teachers who teach writing in the primary schools of St. Vincent and the Grenadines?

The 10 teachers observed practiced their craft along a continuum of two approaches - the traditional skills-based approach and the process-oriented approach. This amalgamation of practices ran the gamut from very few best practices seen, to a classroom where best practices in writing instruction dominated the teacher's instructional practices. However, most teachers observed fell closer to the traditional skills instruction end of the continuum. This was the case regardless of those teachers' age, gender or training acquired. The following sections will provide an insight into the poly-modal nature of the practices observed specifically in the area of

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framework of instruction, format of delivery and teachers' use of resources.

Framework of instruction

A combination of approaches could be seen in teachers' use of instructional frameworks. Some taught writing as a single strand where a concept was introduced without context, taught without a model and had no connection to reading. Joan, an example of such a teacher, explained her approach: "When we do reading, we read and we speak, not write".

Other teachers, however, used the literacy block approach and taught writing through interaction with reading. John who used that framework commented: "We do writing with reading. Everything is a block. It's listening, speaking, reading and writing. They start with the listening (and then) move on to the reading. Not all the time they begin with listening; they talk sometimes, then I would read the story, model the passage. It is important; children have to know it's about what I say, read and understand. They understand they have to think before they write."

Maude commiserated, "As I said, when they read the passage, they can see and follow the grammar and do the writing. It helps them see how other people write. They learn from reading other people's work".

The practices of these teachers illustrate the influence of the main approaches in writing instruction.

Format of delivery

Closely related to the framework used in instruction was the format of delivery used. Most teachers' delivery mode was lecture style, whole class discussion and limited teacher modelling. Mia, however, was an exception. She utilised small groups, encouraged peer sharing and modelled the desired writing outcomes for her students. For the most part, however, the mode of delivery for most of the teachers included more traditional practices. This was seen particularly in their delivery of the writing process approach. Although all teachers stated that they used the writing process approach, practices observed ranked closer to the traditional approach end of the continuum and did not always resemble use of the writing stages as advocated by the process-oriented approach.

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Anne, for example, did not display the stages in her classroom, neither did she refer to them in her instruction. Her students' writing pieces were assigned as homework, which she corrected the next day, following which students produced one draft of their pieces. At the middle of the continuum was Petra. She acknowledged that the cramped conditions of her classroom prevented her from utilising all the stages of the approach. Although the stages were not displayed in her classroom, and she did not refer to them, students were engaged in brainstorming activities, did multiple drafts and were engaged in a whole class editing activity.

At the more process-oriented end of the continuum was Mia. The stages were prominently displayed in her classroom. In the classroom, students referred to the stages and used them with ease and familiarity. She engaged in brainstorming activities which were culturally relevant, and students produced multiple drafts. She demonstrated the use of editing and revising; and students shared their pieces through author's chair. Mia indicated that she used the stages as "all students are able to produce a better piece of writing when they follow the steps".

Teachers' delivery with regards to choice of conferencing practices also spanned the continuum. Some teachers were reactive: they provided help when students asked for it and placed corrective feedback on corrected pieces. Other teachers were more proactive in their conferencing. They sat with the students as they composed their pieces and asked questions such as "Why did you write that?" and "What does this mean?"

Use of resources

A final area in which a range of practices could be seen, was teachers' use of resources.

Some teachers showed a heavy reliance on the prescribed textbook, following its pattern precisely in their teaching. Such teachers showed a marked similarity in their instruction regardless of their school and relied on the text both for content and methodology. John explained this reliance as result of the facility of the text: "When you use the (name of prescribed text) everything is spelt out there". Other teachers however, utilised various other resources in their instruction. Mia and Maude used fairy tales and fables as models in their classroom, and Kim utilised a brochure to

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teach descriptive writing. Jane and Petra both utilised computers in their classroom. Jane used the clipping of a surprised child to introduce narrative writing, while Petra used her laptop and a projector to project students' work and engage them in whole-class editing.

The observed teachers demonstrated a blend of practices across a continuum of the two approaches which govern writing instruction. What influenced their choice of practices will be discussed in the section which follows.

Research Question 3: What are the factors which influence the classroom practices in writing instruction used by teachers who teach writing in the primary schools of St. Vincent and the Grenadines?

Research has outlined several factors as influencing the instructional habits of teachers. These include tenure, age, teacher training, location of school, grade and leadership related practices (Barb, 2007; Bridge, Compton-Hall, & Cantrell, 1997; Street, 2003). The information gathered to answer research questions 3 and 4, was collected through the administration of a semi-structured interview. This information was then analysed and tabulated so that cross-case analysis could be more rigorously made. The 10 teachers interviewed shared the following as factors which contribute strongly to their choice of practice in the classroom.

Training and currency of training

Several teachers indicated that teacher training influenced their instruction. Mia asserted "...from what I learnt at Teachers' College. That was the way I was taught". Jane concurred with this assertion, stating, "At college too, a lot of pointers. Basically, process writing, writing according to genres." Mary also viewed teacher education as contributing to her writing instruction practices, as she indicated, "What I learnt at college as well. Story mapping and story frames." For Maude, the literacy degree she completed contributed positively to her classroom practices. She stated emphatically, "Basically from the degree. I mean the way I was taught to teach writing, that made me not want to teach it. Just write up a topic on the board (laughs). Basically, going through the degree that helped me."

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While teacher education was cited as a contributing factor, it would appear that the currency of that training also affected teachers' instructional practices. This was demonstrated in the practices of Anne and Mia. Although Anne was teacher-trained, her writing instructional practices were tradition oriented. This may be explained by the fact that her training took place decades prior. Conversely, Mia who at the time of the research had graduated from the DTE two years before, utilised process-oriented practices and used these more than any other teacher observed. This issue of currency will be discussed in greater detail further in this article.

Leadership related practices

Two teachers - John and Mia - credited their principal with positively influencing their teaching practices. John stated, "Having a principal who is into literacy helps a lot. She knows her stuff and is easy to approach. She will tell you to try this, try that". Mia, John's colleague at the same school, also singled-out the principal as impacting her writing instructional practices. "The principal as well," she stated, "she gives tips on how to go about teaching and what to do".

A principal with literacy training and experience, however, was not always a decisive factor in impacting teachers' writing instructional practices. Although Kim, Joan, Mary and Rose, like John and Mia, had such a principal, they did not credit her with influencing their practices.

Role of experiences

A further factor which teachers credited as influencing their writing instruction was their own experiences as learners. Petra stated, "When I was growing up, I wasn't good at doing composition. I admired people who could. So, reading about strategies and practising using them to find out what would work, that helped me". Rose also expressed the importance her experiences had on her teaching: "My own experiences not only as an adult but as a child. My own struggles. So, I try to help my students not only about the process but the creative part". Joan's words were a poignant expression of the impact of early classroom experiences on the teacher: "My learning experiences would definitely be one. The way I was taught in secondary school and college.... Some of them were

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positive. I remember that in secondary school I had a very good composition teacher and then her replacement just placed the topic on the board and said, 'Write'.

Self-education

Some teachers expressed the view that their own efforts in acquiring information on effective writing instructional practices, played a key role in their teaching of writing. Reading appeared the dominant method for acquiring that information. Four Grade Four teachers asserted that the practice of reading influenced their writing instruction practices. John stated, "I read books and I got enlightened." Mary asserted, "I will read from books, ideas on how to teach students composition." Jane also indicated that reading aided her teaching of writing. "I teach writing based on what I have read," she stated, "I read a lot so I taught from that. I have read books on how to write." Anne and Joan, both Grade Three teachers, also asserted that reading influenced their craft. "The ideas just come" Anne indicated, "I like to read. So I got some there. I like to improvise on a lot of things." Joan's response was quite similar, "Reading", she said, "Because I loved reading."

Mentorship

A final factor cited by teachers as influencing their practice, was the role of other teachers as mentors. Two teachers indicated this factor as having significant influence on how they taught. Rose and Joan both credited senior teachers who passed along their expertise. "I had two very effective senior teachers", said Rose, "I looked at the way they taught language and incorporate their methods into my teaching skills. Both of them were very passionate about their teaching."

Joan, Rose's colleague in Grade Three, shared a similar experience: "When I just started teaching, I had a very good senior teacher. She modelled for me. I learnt from her that you should always have discussion before they write, no matter what the type of writing. I involve a lot of discussion prior to the actual writing." For both teachers, the mentorship of a peer aided and influenced their practice.

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Research Question 4: What are the current challenges faced by these teachers in the delivery and implementation of writing instruction practices?

Teachers indicated several challenges which impede their writing instruction. These challenges were categorised into student, environmental and pedagogical related challenges (see Table 2).

Student-related Challenges

This category of challenges outlined issues brought to the writing classroom by the students. Teachers stated that some students' inability to read at their grade level affected their writing and made the teaching of composition skills a difficult task. A related issue was students' use of Vincentian Creole and its impact on their writing. Students' writing reflected their oral patterns, making teaching writing difficult for some teachers. Teachers further stated that students' grammar problems (subject and verb agreement, spelling, etc.) and their lack of creativity resulted in the production of poorly written pieces. These issues, too, provided a level of difficulty to the teaching of writing. Finally, teachers cited lack of parental support as a challenge which added difficulty to their teaching. Students' lack of resources (writing implements, textbooks, etc.), and parents' failure to provide reinforcement at home, made the teaching overly complex for some teachers.

Environmental Challenges

Teachers further expressed other challenges to their teaching of writing which can be categorised as environmental. The lack of resources, such as computers and projectors, was cited by teachers as an area which restricts their ability to teach writing more effectively. Other teachers stated that large disruptive classes place considerable strain on them and negatively influence their efforts in the classroom. In Petra's case, for example, the disruptive nature of her class impeded her ability to successfully implement the stages of the writing process approach.

Pedagogical Challenges

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The participants also identified challenges which came from their own realities as teachers. They stated that their lack of confidence, as teachers who teach writing, was an area of difficulty. This lack of confidence made them view writing as an area to be less preferred to other subject areas. Others mentioned that their inability to use available technology limited their own creativity as teachers of writing. The time-consuming nature of the writing process approach was also cited as an issue, as lack of time restricted writing instruction. This, too, hindered creativity and teachers' ability to utilise different methods.

It is interesting to note that regardless of the grade the teacher was assigned to, or the size and location of the school, the categories of challenges were applicable to teachers across all sites.

Table 2. Categories of challenges faced by teachers who teach writing

School	Student related challenges	Environmental challenges	Pedagogical challenges
Mt. Charlotte Primary	Lack of parental support; Vincentian Creole	Lack of resources; Disruptive classes	Lack of confidence
Mt. Patrick Primary	Students' reading level; Lack of parental support		Inability to use technology
Mt. George Primary	Lack of creativity; Grammar issues	Lack of resources; Disruptive classes	Time consuming nature of writing process approach
Mt. Andrew Primary	Vincentian Creole; Grammar Issues		Inability to use technology

Discussion

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The writing instruction practices of the 10 teachers observed, ranged across a continuum of the traditional skills-based approach and the process-oriented approach. This amalgamation of practices portrayed teachers' utilisation of more traditional rather than process-oriented practices. Combined with teachers' assertions, observation of their classroom practices seemed to indicate that the following factors may account for teachers' preference of traditional practices. These factors are: (a) Teachers' level of training: Teachers with training in literacy at some level (DTE or a degree) seemed more likely to incorporate more process-oriented practices in their instruction, (b) Currency of training: Teachers with more recent training were more apt to use practices associated with the process-oriented approach. (c) Teachers' self-efficacy in writing instruction: Teachers who expressed a low self-efficacy in their ability to teach writing were more likely to use traditional oriented practices in their classrooms. While other factors, such as experience, self-education and mentorship, were expressed by teachers as influencing their craft, these factors were not observed as having as significant an influence.

The categories of challenges provided by the teachers themselves may also influence teachers' choice of instructional practices. Teachers faced similar challenges regardless of their levels of training or tenure. Table 1 illustrates that regardless of their location, teachers' challenges in writing instruction were similar. Teachers at the large urban Mt. George faced similar environmental and student-oriented challenges to those teachers who taught at the much smaller and rural Mt. Charlotte. Given the widespread nature of teachers' use of traditional practices, and the commonalties they share across sites with respect to challenges, it may be assumed that the challenges teachers of writing face, are related to the instructional practices they utilise in the classroom. It may be concluded that the factors and challenges identified in data collection, may explain teachers' utilisation of more traditional practices in the teaching of writing over more process-oriented and research advocated practices.

Comparison of findings with similar research

The practices of these teachers within their activity systems were mediated by factors such as teaching training, self-education, experiences and perceptions, the availability of resources and teachers' ability to use

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those resources, the needs of the students, the disruptive nature of classrooms, and the support provided by other teachers and principals. These findings provide essential information regarding the teaching of writing in primary schools of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. However, how do they align with, or perhaps, deviate from those of past findings in other contexts?

Other research would seem to indicate that teachers' practices are affected by several factors. A United States based study which outlined writing teachers' classroom practices and sought to highlight causal factors for those practices was that carried out by Troia, Cohen, Lin, and Monroe (2011). Troia et al. (2011) conducted a yearlong study of six elementary teachers and their writing instruction practices. Data collected from the study revealed that teachers demonstrated variety in their student engagement tactics, management techniques and instructional supports. This variance was influenced by teachers' beliefs about the teaching of writing.

Seunarin Singh (2014) reported that teachers in Trinidad no longer adhere to traditional practices used a decade ago but instead utilise more process-oriented practices in the teaching of writing. This shift in pedagogy may be partly attributed to the training teachers receive through tertiary level education programmes. Similar results were reported by Dockrell, Marshall, and Wyse (2015) in their investigation of the teaching of writing in England. They indicated that teachers were more likely to teach vocabulary, phonics and grammar related components than components associated with writing as a process. However, teacher training in writing pedagogy was a mediating factor, as those teachers with training were less likely to report difficulties with providing support to struggling writers (Dockrell, Marshall, & Wyse, 2015).

Implications for Teacher Education

The training teachers receive in the field of their instruction is positively correlated to their instructional practices (Kennedy, 2002; Zamel, 1987). This means that teachers who received some form of training in writing instruction should demonstrate assimilation and application of that training through their classroom practices (Grossman et al., 2000). Of the 10 teachers observed, only Rose was not teacher trained.

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Of the nine trained teachers, four possessed additional degrees. Maude held a degree in Literacy while Kim, Jane and Mary held degrees in Special Needs Education, Counselling and Administration respectively. Joan, one of the trained teachers, also received training in a two-year Caribbean CETT (Centre of Excellence for Teacher Training) programme.

Although nine of the ten teachers possessed teacher training, there was considerable variance in their practice. Mia, utilised most of the recommended practices, ranking close to the best practices end of the continuum Anne had attended the DTE nearly four decades prior to the start of this research. Joan was teacher-trained and had additional training through the CETT programme. Both Anne and Joan used the fewest of the practices recommended by research, ranking close to the traditional skilled-based instruction end of the continuum.

The practices of the other trained teachers - John, Maude, Petra, Kim, Mary and Jane -seemed to fall along the centre of the continuum, illustrating a blend of both approaches. While exhibiting quite a few of the recommended practices, those six teachers with over a decade of training each, exhibited fewer of those than Mia, the recent DTE graduate.

Currency

These findings would seem to indicate that while training does affect the way teachers teach writing, the currency of that training has an even greater influence on instructional practice. Mia and Anne both attended the DTE but exhibited significant polarity in their instructional practices. Mia's stint at the DTE is far more recent than that of Anne, who attended the institution decades prior. Mia's writing instruction practices were far more process-oriented not only compared to Anne but to all other teachers who were teacher trained. It should not, however, be assumed that the currency of a teacher's training necessarily resulted in more process-oriented practices. Joan demonstrated few recommended practices although she received her training after such teachers as John, Petra and Maude, who utilised more recommended practices than she did.

Teacher's Perceptions of Teacher Education

Despite the importance placed on teacher education by some teachers, others did not view their training as having any influence on the

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way they taught writing. Anne and Petra both agreed that the teacher training they received was so long ago that it no longer had any impact on their teaching and cited other factors which do. For Anne, attending the DTE during the 1970s had caused her to forget any information acquired there. She clarified her stance by stating, “Well the way I was taught was so long ago I can’t even remember. I went to College before you were born, I believe (laughs) 73 to 75. So long I can’t remember”. For her, therefore, the training she received was not the primary source of influence on her teaching of writing. Rather, she credited the reading and research she had done on her own. Petra echoed the sentiments of her peer. She pointed out that she had attended the DTE too long ago for it to have much positive influence on her present craft. For her, being the literacy coordinator at her school and planning literacy related events have contributed to her being a more effective writer and teacher.

John viewed the teacher training he received in writing instruction as counterproductive as it emphasised product over process. “At Teachers’ College it was the old way”, he asserted. “No process. So I read books and I got enlightened.” Although Joan acquired teacher training more recently than Anne, Petra and John, she too saw no positive impact of her teacher training on the way she taught writing. She stated that the expectations of her trainers exceeded her preparation. She cogently expressed her stance, “For all the practice teachings we were supposed to do LEA etc. but none of the lecturers taught us what to do. I guess they assumed we would know what to do. So, a lot of the teaching of composition was left up to us.”

The teachers’ responses appear to indicate that teachers view teacher training as having both a positive and negative impact on the way they teach. This has serious implications both for the content provided through teacher education, and the methodology used to impart that content. Further, while training does seem to impact teachers’ choice of practices, the currency of that training appears to have more impact than the training itself. This may indicate a need for systematic re-tooling of teachers in the area of writing instruction.

Conclusion

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This multisite case study followed the writing instruction practices of 10 teachers of varying age, gender, training and years of experience. Data were collected to answer four research questions: (1) What are the practices of teachers who teach writing in Grades Three and Four? (2) How are those practices demonstrated? (3) What factors account for the instruction practices observed? and (4) What challenges do these teachers encounter in delivery? The teachers demonstrated a combination of practices associated with traditional approaches in writing as well as more research-based process-oriented associated practices. Several factors, such as training, currency of training and teachers' own perceptions of their craft, appear to influence teachers' decisions in choosing an amalgamation of instructional practices. Student-related, environmental and pedagogical challenges were experienced by teachers across all four sites and may also account for teachers' classroom practices. It is hoped that the data revealed by this study will provide useful information for writing teachers and policy makers, as well as serve as an impetus for further research in the field.

Recommendations

The following is recommended:

1. A deeper awareness of current research in writing instruction on the part of teacher trainers, and regular revamping of syllabi to ensure the dispensing of information to pre-service teachers, in keeping with current research.
2. Re-tooling of in-service teachers through organised research-based writing instruction workshops in all schools.
3. Increased monitoring of in-service teachers to ensure that writing instruction is practised which is validated by research. Such monitoring should also ensure such writing instruction is standardised in all schools.

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