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# Reflections on Effective Writing Instruction The Value of Expectations, Engagement, Feedback, Data, and Sociocultural Instructional Practices

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## Abstract

This reflection on effective writing practice is the result of a university-school partnership focused on collaboratively investigating the work of a successful 5<sup>th</sup> grade-writing teacher. The co-authors collectively present the work of Mrs. Hutchison, a veteran teacher who worked in a predominately low-income school with a high percentage of students labeled English language learners. Mrs. Hutchison's class was a space where each student was both a learner and a teacher and most students developed a great interest and love of writing. This reflective piece presents data documenting Mrs. Hutchison's success as well as a collaborative reflection on her work intended to provide a glimpse into Mrs. Hutchison's commitments and practices, and how these resulted in students' learning and productive writing activity and achievement. In so doing, we hope to provide some models of effective practices that others may wish to adapt or investigate further.

**Keywords:** collaborative research, English language learners, sociocultural instructional practices, writing instruction

## A Glimpse Inside A Successful Fifth Grade Writing Classroom

In the fall of 2012, a researcher and a successful 5th grade writing teacher, the co-authors, began a collaboration. This joint venture was sponsored through a university-school partnership focused on teacher preparation grounded in research. Mrs. Hutchison, a veteran teacher, had sustained impressive outcomes in writing for her 5th grade students over several years.

Collaboratively, the co-authors sought to understand and capture features of her successful practice in order to support the improved practices of other writing teachers. The university researcher spent a great deal of time in Mrs. Hutchison's class, observing and taking field notes on her observations. Together, Mrs. Hutchison and the university researcher regularly discussed Mrs. Hutchison's practice, not for the purpose of changing or improving it, but to collaboratively seek the sources of her success.

In the following sections, we share our reflections on Mrs. Hutchison's effective practices grounded in her personal commitments as a teacher as well as her instructional practices. This reflection is a result of hours of observation and discussion, but does not represent an empirical analysis of Mrs. Hutchison's work. Rather, our reflection shared herein is a result of observation, discussion, and collaborative reflection. We believe that her efforts to promote student engagement, hold students and herself to high expectations, provide timely and valuable feedback, as well as gather data on student learning created a strong foundation for the learning success that occurred in her classroom. We also maintain that her classroom was a demonstration of the value of sociocultural instructional practices. In our view, the successes in Mrs. Hutchison's classroom can inspire success in the classrooms of many other teachers (both pre-service and in-service) and can help other writing teachers develop a strong foundation in and commitment to excellence in writing instructional practices.

### **Data Demonstrating Success**

Mrs. Hutchison gained the reputation of being an extremely successful teacher based on the dramatic improvements she saw in the results of her students' standardized assessments scores after making some deliberate changes to her practice. With district help, we collected the aggregate growth scores from her students in writing since 2008. In our state, Colorado, these growth scores are calculated with sophisticated statistical methods and suggest that any teacher with an aggregate score of 50 has met expectations by, on average, helping her/his students to advance one grade level. Therefore, scores below 50 are undesirable and scores at 50 or above are considered good. In 2008, Mrs. Hutchison's students had a growth score in writing of 52. She was working hard and was evaluated as "exceeding expectations," but was still unsatisfied with the results because she knew that helping her students grow one grade level was not enough improvement for her class. This is because most students entered her 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom below grade level and not having grown a full grade level over the

previous years of schooling. Mrs. Hutchison worked predominantly with students who qualified for and received free and reduced price lunch and with approximately half of her class labeled “English Language Learner” (ELL) by the district. Table 1 illustrates the demographic composition of the students tested each year in writing at the school where Mrs. Hutchison worked together with her students’ growth score data across each year.

As this table demonstrates, Mrs. Hutchison’s growth scores grew dramatically between 2009 and 2011, when she returned to teach 5th grade after teaching kindergarten in 2010. She made some deliberate efforts to change her practice and shift the burden of the work onto the students in an effort to boost their learning. In many ways, using standardized test scores to discuss successful outcomes for multilingual learners and other students from historically marginalized populations is extremely problematic (Abedi, 2002; Menken, 2010; Solano-Flores and Li, 2008). However, these are the scores that are valued in the current accountability system for assessing schools, districts, and teachers and which therefore are important to pay attention to. While we strive to improve the assessment and accountability practices and policies to expand beyond solely relying on standardized test scores to make high-stakes decisions, Mrs. Hutchison’s success can shed some light on opportunities for other teachers because her impressive

**Table 1.** Historical School Demographic Data with Mrs. Hutchison’s Writing Growth Scores

<i>Year</i>	<i>% of tested Student Body on FRL**</i>	<i>% of tested Student Body MLL**</i>	<i>% of tested Student Body MLL and FRL</i>	<i>Mrs. Hutchison's 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Writing Growth Scores</i>
2008	77%	59%	51%	52
2009	87%	58%	55%	68
2010	86%	51%	48%	N/A *
2011	91%	57%	55%	89
2012	90%	56%	53%	82
2013	89%	56%	51%	83

\*There are no scores for Mrs. Hutchison for 2010 because she taught kindergarten, an untested grade, that year.

\*\*FRL stands for “Free and reduced lunch,” meaning students are from low-income families. MLL stands for “Multilingual Learner.” MLL is not a typical term used in U.S. schools; however, it is our term of choice because it positions students for what they are (multilingual) versus the typical term “English Language Learner,” which focuses on a perceived deficiency (English). The fourth column above represents the percentage of the student body who are both MLL and on FRL.  
Data source: Colorado Department of Education (2013) and District Provided Growth Scores.

growth scores are accompanied with positive feedback from her students.

Mrs. Hutchison administered a modified version of the Tripod Survey (<http://tripodproject.org/>) used in the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Study (Measures of Effective Teaching Project, 2012) at the end of the 2013 school year. The MET study is a large study funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation focused on the research question: "How can effective teaching be identified and developed" (<http://www.metproject.org/>). In this study, they found that student perceptions of teachers were a stronger indicator of effective teaching practice than multiple observations by evaluators over the course of two years (MET Project, 2012). We were interested in student perspectives as well and therefore used a modified version of the Tripod Survey from the MET Project. Mrs. Hutchison administered our modified version of the Tripod Survey where the statements students responded to were the same, but they had to choose either agree or disagree. The Tripod Survey offers a Likert scale for students to respond to each statement. We now plan to use the Likert scale in the future because some of the students struggled to pick between just agree and disagree. We made additional modifications in that we added open-ended questions to the survey for students to respond to. The results of Mrs. Hutchison's administration of the survey are presented in Table 2.

The results above demonstrate that Mrs. Hutchison's category of highest positive response is in regard to "Challenge" (an average of 88% of students responded favorably), then "Care" (an average of 86% of the students responded favorably), then "Confer" (an average of 82% of the students responded favorably, and "Clarify" (an average of 80% of the students responded favorably). Areas where students responded less favorably were "Consolidate" (an average of 64% of students responded favorably), "Captivate" (an average of 51% of students responded favorably), and "Control" (an average of 37% of the students responded favorably).

Overall, these results suggest that students found Mrs. Hutchison's class a challenging and caring space with many opportunities to learn. However, these results also demonstrate some room for improvement. Student behavior appears to be an issue, according to the students, as well as student interest ("captivation") in classroom work. We can attest to the challenge of student behaviors during the course of our collaboration. Mrs. Hutchison and her students faced disruptive behaviors in the classroom at a higher level than would be desired, though not at such a level that student learning was hampered. Mrs. Hutchison worked through these challenges with care and concern for her students and their learning. Therefore, despite this difficulty for both Mrs. Hutchison and her students, strong learning gains

**Table 2** Modified Tripod Survey Results

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
<b>Care</b>		
1. I like the way my teacher treats me when I need help.	93%	7%
2. My teacher is nice to me when I ask questions.	95%	5%
3. My teacher in this class makes me feel that she really cares about me.	89%	9%
4. If I am sad or angry, my teacher helps me feel better.	75%	23%
5. The teacher in this class encourages me to do my best.	98%	2%
6. My teacher seems to know if something is bothering me.	66%	32%
7. My teacher gives us time to explain our ideas.	84%	16%
Average	86%	13%
<b>Control</b>		
8. My classmates behave the way my teacher wants them to.	23%	73%
9. Our class stays busy and does not waste time.	23%	71%
10. Students behave so badly in this class that it slows down our learning. (i.e. Disagree)	57%	36%*
11. Everybody knows what they should be doing and learning in this class.	64%	27%
Average	37%	57%
* Reverse coded; average accounts for the desired response (i.e. Disagree).		
<b>Clarify</b>		
12. My teacher explains this in very orderly ways.	84%	14%
13. In this class, we learn to correct our mistakes.	91%	9%
14. My teacher explains difficult things clearly.	91%	9%
15. My teacher has several good ways to explain each topic that we cover in this class.	86%	5%
16. I understand what I am supposed to be learning in this class.	86%	5%
17. My teacher knows when the class understands, and when we do not.	73%	27%
18. This class is neat—everything has a place and things are easy to find.	43%	52%
19. If you don't understand something, my teacher explains it another way.	86%	7%
Average	80%	16%
<b>Challenge</b>		
20. My teacher pushes us to think hard about the things we read.	86%	14%
21. My teacher pushes everybody to work hard.	86%	11%



	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
22. In this class we have to think hard about the writing we do.	89%	11%
23. In this class, my teacher accepts nothing less than our full effort.	89%	7%
Average	88%	11%
<b>Captivate</b>		
24. School work is interesting.	48%	41%
25. We have interesting homework.	34%	52%
26. Homework helps me learn.	70%	25%
27. School work is not very enjoyable.	45%	50%*
Average	51%	41%
<b>Confer</b>		
28. When she is teaching us, my teacher asks us whether we understand.	82%	14%
29. My teacher asks questions to be sure we are following along when she is teaching.	93%	2%
30. My teacher checks to make sure we understand what she is teaching us.	86%	11%
31. My teacher tells us what we are learning and why.	80%	16%
32. My teacher wants us to share our thoughts.	86%	14%
33. Students speak up and share their ideas about class work.	61%	39%
34. My teacher wants me to explain my answers – why I think what I think.	86%	14%
Average	82%	16%
<b>Consolidate</b>		
35. My teacher takes the time to summarize what we learn each day.	61%	32%
36. When my teacher marks my work, she writes on my papers to help me understand.	66%	30%
Average	64%	31%

were still made and students overall responded positively to the survey.

Another aspect of Mrs. Hutchison's survey requested responses to open-ended question such as "Did you like to write when you came into 5<sup>th</sup> grade?" "If you didn't do you like to write now? What changed?" and "What do you think you are better at because of the work you've done in Mrs. Hutchison's class?" Happily, 75% of the students reported liking writ-

ing at the end of 5th grade. However, only 45% of the students said they liked writing when they started 5th grade. This means that Mrs. Hutchison, in one year, got 30% of her students to move from disliking writing to enjoying it. One student said, "I thought writing shouldn't even be on this earth till Mrs. Hutchison came along." Another student commented, "I didn't like writing before. But, what changed is that I showed growth in writing." And another student suggested that their affection for writing changed to the positive because "it was boring. Now it is fun because Mrs. Hutchison does it funner." The most common reasons for the shift from disliking writing to liking it included:

- Finding writing interesting and fun
- Being able to see own improvements
- Began to feel better at writing
- Finding writing exciting
- Feeling well supported
- Knowing how to focus on details

From both the standardized test scores, the feedback from students, and our own observations and reflections on the practices in Mrs. Hutchison's classroom, it is clear that Mrs. Hutchison created a successful learning environment for students, including her multilingual learners.

### **Becoming a Writer with Mrs. Hutchison**

Every day, Mrs. Hutchison taught writing to two different groups of 5<sup>th</sup> graders, each group having approximately 24 students. She had a daily structured writing block (lasting 60 minutes) in which she ensured that students had at least half of the time to write. During the first part of the writing block, Mrs. Hutchison would teach, through a demonstration, either aspects of the writing process (drafting, revising, editing, publishing, etc.) or a particular writing skill (introductions, organization, grammar, word choice, details, etc.) grounded in genre study. This way students would learn to adapt the writing process and various writing skills to the different types of texts or genres they had to learn to write in 5th grade. Through her demonstrations, Mrs. Hutchison wrote daily in front of and with students. Therefore, the expectation that she held for students to write every day was an expectation she also held for herself. Further, with her demonstrations, Mrs. Hutchison allowed students to critique her work and lead discussions about how to improve it. Students became skilled at analyzing texts as well



as comparing them to other pieces of writing and making judgments about quality. Often, Mrs. Hutchison's demonstrations were examples of writing that needed a great deal of improvement. She showed her students the reality of all writers and how rarely writers are able to write something well without taking it through the entire process of revising, editing, and publishing or dissemination. And consistently, Mrs. Hutchison chose to write about topics that were interesting to her students and made them laugh. The writing demonstration portion of Mrs. Hutchison's writing block was a time of humor as well as complex thinking and meaningful analysis of writing by students.

During the second half of her writing block, students wrote. Mrs. Hutchison always spent that time moving about the room and either positioning herself to help and collaborate with individuals or groups of students or else collecting data on her students' current work and progress in their writing and what their next steps should be. This was also a time when she gave clear feedback to students both on what they were doing well and what they could do next. In this manner, Mrs. Hutchison was able to engage with all of her students on a daily basis around their writing but did not have to take home stacks of composition books to read at night. Further, students were given timely and valuable feedback on their work. Every day they heard from Mrs. Hutchison what they were doing well and what they needed to focus on next.

This is just a brief description of Mrs. Hutchison's approach to writing instruction. In the following sections, we provide more information on her instructional work as well as foundational commitments that were able to turn her daily 60-minute writing block into a place where students became writers.

## **Sociocultural Instructional Practices**

This short piece cannot capture everything Mrs. Hutchison engaged in instructionally; yet through our collaborative reflections, we recognized research-based practices that clearly support high levels of learning for students. For example, Mrs. Hutchison's classroom was a space where the sociocultural practices described in the CR EDE Standards of Effective Pedagogy were regularly enacted (Doherty, Hilberg, Epaloose, and Tharp, 2002; Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, and Yamauchi, 2000). These standards were developed over years of researching effective practices in diverse classrooms and center on students' and teachers' joint productive activity, students' language and literacy development, contextualization of instruction,

the teaching of complex thinking, and instructional conversations. Recently, researchers from Indiana have added a 6th standard called “critical stance” (Teemant and Hausman, 2013) intended to help teachers and students to work together to transform issues of inequity (Teemant and Hausman, 2013; Teemant, Wink, and Trya, 2011). The six standards are listed below.

- Standard 1: Joint Productive Activity. In this standard, learning is facilitated by the teacher collaborating with a small group of students on a shared product.
- Standard 2: Language and Literacy Development. Teachers help students develop competence in the language and literacy of instruction across the content area and curriculum.
- Standard 3: Contextualization. Teachers help students make meaning of new ideas by connecting school learning to students’ lives outside of school.
- Standard 4: Challenging Activities. Teachers teach complex thinking and challenge students to increase their cognitive complexity.
- Standard 5: Instructional Conversation. Teachers engage students through dialogue and teach through conversation that is planned, goal-directed and with a small group of students.
- Standard 6: Critical Stance. Teachers and students work together to transform society’s inequities through democracy and civic engagement.

Over the course of our collaboration, we noticed these standards being put into place consistently and at high levels. Mrs. Hutchison most frequently enacted standards 1, 2, 4, and 5. Research on these standards has suggested that teachers who enact several of the standards in combination at high levels consistently in their instruction have impressive learning gains from students (Teemant and Hausman, 2013). Mrs. Hutchison’s classroom appears to substantiate that research claim, though we have not conducted a formal empirical study to test this.

While it is not within the scope of this piece to expand upon each standard of effective pedagogy, there exist numerous resources for teachers and instructional leaders who are interested in learning more about these standards (e.g. Dalton, 2008; Tharp et al., 2000). Mrs. Hutchison’s classroom was a strong example of effective sociocultural instructional practices as illustrated by the CR EDE standards of effective pedagogy, though she has never been trained in these standards specifically nor was she familiar with them before our collaboration began.

**Table 3** Expectations in Mrs. Hutchison’s Class

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<b>Students:</b>
Are here to learn and take on new learning each day.
Will make choices that will move them towards writing at the level of proficiency.
Will have daily discussions around writing proficiency through conversations around teacher modeling and their writing.
Will reflect on teacher feedback and apply next steps while also celebrating their strengths.
Will write no less than 30 minutes every day.
Will engage in conversations around genre and teaching points.
Will recognize when meaning breaks down in writing.
Will hold themselves accountable for all learning.
<b>Teacher:</b>
Will model each day with a clear teaching point and demonstrate life-long writing behaviors.
Will provide time and opportunity for 30 minutes of writing every day.
Will teach students how to identify strengths and next steps in their writing.
Will provide models of writing proficiency.
Will provide examples of the various levels of writing (Below Understanding, Partially Proficient, Proficient, and Advanced).
Will show students a love of writing through demonstrations.
Will rove during student writing time to give feedback in a positive, constructive manner as well as collect data on student strengths and next steps.
Will hold students accountable for all learning.
Will push all students each and every day.

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**Mrs. Hutchison’s Personal Commitments**

A goal of our collaboration was to establish ways for other teachers to learn from Mrs. Hutchison’s success. The rest of this section describes the personal commitments Mrs. Hutchison has to creating a strong learning environment that supports high levels of learning and writing improvement for students.

*Expectations*

Mrs. Hutchison held high expectations for both herself and her students. Table 3 lists the expectations Mrs. Hutchison maintained for both students and herself.

By setting up high expectations for herself and her students, the writing classroom led by Mrs. Hutchison was a powerful space for high levels of learning to occur. Students saw themselves as readers and writers, and they focused their time in Mrs. Hutchison's class on learning, growing, and improving. Having high expectations of students and herself maintained Mrs. Hutchison's class as a productive educational environment full of learning and growth.

Obviously, having high expectations is not enough for students to be able to enact them. Mrs. Hutchison spent a great deal of time collaborating with students to co-construct expectations and ensure that students knew what was expected of them. She never expected students to do something in her class that she did not explicitly model or teach them. Mrs. Hutchison also often demonstrated humorous examples of what not to do in order for students to have a sense of what her expectations were. For example, early in the year, students were learning how to do writing conferences with each other to provide peer feedback (relating to the expectation that "Students will engage in conversations around genre and teaching points"). Mrs. Hutchison had a student come to the front of the room and sit next to her so they could act out a peer feedback conversation. She grabbed the writing book out of the student's hand and started reading. The rest of the class was watching as they sat at the front of the room and started yelling, "No!" Mrs. Hutchison asked them what was wrong and they told her that the student is supposed to read his own work. Mrs. Hutchison acted surprised at this information and wondered why this was so. The students told her it was so that he could learn from the feedback she would give him. She opened her eyes wide and made a face that was funny to the students and said, "Ohhhhhh!" meaning, "Now I get it!" The interaction between her and her student demonstrator lasted for about 20 minutes, during which time she continued to do funny (and inappropriate things) like falling asleep while the student was reading, fixing the student's writing for him, etc. By the end of the demonstration, the class had a clear sense of both what to do in their peer feedback conversations as well as what not to do. Throughout the whole demonstration students were engaged and co-constructing with Mrs. Hutchison the expectations of the peer feedback conversations. The expectations listed above were clearly co-constructed, explored, and established jointly between teacher and students, and they were also displayed on the wall and

utilized across the year as a tool to support student learning.

### *Engagement*

Mrs. Hutchison firmly believed that student and teacher engagement is a foundational feature of strong learning environments. She always sought to motivate and engage her students through fun activities (e.g. drawing story elements out of a bag) and interesting writing opportunities. For instance, one time she had students write down story elements on note cards. Each student wrote a card for characters, settings, and a story topic. The note cards went in bags (one bag for each type of notecard) and each student picked a notecard from each bag for their characters, setting, and story topic. Students loved this activity as they would often pick notecards that would not traditionally end up together such as aliens as characters, the Amazon jungle as the setting and raising chickens as the topic of the story. Students enjoyed the opportunity to use their imagination and create stories based on these notecards and had a lot of fun with this activity.

Mrs. Hutchison also created an inclusive and safe learning community where every student, regardless of English language proficiency level or writing background, was a valued member and contributor. Students in Mrs. Hutchison's class were all positioned as both teachers and learners and had a sense of the important role they each played in supporting one another's success. Because of the strong and positive community environment, students were also safe to make mistakes or to perform at a lower (or substantially more advanced) level than their peers. A student's level in terms of current achievement was not important; what mattered in Mrs. Hutchison's class was that everyone was striving for the next level and working hard towards it.

In the spring, a few weeks before state standardized testing took place, Mrs. Hutchison held a "bootcamp" with her students. In the United States a bootcamp (or the analogy of military training) is often the term used to describe very challenging workout classes that only occur for a short amount of time. Mrs. Hutchison was drawing on that same philosophy and created a "writing bootcamp" intended to push students to be able to write proficiently under time pressure and with limited opportunities for revision. Essentially, her bootcamp helped students improve their writing skills under similar types of pressures that exist during state testing. Normally in Mrs. Hutchison's class, writing was an extended process in which students drafted, conferenced with peers, revised their work, edited it, and received ongoing feedback from the teacher. However, under the timed pressures of standardized testing, students had to work independently through those processes and often with limited time. Mrs. Hutchison's bootcamp



was an environment where students continued to refine their writing skills, but in a context that mirrored the reality of writing on standardized tests versus writing for improvement over time. Therefore, during the writing bootcamp, students focused on writing at a proficient level in their first drafts as well as within the time constraints that mirror testing conditions. Mrs. Hutchison used the bootcamp to prepare students for success on the standardized test, but in a motivating as well as authentic way that helped students see their own progress quite tangibly. For instance, every day the students did some writing that mirrored the type of writing they were going to be assessed on and, every day, Mrs. Hutchison graded their work and posted the aggregate results for each of her two writing classes. This way, she created a competition between classes and also an opportunity for each class to set goals for themselves regarding their growth.

At the beginning of writing bootcamp, usually a low percentage (approximately 30% of each class) would score “proficient” or higher on the daily writing task. However, by the end of the two-week bootcamp, 60–80% achieved these high scores. Students loved examining the daily charts showing their proficiency levels as a class, setting targets, evaluating what they could do better both individually and collectively, and collaborating about how they could reach high levels of proficiency across their whole class. Bootcamp was a great deal of work for both Mrs. Hutchison and her students; however, the hard work appeared to have paid off. It was a short-term, intensive “bootcamp,” for just two weeks out of the year, because the demand on both her and her students was too high for it to be sustained beyond those intense two weeks.

The way Mrs. Hutchison began bootcamp is a good example of her commitment to engagement. On the first day of bootcamp in 2013, students watched some excerpts from the movie *Rocky* (Avildsen, 1976). The class discussed the value of hard work as well as the struggle and pain that it can often cause. Students compared themselves to Rocky and discussed how they would fight hard to grow as a writer during bootcamp. At one point, Mrs. Hutchison put on the music from *Rocky* and students ran laps around the classroom, pretending to box and building increased levels of excitement about the work that was to come. Mrs. Hutchison took the time to ensure that students would be engaged in the hard work that was ahead and that they could find the motivation to work hard through bootcamp. Not only in bootcamp but throughout the school year, Mrs. Hutchison made important efforts to ensure engagement by keeping the pace and expectation level high in her classroom. Other key aspects of her teaching which ensured engagement were using interesting writing prompts and tasks,



and offering students choice in their work. For the most part, whenever we walked into Mrs. Hutchison's classroom, we could see that all students had the tools and resources necessary to be deeply engaged in learning.

### *Feedback and Data*

One of the important changes that Mrs. Hutchison made when she returned to teaching 5th grade after one year teaching Kindergarten that improved her students' writing was how she gave students feedback. Instead of taking home stacks of composition books each night and grading for hours (her previous approach), Mrs. Hutchison found time in class every day to give students feedback on their work. She established extremely clear practices as to what the different phases of the writing process should look like, so that at a quick glance she would know at which stage each student was working. For instance, sticky notes in a student's composition book meant that the student had conferenced with a peer. Blue pen edits meant that the student had done revisions and edits according to the feedback from the peer. By having such strong visual cues, Mrs. Hutchison could walk around the room and quickly know what each person was doing. Additionally, because she was constantly gathering data on what she was seeing her students do, she also had a clear sense of each learner's achievement and progression in the class and could clearly articulate to each student a current strength and suggest next steps to continue improving.

By using spreadsheets and keeping track of the learning goals that students were reaching or still needed help with, Mrs. Hutchison was able to use the time when she was not engaged with a group or individual students to check in with, offer feedback to, and collect data on the others. She was so consistent and complete in offering feedback to her students and gathering data regarding their progress that at any moment, she could have a rich conversation with anyone (i.e. the school principal, an instructional coach, a parent, etc.) about the particular strengths and weaknesses of each individual writer in her class. Mrs. Hutchison meaningfully positioned herself in the classroom to be jointly working with students either in groups or independently, or to be providing feedback to push students forward in their writing. Sometimes the feedback came to a student through overhearing the teacher compliment or discuss next steps with another student. In fact, Mrs. Hutchison made it a point to offer her feedback in a loud voice so that all students could benefit. This meant that students became comfortable writing in a noisy environment and were able to move in and out of their writing process in useful ways

to receive ongoing feedback and ideas for consideration as they wrote.

## **Conclusion**

Mrs. Hutchison's writing classroom was a very special place. Students felt smart and capable, yet also challenged and excited to learn and grow. There was always a great deal of activity and clear examples of Mrs. Hutchison working extremely hard while inspiring her students to work hard as well. If it were possible to clone Mrs. Hutchison, there would be a cadre of impressive student writers coming out of the 5th grade! Therefore, we hope that this reflection on her effective practice can become a tool to support the work of other writing teachers. Grounded in firm personal commitments that support students' learning and strong instructional practices that are responsive to students as individuals and as a group and their learning assets and needs, we believe that the learning successes that occurred in Mrs. Hutchison's classroom can and should be replicated in others.

## **About the Authors**

**Kara Mitchell Viesca** (Ph.D., Boston College) is an Assistant Professor of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education at the University of Colorado Denver. She is a former teacher of multilingual students from grades Pre-K to graduate school in California, Virginia, Massachusetts, Mexico, and China. She currently leads a 1.9 million dollar National Professional Development grant focused on supporting teachers in improving their practice with multilingual students. Her scholarship focuses on advancing equity in the policy and practice of educator development, with a particular focus on multilingual learners and their teachers.

**Kim Hutchison** (M.A., University of Phoenix) is a 5th grade teacher in Aurora Public Schools. She has been a teacher for 20 years and worked in elementary schools in grades K-5. She has taken leadership roles at both the school and district level as a teacher leader, teacher on special assignment, and teacher coach. She has a relentless commitment to student growth and seeks opportunities to collaboratively learn, improve student learning, and support the development of successful teacher practices.

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