THE “WRITE” TOOLS: THE IMPACT OF TEACHERS’ SELF-EFFICACY ON CLASSROOM WRITING INSTRUCTION

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A DISSERTATION
Submitted to the graduate faculty of The University of Alabama at Birmingham, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

2009
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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

While teaching self-efficacy has been supported as an important construct related to teacher competence (Goddard, R. D., Hoy, W. K., & Hoy, A. W. American Education Research Journal, 37, 479-507), little is known about how teachers think of themselves as writers, particularly as it relates to their writing instruction. This study supports the developing notion that writing self-efficacy is an important element in understanding how it is that teachers think about their own writing. It also serves to operationalize the construct of teachers’ writing self-efficacy and how it impacts their writing instruction. Additionally, it was important to learn how teachers value writing as a tool of learning and evaluation.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the impact of early childhood teachers’ self-efficacy on classroom writing instruction. The data was collected from eight early childhood teachers in a suburban elementary school.

Results of the study indicated that most teachers did not remember writing in school. Other teachers remembered being taught in a traditional way through the rules of Language Arts, writing from teacher specifications, trial and error, or writing prompts. Even though teachers did not write in school or were taught more traditionally, classroom observations indicated that authority was decentralized. That is, these teachers wrote with their students, and they supported and validated student conversation and choice of writing topic. Finally, despite the fact that the school system in which the research was
conducted placed a high value on providing teachers with professional development—specifically in the area of writing—only one of the eight teachers who participated in this study referenced professional development as a support system for themselves as a writer or teacher of writing, even though these same teachers were provided with professional development in a statewide reading initiative that requires a writing component in every grade.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my daughter Darcie and son-in-law Brett, who gave their unconditional love, support, and patience throughout the extent of this study. They sacrificed of themselves so I could follow my dreams. Without them this journey would have been impossible.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I truly believe that people come into your life for a specific reason. Words cannot express the gratitude that I owe to each of you or describe the impact that you have had on my life. Who I am now and who I have become as an educator are due to the contributions of many people.

I wish to acknowledge and thank the following people who have kept me focused throughout this entire process, especially my exceptional doctoral committee:

Dr. Lois Christensen, thank you for your endless patience, wisdom, and support during this study, as well as for helping me to better understand qualitative research. Not only have you been an excellent guide as my committee chair, but you have kept me calm and focused on the goal. I appreciate the firm approach you used to help me see areas of my study that could be strengthened. When I was doubtful about this study, a reality check as only you could deliver would put me right back on track.

Dr. Maryann Manning, a special thanks to you for your friendship and being a constant cheerleader for me throughout this process. I love the passion you have to see others achieve their goals. You never let me forget how important it is to have a passion of my own.

Dr. Joe Burns, thank you for reading through each chapter of my study and offering valuable input. You were the one to remind me that during the tough times it is
important to maintain a sense of humor. This is advice I’ll carry with me the rest of my life.

Dr. Kay Emfinger, many thanks to you for your endless smiles, reassurances, and the opportunity to practice what I have learned in college. Your expertise in this process is invaluable.

Dr. Lynn Kirkland, I thank you for believing in me and being an example of energy throughout my study. You are appreciated for agreeing to serve on my committee midway through it. I will be forever grateful to you for doing so.

Dr. Jerry Aldridge, I thank you for your compassion, intellect, and for holding my hand when challenges seemed unbearable and no end was in sight. You gave me the confidence to believe that I could accomplish any goal I set for myself. In my lifelong journey, you are ever-present, but more importantly you are in my heart!

This journey would have been impossible without the support of my family and friends. You have each supported me in your own personal way:

Most importantly, Darcie and Brett Clemons, my daughter and son-in-law: You have made many sacrifices, and always had your own way to encourage and inspire me. I could not have done this dissertation without each of you. I love you both!

Cathy Lollar, my dear and invaluable friend: You have stood beside me every step of the way. You challenged my thinking, reassured me during difficult times, and celebrated my accomplishments. When I said, “I can’t.” You said, “You can.”

Glenn Cheatham, my nephew in Tennessee: You have listened to my concerns about this study when I know you had more important things to do. When I called you
and said I was overwhelmed with my work, you continually told me not to give up, to
persist. I did.

Aubretta Curry, Dr. Laura Bloom, and Dr. Kara Scholl, my friends and cohorts
from the beginning of this educational journey: You have all traveled this road with me
from beginning to end. We have shared our feelings, emotions, anxieties, and confusions
together. You have supported me with much pride and somehow found the right words to
keep me on track with what needed to be done. Each of you has shown confidence in my
ability to complete my dissertation when I wasn’t sure I could do it. You are all my
inspiration and my greatest source of motivation!

Special thanks are extended to the teachers who participated in my study. Their
willingness to participate in this process was greatly appreciated. Gratitude is extended to
Dr. David Fancher and Mr. Bob Lawry for their support in completion of this study. A
genuine debt of gratitude is owed to Mrs. Linda Joseph, my school principal, and Mrs.
Sandy Ritchey, my assistant principal, for their support and words of encouragement
when I needed it most. They were positive and an ever-present catalyst during the rough
times. Their belief in me will never be forgotten.

To everyone: A huge thank you from my heart! ...and BG, I did it!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ Writing Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writers and Teachers of Writing</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of Terms</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of the Study</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextualism</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Cognition Theory and Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Overview of Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Concept of Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics Of Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy Beliefs</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Self-Efficacy and Student Achievement</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects of Teachers’ Instructional Practices on Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners’ Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Learning Theory</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution Theory of Motivation for Learning</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing Practices in the Classroom</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinds of Writing</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing and Grading</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Feedback</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Writing</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Beliefs</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deterring Factors</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Factors</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Writing in the Classroom</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 METHODS</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design of the Study</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradition of Qualitative Inquiry</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site and Participants</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member Checking</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Debriefing</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audit Trail</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferability</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Considerations</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of the Research Settings</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Site A— CB Elementary</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Site B— Fannin West Elementary School</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Site C— Blue Ridge East Elementary School</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions of the Participants</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant A— Brenda</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant B— Caroline</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant C— Kaye</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant D— Liz</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant E— Shelley</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant F— Lacey</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant G— Nona</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant H— Phoebe</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credentials of the Researcher</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief System of the Researcher</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

Page

CHAPTER

4 RESULTS ..............................................................................................................87
Themes......................................................................................................................87
  Theme 1: Teachers as Writers...........................................................................91
  Theme 2: Classroom Practices...........................................................................95
  Theme 3: Experiences.......................................................................................100
  Theme 4: Support Systems .............................................................................103
Lessons Learned .................................................................................................105
Summary..............................................................................................................106

5 FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS ..........................107
Major Findings .....................................................................................................108
Summary of Unexpected Findings .....................................................................113
Implications .........................................................................................................114
Recommendations for Practice...........................................................................116
Recommendations for Future Research..............................................................117
Conclusion..........................................................................................................120

REFERENCES .....................................................................................................122

APPENDIX

A GATEKEEPER LETTER.......................................................................................136
B GATEKEEPER APPROVAL LETTER.................................................................139
C PRINCIPAL APPROVAL LETTER....................................................................141
D PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER............................................................143
E FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL........................................................146
F REFLECTIVE JOURNAL PROTOCOL ...............................................................149
G INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL ...........................................................151
H CLASSROOM OBSERVATION PROTOCOL....................................................153
I INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN USE ..................................156
J INFORMED CONSENT FORM.........................................................................158
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Writing Practice Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sites and Demographic Characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Participating Teachers’ Characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Themes, Subthemes, and Data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For more than 30 years, teachers’ sense of self-efficacy has been studied in the educational arena (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). Researchers have shown that sense of self-efficacy is significantly connected to effective teaching and individual and organizational changes (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Cotton, 1995). Moreover, researchers have recognized teachers’ sense of self-efficacy as a multidimensional construct but have disagreed as to the composition of its dimensions. Some believed that it was composed of personal and teaching dimensions (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Tracz & Gibson, 1986; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990), yet others believed it was made up of both internal and external dimensions (Guskey & Passaro, 1994).

The belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute courses of action has been defined as teachers’ sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995). Bandura (1994) described these beliefs as determinants of how people think, behave, and feel. Teachers who possess a high sense of self-efficacy believed performance outcomes to be personally controllable (Bandura, 1989). Hence, “a fundamental attribute of the successful teacher was a ‘can do’ attitude, a feeling that they were capable of coping with whatever problems come along” (Brophy & Evertson, 1976. p. 40). Conversely, teachers with a low sense of self-efficacy attributed failure to uncontrollable factors, thereby increasing their feelings of despair and the likelihood of surrendering in the presence of difficulty (Silver, Mitchell & Gist, 1995). These types of attributions are particularly important
because they encourage teachers to make adaptive changes or self-adjustments in their instructional practices (Pajares & Urdan, 2006). Perceived self-efficacy or a sense of responsibility for success and failure is “undoubtedly a robust variable in the teaching process” (Cotton, 1995, p. 3).

Contextual factors, experiences both inside and outside the classroom setting, differences between current theory and practices in teaching, and the students served—all affect teachers’ perceptions of their ability to influence academic outcomes particularly in the teaching of writing. Not least among these are teachers’ own dispositions, their beliefs about writing and writing instruction, and the perceptions of themselves as writers (Bowie, 1996). Additionally, other diverse factors such as personal characteristics, age, years of teaching experience, the type of student taught, context of the school environment, and cultural expectations were found to influence a teacher’s sense of self-efficacy for writing (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Guskey, 1987; Moore & Esselman, 1994). These factors also account for teachers’ attributions which may explain why students are successful or not (Cotton, 1995). Researchers examined various dimensions of perceived teacher self-efficacy, which is typically construed to encompass teachers’ perceptions regarding their own power to influence various dimensions of practice (Lavelle, 2006) such as instructional self-efficacy (Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2000) and management self-efficacy (Enochs, 1995).

Teaching self-efficacy inventories have emerged that address dimensions such as instructional efficacy, efficacy to influence decision making, efficacy to influence school resources, and management efficacy (Teacher Scales of Self-Efficacy, n. d.).
Although “teaching self-efficacy is critical to teaching performance, it is equally important to know about teachers’ efficacy beliefs for successfully engaging and negotiating professional and academic tasks that are directly related to instruction, such as writing” (Lavelle, 2006, p. 75). Not only does writing involve sophisticated concepts common to thinking, it generally helps the writer “to figure out what you know and don’t know, to problem-solve, organize and work through confusions” (Routman, 2005, p. 42). Because it is through writing that ideas are developed to the fullest extent, beliefs in one’s own task competence and actual skill play an important role in teaching effectiveness (Wilson & Floden, 2003).

Writing Self-Efficacy

Although numerous studies have addressed teachers’ beliefs about teaching writing (Benton, 1999; McLeod, 1995; Moore, 2000; Lavelle, 2006), few have considered teachers’ beliefs about their own writing skill (Lavelle, 2006), especially in relation to their classroom instructional practices. However, an exception in this regard was investigated by Frank (2003), who found that individuals who were low in writing self-efficacy did become more engaged when they had the opportunity to write their own stories. Lavelle (2006, p. 75) argued “that writing self-efficacy is raised as teachers explore the ‘inscape’ of their own cultural and personal stories as they connect to the experiences of other teachers.” A similar study by Shell (1989) examined a relationship between self-efficacy and achievement in both reading and writing among preservice teachers. An additional study by Wachholz and Etheridge (1996) investigated differences in writing self-efficacy beliefs for pre-service teachers who had high or low apprehensions about writing. They linked preservice teachers’ prior experiences directly
to writing efficacy and established a relationship between writing self-efficacy and writing performance (Lavelle, 2006).

Teachers’ Writing Self-Efficacy

Lavelle (2005) conducted a large scale \( n = 423 \) psychometric study that examined the relationship of writing beliefs and writing strategies with teachers who had returned to college and enrolled in core courses required for a master’s degree in education. This study revealed a low self-efficacy factor that was similar to that found in studies of undergraduates, which described a “needy” predisposition toward writing, with little confidence in individual skill or belief in their own success. In Lavelle’s study, the low self-efficacy scale for teachers showed no significant score differences based on gender, age, or level taught (preschool, K-3, 4-6, middle, or secondary). Moreover, the study described a “paralyzing” fear of writing that was based on teachers’ perceived needs for social encouragement, teacher support, and a general self-doubt about writing skills (Lavelle, 2006).

Writers and Teachers of Writing

Scholars contend that writing in classrooms will not improve substantially until it becomes the central focus of the curriculum (Richardson, 1992). In addition, writing has long been believed to be one of the best ways of fostering thinking and learning in all subject areas (Camp, 1982; Silberman, 1989; Smit, 1991).

Much of teachers’ resistance to incorporating writing instruction in their classroom comes from their poor perceptions of themselves as writers and their uncertainty about how to teach and foster writing in their classroom. A study of 192 high
school teachers with a mean experience of 12.9 years completed by Claypool (1990) found that teachers who were unsure of their writing ability, typically assigned fewer writing assignments per year than those who were less apprehensive or insecure. Because of a lack of confidence in writing, teachers were inadequately prepared to teach writing or to use writing as a teaching tool in their classroom (Claypool, 1990; Deckert, 1988; Hollingsworth & Eastman, 1988). Another study of 185 elementary and secondary teachers conducted by Daly (1985) found that writing apprehension in teachers related significantly to their perceptions of the relevance of writing in the content areas and to their degree of emphasis on writing in the classroom setting.

Experts in the field of writing agree that in order to teach writing, teachers must first be writers (Bridge & Hiebert, 1985; Faery, 1993; Hollingsworth & Eastman, 1988). To make meaning in writing, teachers must “wear the writer’s hat” and grapple with the process because it calls not only for advanced skills, but also for self-knowledge of oneself as a writer (Lavelle, 2006). Similarly, teachers must participate and understand the process and know how to create the kind of conditions that facilitate skillful writing from students (Atwell, 1991).

Statement of the Problem

Other nations around the world strive to improve their schools to create global citizens (van Roekel, 2008). Likewise, reform in the United States is based on a globally competitive workforce for increasingly technically demanding jobs, especially those that place a premium on math and science skills (Troia, in press). Education in the United States is also dominated by the onset of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) era. Accountability has focused almost exclusively on basic academic skills, has based
sanctions solely on math and reading scores, and has created incentives to limit or eliminate entirely the time spent on other important curricular objectives (Rothstein & Jacobsen, 2006)—to the extent that is has almost excluded writing (Lesnick, 2006). In this context, it is little wonder that writing is the most neglected of “the three R’s” (National Commission on Writing in America’s Schools and Colleges, 2003) and does not enjoy the same level of distinction or rally as much concern as the other two R’s.

Opportunities for economic success make strong reading, writing, and thinking skills essential for the future. Therefore, teachers’ beliefs in their personal efficacy to motivate and promote learning affect the type of learning environment that is created (Bandura, 1993). Albert Bandura (1997, p. 240) postulated “The task of creating learning environments conducive to development of cognitive competencies rests heavily on the talents and self-efficacy of teachers.” Consequently, how teachers view their own classroom capabilities is significant in raising the level of academic progress their students achieve. Researchers have shown a positive correlation between teachers’ perceived self-efficacy and student achievement (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Bandura, 1977, 1997; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Hoy, 2000; Smylie, 1990). Consequently, teacher educators need to further their understanding of factors that influence self-efficacy and how it affects the practice of writing instruction (Bridge & Hiebert, 1985; Schunk & Pajares, 1992). Although teaching self-efficacy has been supported as an important construct related to teacher competence (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000), little is known about how teachers think of themselves as writers (i.e., writing self-efficacy), particularly as it relates to their writing instruction. Therefore, in trying to address this issue, it is
imperative that educators discover how and to what extent teachers view themselves as writers and writing teachers (Frager, 1994).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of teachers’ self-efficacy on their classroom writing instruction. Information was drawn from a sample of eight currently practicing early childhood teachers working at a southeastern, suburban school district in central Alabama. Another purpose of this study was to contribute to the existing body of knowledge that supports the developing notion that self-efficacy is an important element in understanding how teachers think about their own writing, how they implement and evaluate writing instruction in their classroom, and how they value writing as a tool of learning.

Research Questions

The central focus question explored in this study was “How do early childhood teachers describe the relationship between their writing self-efficacy and the impact it has on writing instruction in the classroom?”

Six subquestions were developed to better explore the central question:

1. How do teachers describe themselves as writers?

2. How do teachers describe themselves as writing teachers?

3. What personal experiences have teachers had that affected the way they teach writing in their classroom?

4. How do teachers describe differences in self-efficacy when students experience academic success or failure?
5. How do teachers evaluate writing instruction in their classrooms?

6. How do teachers describe the educational context that supports teachers and the teaching of writing in the classroom?

Significance of the Study

The findings of the study will provide information regarding the impact of teachers’ writing self-efficacy on their writing instruction. The information derived from this study will also be useful to develop personal and organizational approaches for raising teachers’ self-efficacy levels. This understanding will be useful for early childhood educators, district administrators and policymakers, school-based leadership personnel at the local level, educational psychologists, social psychologists, and other stakeholders when making decisions about classroom instructional practices.

Definitions of Terms

*Academic achievement*—achievement as measured by a nationally normed achievement test.

*Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI)*—a statewide initiative directed by the Alabama State Department of Education that focuses upon teacher professional development in order to achieve the goal of 100% literacy among public school students (Lollar, 2002).

*Attribute*—a characteristic or quality of a person (*Webster’s New World Dictionary*, 1970).

*Belief*—a conviction or acceptance that certain things are true or real (*Webster’s New World Dictionary of American English*, 1991).
Context variables—environmental factors that can influence teacher-student relations and sense of self-efficacy, such as classroom setting, socioeconomic level of the community, school and district organizational factors, and the political climate of the state.

Deterrent—something that prevents or discourages action (American Heritage Dictionary, 1985).

General teacher efficacy—the belief that outside factors beyond teachers’ control impact students’ academic achievement.

High teacher self-efficacy—confidence in one’s own ability to affect change resulting in student achievement (Earley & Lituchy, 1991).

Low teacher self-efficacy—lack of confidence in one’s own ability to carry out actions.

Perception—mental image; a concept (Webster’s New Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1993).

Self-efficacy—an individual’s personal judgment of his or her capabilities to organize and carry out actions that will result in anticipated types of performances such as student achievement (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997; Pajares, 2002). This definition is used interchangeably with personal teacher efficacy and self-efficacy throughout this dissertation.

Student success—achievement of age and grade-level competencies valued by students, parents, teachers, and the community.

Student failure—non-achievement of age and grade-level competencies valued by students, parents, teachers, and the community.

Teacher dispositions—relatively enduring attitudes or habits of mind that are characteristic of a particular teacher.
Teacher perceived self-efficacy or sense of teacher self-efficacy—the personal responsibility that teachers assume for the academic outcomes of their students. This responsibility is based on teachers’ judgments of their ability, their past and present efforts, the ability and efforts of their students, personal characteristics, and contextual variables.

Teaching practices—instructional strategies that are repeated frequently.

Writing process classrooms—classrooms in which writing is a recursive process involving prewriting, drafting, revision, conferencing, editing, and publication (Ray & Laminack, 2001). It is an instructional element within writing instruction (Houston, 2004). Children write daily from self-selected topics. Response is to the children’s meaning and inclusion of all children in the community of learners (Graves, 1994; Heald-Taylor, 1989).

Writing workshop—a teaching and learning tool in which the focus is on the writers, who use writing to do powerful things in the world in which they live. Children research, explore, collect, interview, talk, read, stare off into space, and co-author, in addition to prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made in conducting this study:

1. Respondents would accurately answer interview questions in a manner that reflected their true beliefs and instructional practices.

2. Participants would not drop out of the study.

3. Participants who volunteered for the study were genuinely interested in improving writing instruction in their classrooms.
4. The researcher was knowledgeable of the writing process and writing workshop.

Limitations

The study was subject to the following limitations:

1. Because this qualitative research cannot be generalized beyond the eight participants, the sample size was a limitation of the study (Bodgan & Biklin, 1998). Some parts may be transferable to others in like circumstances or populations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2003).

2. All of the participants in the study were Caucasian females within a single school district. This limits the study to the views and beliefs that are norms within this district.

3. The district in which the study was conducted strongly values and encourages classroom writing instruction. This may limit the outcomes of the study.

4. The external validity of the interview responses could be suspect because the researcher is a teacher employed by the school system in which the research was conducted. Some teachers might have been reluctant to share their genuine opinions, whereas others might have said what they thought the researcher wanted to hear.

5. The participants had varying amounts of education and held different degrees.

6. The study was conducted over a relatively short period of time: a two-month period. Conducting the research over a wider span of time may have revealed more information.
7. Although efforts were made to identify many variables that interact with or influence self-efficacy, it is not possible to control for all variables that could significantly interact with this construct.

8. The researcher knew a majority of the participants, which could have affected their responses.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 comprises an introduction, short literature review, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, the research questions, significance of the study, terms and definitions, assumptions and limitations, and organization of the study. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of the literature that laid the foundation for, and provided the rationale for, the study. This chapter includes several theories that support self-efficacy, as well as additional information about writing instruction and teachers’ beliefs about the use of writing. Chapter 3 describes the methods used in the research study, including qualitative research, the tradition of inquiry, the research site and selection of participants, introduction of the participants and sites, procedures for data collection and analysis, verification procedures, ethical considerations, and the role of the researcher. Chapter 4 details the results of the study and the emergent themes. Chapter 5 provides a summary of findings, implications for educators, recommendations for further research, and the conclusion of the study.
Summary

A teacher’s instructional practices are guided by the “big ideas” in today’s classroom (Hall, 2009). Our beliefs tend to drive our teaching practices in the classroom, even if we never articulate them. Because written communication is a tool that is undeniably important to ensure success in an increasingly competitive world, our beliefs must be recognized, questioned, and challenged in the light of new information, research, and experiences, or else virtually nothing happens (Routman, 2005). As teachers, we must be able to collect and organize information, discover its significance, and make it available to others (Murray, 1996). We must also understand why it is we are doing what we are doing when we step into our classroom. *Nulla dies sine linea*, or, “Never a day without a line.”
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review begins by defining the theoretical framework for the study as one that includes contextualism, social cognition theory, social learning theory, and attribution theory. The construct of teacher sense of self-efficacy is examined to explain how it is defined and measured. Studies that have investigated the effects of self-efficacy are presented, as is an examination of teacher attributions and frameworks that explain those effects. From the review of existing research related to writing in the classroom, four general topics emerged as relevant to the current study: (a) practices, (b) teacher beliefs, (c) deterring factors, and (d) supporting factors.

The study of teachers’ self-efficacy for writing and the impact it has on their writing instruction has been undergirded by the theoretical frameworks of social cognition theory, social learning theory, and attribution theory. Contextualism has served as the overall foundation for examining the personal characteristics and context variables that contributed to teachers’ own writing self-efficacy and its link to their classroom writing instructional practices. With the many factors that may influence student success, teachers’ responsibility for students’ academic outcomes is a direct result of the instructional practices that those teachers provide. Studies that investigated the effects of teacher self-efficacy found that the classroom teacher is “the most important factor affecting student learning” (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001, p. 63). Stevens (2008, p. 3) further stated that if we, as educators, “expect our students to succeed, not only do
we have to provide our students with the right tools and knowledge for success, but we also have to empower ourselves with effective teaching methodologies and instructional activities.”

Bandura’s (1986) social cognition theory furnished the basis for assessing the role of teachers’ self-efficacy for writing and the impact it has on writing instruction in the classroom as well as how both influence student academic outcomes. Rotter’s (1966, 1982) social learning theory examined teachers’ internal versus external locus of control, as well as the relationship between the responsibility for writing self-efficacy and writing practices and the connection that both have on student success or failure. Weiner’s (1986) attribution theory was used to examine the causes that teachers gave to account for the writing instruction they provided to students in the classroom and how it determined student success or failure.

Contextualism

The word contextualism in reference to human development theories was popular in the late 1970s and became more common in the 1980s and 1990s (Thomas, 2005). This paradigm emphasizes both social sources of knowledge and the adaptive quality of human thought through four basic tenets (Cotton, 1995). The following list of four tenets is adapted from the work of Cotton (1995); Lerner (1986); Rosnow and Georgoudi, (1986); Zimmerman (1983); Thomas (1992); and Yin (2003).

1. Events that happen are a result of an interaction between individuals and the environment. Human activity and environmental context operate concisely. The environmental context is an essential element in human events, acts, and activities and is correlated with meanings and relationships in the socio-cultural context.
2. Context forms a complex framework of events that are holistic, not discrete isolated units. Because of the strong interrelationships among these events, not only are they embedded with layers of experience, but changes in one layer also promote changes in another layer.

3. Contextualism is both dynamic and comprehensive. Contextualists believe that scrutinizing bits and pieces of cognition takes meaning away from what actually occurs. They also believe that it is the day-to-day occurrences within the culture and environment which provide the basis for the rules and patterns in life.

4. Development is ongoing and diverse. Constant change is a core element of development. Social variables are considered a more accurate predictor of performance transitions than age.

Contextualism provides a perspective for development that compliments diverse models (Cotton, 1995). Both social learning theory and social cognition theory embrace the tenets of contextualism (Cotton, 1995). Rotter’s (1966) social learning theory views the element of inquiry as an interaction of individuals and their environment and is classified under the contextualist paradigm. Bandura’s (1986) theory is contextualist as well because it considers psychological functioning as a continuous reciprocal interaction among behavioral, cognitive, and environmental influences (Cotton, 1995; Thomas, 1992). In the sections that follow, social cognition theory is used to explain the concept of self-efficacy.

Social Cognition Theory and Self-Efficacy

Social cognition theory is a socio-cognitive perspective proposed by Bandura (1986). It empowers individuals to self-regulate their cognitive processes and behaviors,
as opposed to simply reacting to events (Lewandowski, 2005). This perspective derives from a belief that “individuals are capable of exercising a degree of control over their thoughts, feelings, motivation, and actions” (Pajares, 2003, p. 7) after a self-interpretation of personal performance. It is this type of control that impacts or alters subsequent actions and behaviors (Lewandowski, 2005).

Other effectors of behavior, and even of motivation, are what Bandura (1986) described as outcome expectations and efficacy expectations. Outcome expectations relate to the consequences of a particular action, and efficacy expectations related to the judgments of ability one believes that one has to achieve a certain level of performance in specific situations (Cotton, 1995). Riggs and Enochs (1990), Ashton et al. (1982), Gibson and Dembo (1984), and Soodak and Podell (1996) reasoned that, in general, what teachers could be expected to accomplish was an outcome of their own teaching. Bandura (1986), on the other hand, argued that outcome expectancy was a judgment of like consequences of a specific action based on an individual’s anticipated level of performance. Further, Bandura (1986) considered both outcome expectations and efficacy expectations interrelated in that they depend to a large degree on how well people think they will perform in a given event.

Bandura (1977, 1986; Enochs, 1995) believed that perceived self-efficacy originates from four major sources of information.

1. The most influential source of self-efficacy has been identified as enactive attainments or what is considered actual experiences (Pajares, 1996). Bandura (1986) believed that successful experiences raise self-efficacy, whereas repeated failures render a low sense of self-efficacy.
2. Vicarious experience has been identified as perceived self-efficacy. When a woman observes others experience or attain success, then she is likely to believe that she also possesses the ability to be successful (Cotton, 1995). Conversely, when a man observes others who have capabilities similar to his own fail at a task, then his self-efficacy or belief in his ability to perform a task is lowered (Bandura, 1986).

3. Verbal persuasion has been specified as perceived self-efficacy. This source has been proven effective with individuals who think they can be successful (Cotton, 1995). Verbal persuasion is the most limited source, however, because of its inability to produce lasting improvements in self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986).

4. The final source has been identified as the physiological state. When an individual’s body signals a fear response, that individual is likely to experience the failure that is most feared (Cotton, 1995). But, if bodily levels of arousal are controlled, then performance will resume and self-efficacy will improve (Bandura, 1986).

Bandura (1986, 1997) credited behavior as being an accurate predictor of individuals’ beliefs in their own capabilities as opposed to what they are actually able to accomplish, which he called our self-efficacy beliefs. It is “these self-perceptions that help determine what individuals do with the knowledge and skills they have” (Pajares & Schunk, 2002, p. 18). According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is the most influential arbiter in human functioning, and self-belief drives an individual’s academic endeavors. Therefore, these beliefs determine “how well knowledge and skill are acquired” (Pajares, 2003, p. 8). As Pajares and Schunk (2002) asserted,

In all, Bandura’s social cognitive theory paints a portrait of human behavior and motivation in which the beliefs that people have about their capabilities are critical elements” and “that individuals’ self-beliefs are critical forces in their academic motivation and achievement. (p. 20)
Historical Overview of Self-Efficacy

Around the turn of the twentieth century, attention was focused on the impact of how human behavior affected our idea of self and how one’s self-perception has affected human conduct (Lewandowski, 2005). In the forefront with an early interest in the self was American psychologist, William James. He believed that introspective observation was something to be relied on (Lewandowski, 2005). James (1896, 1958) was one of the first psychologists and writers to use the term “self-esteem,” which he described as a self-feeling in this world that depends entirely on what we back ourselves to be and do. James defined it as a feeling about one’s self and about what one thinks of personal accomplishments in associations with other members of society (Lewandowski, 2005; Pajares, 2002).

During the 1920s through the 1940s, behavioral psychologists such as Pavlov and Skinner focused mainly on the idea of stimuli and response. Consequently, the idea of self lacked interest and, because the field of education closely followed psychological theory, educators disregarded the focus on self during this period. (Lewandowski, 2005). However, in the 1950s, the humanistic movement was born.

Abraham Maslow, a powerful voice in the new movement, redirected attention to the construct of self when he looked at how individuals are motivated by unsatisfied needs, or what he referred to as the “motivational processes” of individuals (Lewandowski, 2005). Motivation was further increased by “the need to become self-actualized, that is, to achieve one’s potentialities, capacities and talents” (Pajares, 2003, p. 3). Humans are naturally motivated by basic needs that they seek to fulfill. As certain
individual needs are prioritized and met, others are identified, and needs are
hierarchically ordered from lower needs to higher ones. Diggory (1966) summed it up:

The fact that the new psychologists were able to argue substantive matters of
learning theory and motivation with the heirs of the behaviorists made the latter
pay attention and finally agree that there might be something to the idea of self
after all. (p. 56)

Fueled by the humanistic movement of 1960s and 1970s, an enthusiastic
renaissance was born. There was interest in internal and intrinsic motivating forces as
well as affective processes with reference to the dynamic importance of self (Pajares &
Schunk, 2002). Schools attempted to nurture positive self-concepts and self-esteem but
were hindered as a result of a gap between theory and practice (Lewandowski, 2005).
Noticeably, a large amount of the research on self-esteem and student achievement
provided findings that were “inconclusive or provided unsettling results” (Pajares, 2003,
p. 4). As expected, interest and enthusiasm for self-constructs rapidly diminished
(Lewandowski, 2005).

The “cognitive revolution” materialized in the 1980s as psychologists shifted their
interest to cognition and information processing. This revolution was highly influenced
by technological advances, specifically the computer. As a result of technology,
psychologists now concentrated their time and effort on internal, mental tasking activities
such as information processing, schema building, and problem-solving rather than on
issues related to the self (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). Furthermore, there was national
concern that academic standards had decreased significantly and that high schools were
awarding diplomas to students who drastically lacked skills that were necessary for daily
functioning (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Lewandowski, 2005; Pajares & Schunk, 2002).
This scare threw the American educational system into a “back to basics approach to curriculum and practice” (Pajares, 2003).

Social cognitivist Albert Bandura (1977) identified what he believed was the missing link from all the theories at this time, including his own social learning theory, in his publication, *Self-efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change*. In this publication, Bandura described individuals as having a perception of their own capabilities that impacts and helps determine the choices of activities and persistence they have in reaching a particular goal. He referred to these self-perceptions as *self-efficacy*. In another publication, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action* (1986), Bandura explained a social cognitive theory. According to this theory, people have beliefs about their own capabilities—self-perceptions—and people’s accomplishments are driven by these perceptions of self, not by externally measured abilities (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Pajares, 2003). Individuals who believe that they have the capability to be successful will attempt to reach their goals. Table 1 outlines some of the research on self-efficacy and teaching that was examined in preparation for the present study.

The Concept of Self-Efficacy

“Self-efficacy is distinct from other conceptions of self, such as self-concept, self-worth, and self-esteem, in that it is specific to a particular task” (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, p. 210). Gist and Mitchell (1992) noted that self-esteem is usually considered to be a trait that reflects an individual’s characteristic affective evaluation of self, such as feelings of self-worth or self-liking. By contrast, they remarked that “self-efficacy is merely a judgment about task capability that is not inherently evaluative” (p. 185). Self-efficacy is synonymous with self-perception of one’s competence rather than
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of the study</th>
<th>Researchers</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sense of self-efficacy</td>
<td>Ashton and Webb (1986)</td>
<td>Effective teaching is connected to a teachers sense of self-efficacy and individual changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy attributes</td>
<td>Brophy and Evertson (1976)</td>
<td>Found that the successful classroom teacher can cope with adversities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy attributes</td>
<td>Silver and Mitchell (1995)</td>
<td>Teachers with low self-efficacy attribute failure to uncontrollable factors which increase feelings of despair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy attributes</td>
<td>Pajares and Urdan (2006)</td>
<td>Attributions were significant as they helped teachers make adaptive changes in their instructional practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences inside and outside the classroom</td>
<td>Bowie (1996)</td>
<td>Differences in theory and practice in teaching affect teachers perceptions of their ability to influence academic outcomes, particularly in writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching self-efficacy</td>
<td>Lavelle (2006)</td>
<td>Teachers’ efficacy beliefs are directly related to instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing self-efficacy</td>
<td>Frank (2003)</td>
<td>Individuals who were low in writing self-efficacy became more engaged in writing when they wrote their own stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing self-efficacy and achievement</td>
<td>Shell (1989)</td>
<td>A relationship exists in both reading and writing among pre-service teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences in writing self-efficacy beliefs</td>
<td>Wachholz and Ethridge (1996)</td>
<td>A link exists between pre-service teachers’ prior experiences and writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ writing self-efficacy</td>
<td>Lavelle (2005)</td>
<td>Low self-efficacy had little to do with age, gender, or level taught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus of the study</td>
<td>Researchers</td>
<td>Outcomes</td>
</tr>
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<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ experiences</td>
<td>Claypool (1990)</td>
<td>Found that teachers with 12+ years of teaching experience were unsure of their writing ability and assigned fewer writing assignments per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ experiences</td>
<td>Daly (1985)</td>
<td>Found that writing apprehension in teachers related to their perceptions of the relevance of writing in the content area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher efficacy scale</td>
<td>Guskey and Passaro (1994)</td>
<td>Found no difference in pre-service versus experienced teachers ability to influence students but did find an internal versus external distinction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ self-efficacy</td>
<td>Berman and McLaughlin (1977)</td>
<td>Found a connection between teachers’ efficacy beliefs and student achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ self-efficacy</td>
<td>Armor et al. (1976)</td>
<td>African American students achievement were improved by their teachers commitment to improve classroom practices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

level of competence, and this distinction is significant because people tend to either overestimate or underestimate their actual abilities (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998).

According to Bandura (1986, p. 391), self-efficacy is defined as “people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances.” Perceived self-efficacy beliefs impact a person either positively, in an empowering way, or negatively, in a demoralizing way. One’s belief that he or she can carry out the necessary actions to achieve a desired result determine the impact (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). Individuals who believe in their ability to perform a
specific task well will work harder and persist longer to successfully reach the goal than will those who lack confidence in their ability (Lewandowski, 2005). Bandura (1977) asserted that personal life experiences shape an individual’s expectation about action and outcome and, thus, directly impact their motivation and sense of self-efficacy.

Characteristics Of Self-Efficacy

Beliefs of self-efficacy may differ in level, generality, and strength. The perception of a task is most affected by the level of the demands required to accomplish it. Therefore, will the demands of the task be classified as simple, moderate, or more difficult? Generality refers to the range of activities included in the perception of a task. When activities are similar in degree and require the same capabilities, then they are more generalizable. Finally, strength varies with self-efficacy beliefs. Individuals who have weak self-efficacy beliefs tend to let negative experiences weaken their self-efficacy. They may actually give up on working toward their goal, whereas individuals who have high self-efficacy beliefs will continue to strive for accomplishment even when adversity is present (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Lewandowski, 2005).

Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Albert Bandura, professor of psychology at Stanford University, was the most recent voice to call for renewed attention to the self. Bandura was primarily trained as a behaviorist, and his early ideas stemmed from a behavioristic orientation. He was uncomfortable with the stimulus-response nature of behaviorist notions but was keenly aware of a key element that was missing from the prevalent learning theories at the time (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). The missing element, identified in his 1977 publication of
Self-efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change, sought to explain how individual human beings “create change and develop self-perceptions of capability that become instrumental to the goals they pursue and to the control they are able to exercise over their environments” (Pajares & Schunk, 2002, p. 17). While most psychology textbooks place Bandura’s (1973, 1977, 1986, 1997) theory with those of the behaviorists, Bandura himself noted that he never really fit the behavioral orthodoxy. From his earliest work, he argued that reducing behavior to a stimulus-response cycle was too simplistic. Although much of his work used behavioral terminology such as “conditioning” and “reinforcement,” Bandura (1973, 1977, 1986, 1997) explained that he had conceptualized these phenomena as operating through cognitive processes. He contended that the authors of psychological texts have mischaracterized his approach as being rooted in behaviorism, whereas he described his own perspective as “social cognitivism.” When Bandura proposed his social cognitive theory of human functioning in 1986, it emphasized the critical role of self-beliefs in human cognition, motivation, affective processes, and the selection process (Cotton, 1995; Pajares & Schunk, 2002). In rejecting the behaviorists’ indifference to self-processes, he argued that “individuals possess a self system that enables them to exercise a measure of control over their thoughts, feelings, and actions” (Bandura, 1994; Pajares & Schunk, 2002). By doing so, he reinvigorated the almost abandoned focus on the self in the study of human process that William James introduced almost a century earlier (Pajares & Schunk, 2002).

Bandura (1993) identified four types of processes that influence thoughts, feelings, and actions: cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection. The first of these, the cognitive processes, influence the way people think, the types of goals and events
people develop, one’s conception of his or her ability to accomplish the goals, and the analytical thinking used to achieve the goals (Cotton, 1995). When the goals are or are not accomplished, social feedback affects thought and influences self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993). Self-efficacy beliefs allow individuals to tap into their self-efficacy or their self-concept beliefs (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). Pajares and Schunk (2002) went on to explain that

Self-efficacy beliefs revolve around questions of ‘can’ (Can I write well? Can I drive a car? Can I solve this problem?), whereas self-concept beliefs reflect questions of “being” and “feeling” (How do I feel about myself as a writer?). (p. 21)

When posed to individuals, these types of self-efficacy questions reveal whether those individuals possess high or low confidence to accomplish a task. Just as important are what the answers reveal about how positively or negatively those individuals view themselves (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). Bandura (1986) acknowledged that both positive and negative perceptions of self “contribute in their own way to the quality of human life” (p. 410).

Second, motivational processes are another influence on self-efficacy beliefs. These influences contribute to the types of goals individuals set for themselves, the amount of effort exerted trying to achieve the goals, the energy used when faced with adversity, and individual resilience (Cotton, 1995). Individuals who exhibit a strong sense of self-efficacy persevere and achieve the goals even in adverse situations, whereas those who have a weak sense of self-efficacy may halt their efforts or give up completely (Bandura, 1993).

Third, affective processes are identified as the emotional mediators of self-efficacy (Cotton, 1995). When faced with adversity, an individual’s stress level rises.
Individuals with a low sense of self-efficacy tend to dwell on certain situations or avoid them altogether. Those with a high sense of self-efficacy recognize they have the ability to avoid stressful situations entirely (Bandura, 1993).

Fourth, a sense of self-efficacy impacts the choice of activities and environments through the selection processes (Cotton, 1995). Tasks that are attainable and can be viewed as successful are met willingly by those with strong self-efficacy beliefs. Those with low self-efficacy beliefs will avoid tasks that appear even potentially unattainable. The choices individuals make regarding such tasks influence their competencies, interests, and possibly their careers (Bandura, 1993).

A companion concept, locus of control, describes an individual’s belief system regarding the causes of his or her experiences, the factors to which he or she attributes success or failure. These factors that control experiences, actions, and outcomes are considered either internal or external. A person with an external locus of control will attribute his success to fate or luck, and he will be less likely to make the effort needed to learn (Bandura 1997). If a person has an internal locus of control, she attributes success to her own efforts and abilities. As it relates to learning, a person who expects to succeed is more likely to be motivated and more likely to learn. This person will seek out information and is more likely to have good study habits and a positive academic attitude (Bandura, 1977, 1997; Smylie, 1990).

Finally, it has been shown that self-efficacy beliefs are not static and may be altered as a result of contextual factors. When an individual acquires new skills, they are added to the performance of the previous skills, and then efficacy beliefs are adjusted to
accommodate changes: “[N]o other motivational concept with an expectancy construct adheres to such specificity” (Lewandowski, 2005).

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Researchers and educators seem to disagree when defining teacher self-efficacy. The Rand Corporation researchers (Berman et al., 1977, p. 136) defined it as “a belief that the teacher can help even the most difficult or unmotivated students.” Ashton and Webb (1986, p. 3) further defined it as “teachers’ situation-specific expectation that they can help students learn.” Guskey (1987) viewed the definition as synonymous with the teacher being responsible for students’ past learning. Still, Pajares and Schunk (2002, p. 233) said that “it is a teacher’s belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context.” Both self-perception of teaching competencies and beliefs about teaching contribute to teacher self-efficacy, and to the consequences that stem from efficacy beliefs (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). Teacher efficacy, in a broad sense, “combined beliefs about teachers in general with beliefs about individual ability” (Lewandowski, 2005, p. 23).

According to Woolfolk and Hoy (1990), teacher self-efficacy was first referenced by the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) in 1974. The reference used was a 5-item Political Efficacy Scale, eventually renamed the Teacher Efficacy Scale, that determined humanistic teachers’ beliefs about student control (Barfield & Burlingame, 1974). The developers of the efficacy scale, which was grounded in political science, defined efficacy as “a positive attitude toward accomplishing things through politics” (Barfield & Burlingame, p. 8).
Another concept of teacher efficacy was grounded in the field of psychology (Cotton, 1995). In 1977, the Rand Corporation had researchers develop the first psychologically based scale for measurement of teacher self-efficacy. The instrument was grounded in the work of Julian Rotter’s social learning theory (Armor et al., 1976; Berman et al., 1977; Pajares & Schunk, 2002). The RAND researchers developed a two-question 5-point Likert scale based on their inspiration from an article by Rotter (1966) titled “Generalized Expectancies for Internal Versus External Control of Reinforcement” (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). The first question referred to the teacher’s own personal beliefs that he or she had the necessary skills and capability to improve student learning: “If I try really hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated students” (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977, p. 137). The second question referred to beliefs that external factors beyond the teacher’s control, such as the socioeconomic status, home environment and parental involvement, limit the teacher’s ability to bring about change or stimulate improvement: “When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can’t do much because most of a student’s motivation and performance depends on his or her home environment” (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977, p. 137). Researchers identified the second question as clearly corresponding to Bandura’s concept of outcome expectancy (Gibson & Dembo, 1984).

The first multidimensional model of teacher self-efficacy was developed by Ashton and Webb (1986) and was based on Bandura’s construct of self-efficacy (Guskey & Passaro, 1994). The model consisted of two distinct dimensions: teaching efficacy and personal teaching efficacy. Both dimensions were measured by using the two Rand questions, classroom observations, and an interview process. Woolfolk and Hoy (1990)
explained that both dimensions have been tied to Bandura’s outcome expectations for two reasons. First, teaching efficacy had a connection to outcome expectations because it measured teachers’ beliefs that they can overcome the effects of adverse background influences. Second, personal efficacy had a bond to expectation outcomes because it measured teachers’ confidence in their abilities to achieve a certain level of performance in particular situations. However, Bandura disagreed. He viewed them as only efficacy expectations because they involved the potential of teacher in general to overcome negative influences. He, instead, described outcome expectations as judgments of the probable consequences for specific acts (Bandura as cited in Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). Guskey and Passaro (1994) suggested that Bandura’s interpretation questions the accuracy of using outcome and expectancy expectations as definitions for the two dimensions.

Teaching efficacy has been defined as “the teacher’s sense that teaching as a profession can offset the influence of negative background variables, such as socioeconomic status” (Cotton, 1995, p. 23). Teachers with a low sense of self-efficacy do not believe students can be helped and provide little help because they do not expect students to make progress. Additionally, these teachers blame background variables for student failure. Teachers with a high sense of teaching efficacy believe that all students can learn and will learn (Ashton & Webb, 1986). Teachers’ sense of self-efficacy has been shown to positively impact student achievement (Armor et al., 1976; Ashton & Webb, 1986; McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978; Moore & Esselman, 1992; Ross, 1992; Smylie, 1990), motivation (Midgley et al., 1989), and sense of efficacy (Anderson et al., 1988).
Personal efficacy, as it relates to teaching, has been defined as “teachers’ assessments of their own teaching abilities and confidence in promoting learning” (Cotton, 1995, p. 23). This dimension has been found to have an influence on the types of instructional practices and management techniques teachers incorporate in their classrooms (Cotton, 1995). Low personal efficacy teachers believe that low-achieving students need more dedication and background knowledge to succeed. Teachers with low self-efficacy are likely to feel professionally compromised and stressed in working with these types of students, whereas teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy feel professionally satisfied in helping any student learn, no matter what that student’s situation entailed (Ashton & Webb, 1986).

Some researchers propose that teaching efficacy comprises internal and external components, as opposed to personal and teaching components (Guskey & Passaro, 1994). Guskey and Passaro modified the Teacher Efficacy Scale of Gibson and Dembo (1984) to include items that had a teaching-internal orientation or a personal-internal orientation (Cotton, 1995). Likewise, they changed some of the items to reflect a personal-external or teaching-internal orientation and found teachers exhibited greater efficacy or positive attitudes about teaching, as well as a high level of confidence in their teaching abilities (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). Using the modified scale, Guskey and Passaro found no distinction between the teachers’ ability to influence students when they compared preservice and experienced teachers (personal efficacy), nor in the abilities of teachers in general to influence students (teaching efficacy). However, their results did detect a distinction in teachers’ abilities to influence students that was based on internal and external factors. The internal factor reflected the teachers’ ability, power, and influence in
teaching situations, whereas the external factor represented the power and influence over outside elements of the classroom that reach beyond teachers’ personal control (Cotton, 1995). Other researchers such as Gibson and Dembo (1984) and Woolfolk and Hoy (1990) have come to this same conclusion about the two dimensions of efficacy.

Teacher Self-Efficacy and Student Achievement

Researchers have shown that teachers are a direct link to student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1993). A study connecting teachers’ self-efficacy to student achievement was carried out by Berman and McLaughlin (1977). It involved two middle schools with distinct organizational variables that the researchers believed would have an impact on teachers’ efficacy. After several classroom observations were conducted, it was concluded that the study of teacher self-efficacy beliefs, “indicates that the extent to which teachers believe they are capable of influencing student performance affects their enthusiasm and persistence in working with their students and ultimately their students’ achievement” (Ashton et al., 1982, p. 11).

A study in Los Angeles was conducted with 20 elementary schools participating in the Preferred Reading Program. The focus was on the classroom practices of those students who successfully improved their scores. It was shown that teacher efficacy, identified as “their sense of being able to get through to students, their commitment and morale” (Armor et al., 1976, p. 38), positively affected African American children’s reading scores.

Ultimately, it is teachers who possess strong perceptions of self-efficacy that display observable behaviors such as effort, persistence, enthusiasm, and confidence. They also engage their students for longer periods of time in learning. High self-efficacy
teachers tend to exemplify warmth and responsiveness to all students, even those with lower ability ranges.

David Kearns (1988) found that failure to change the willingness of all teachers to make a positive impact on all students and failure of teachers to believe in their own abilities is a failure to deal with a critical issue in education. Teachers must believe in themselves and have a support network that fosters the qualities that complement student learning and achievement.

Effects of Teachers’ Instructional Practices on Self-Efficacy

Researchers in diverse settings has explored the effects on self-efficacy of instructional practices and other classroom processes (Schunk & Pajares, 1992). Evidence supports certain practices and processes across grade levels and academic areas, and within student academic levels (Pajares, 1996; Schunk, 1995). Schunk (1995) reported that certain processes are beneficial for developing self-efficacy: proximal and specific learning goals, instructional strategies and verbalizations, social models, performances and attributional feedback, and performance-contingent rewards. Not only do these processes inform students of their capabilities and progress in learning, but the information also serves to motivate students to continue to perform well (Schunk & Pajares, 1992).

Goal setting and self-efficacy provide powerful influences on academic attainment (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Students’ self-efficacy is enhanced by learning goals that are specific, short term, and viewed as challenging yet attainable (Schunk & Pajares, 1992). With clear standards, students can better gauge their
progress and compare it to their goals. The perception of progress further strengthens self-efficacy and encourages students to continue to improve (Schunk, 1995).

Providing students with strategies that help them succeed, such as think-alouds, can raise their self-efficacy. Think-alouds take place when either a student or teacher uses words to discuss or talk-through a lesson or skill (Allen, 2002). It is this kind of interaction between the teacher and students that scaffolds young learners through unfamiliar content. Having students verbalize strategies as they apply them in this way or through pair-sharing will also raise their self-efficacy because it directs students’ attention to important task features, assists strategy encoding and retention, and helps them to work in a more systematic way (Allen, 2002; Schunk, 1995). That is, when students believe they have a means for performing successfully, they are more apt to feel efficacious about doing so (Schunk & Pajares, 1992).

Learners’ Self-Efficacy

The observation of models that demonstrate the application of skills has been shown to raise students’ self-efficacy for learning and to enhance achievement (Schunk & Hanson, 1985; Schunk, Hanson, & Cox, 1987). Modeled displays convey to observers that they are capable of learning and can follow sequential steps to become successful (Schunk & Pajares, 1992). Models have a strong impact among students who often have trouble learning.

Feedback is a persuasive source of self-efficacy that informs learners of goal progress, strengthens self-efficacy, and sustains motivation (Schunk & Pajares, 1992). Attributional feedback links student outcomes with one or several attributions (i.e., perceived causes). Particularly in the early stages of learning, effort feedback is
 paramount to students (e.g., “You’ve got it right because you worked hard.”). As skills improve, ability feedback is highly credible (e.g., “You are good at this.”). Schunk (1995) believed that effort and ability feedback to have strong influences on student self-efficacy.

When students work on tasks, they learn which actions produce positive outcomes, and this helps to guide their future actions (Schunk & Pajares, 1992). When students anticipate desirable outcomes, they are motivated to persist with tasks (Schunk & Pajares, 1992). Rewards entice students to accomplish goals, but may not convey progress information (Schunk, 1983). Performance-contingent rewards and proximal goals raised children’s self-efficacy equally during mathematics learning, but combining rewards and goals tended to lead to the highest self-efficacy and achievement (Schunk, 1984).

Proximal goals promote not only children’s self-efficacy, but also their intrinsic interest (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). Teachers’ instructional practices are a powerful key in raising student interest and self-efficacy, especially when teachers are well informed about student progress in learning. Because of this, experts recognize the relationship between improved teachers’ self-efficacy and instructional practices and the linking of that relationship to student self-efficacy and achievement (Tracz & Gibson, 1986).

Summary of Self-Efficacy

In the field of early childhood education, little is known about how teachers think of themselves as writers and teachers of writing. Because this study supports the notion that self-efficacy is an important construct related to teacher competence, it is important to understand how it is that teachers think about their own writing and writing practices
in the classroom because “people don’t see themselves as writers … [T]hey believe they have nothing valuable or of interest to others to say” (Graves, 1994; Buckner, 2005). As explored in the following sections, Social Learning Theory can explain how people come to hold such beliefs from learning in a social context.

Social Learning Theory

When Julian Rotter developed his social learning theory, the dominant perspective in clinical psychology was Freud’s psychoanalysis, which focused on people’s deep-seated instinctual motives as determining their behavior. Rotter departed from this view with the belief that a psychological theory should have a psychological motivational principle. Rotter chose the empirical law of effect as his motivating factor. That law states that people are motivated to seek out positive stimulation, or reinforcement, and to avoid unpleasant stimulation. He combined behaviorism and the study of personality, without relying on physiological instincts or drives as a motivational force (Rotter, 1966, 1982).

Rotter believed that to understand behavior, one must take into account both the individual (i.e., one’s life history of learning and experiences) and the environment (i.e., stimuli that a person is aware of and responding to). Rotter saw personality, and therefore behavior, as always changeable. Change represents the way a person thinks: By changing the environment the person is responding to, the behavior is changed. He sees individuals as being drawn forward by their goals. Rotter (1966, 1982) proposed that four main components predict behavior: behavior potential, expectancy, reinforcement value, and psychological situation.
Behavior potential is the likelihood of engaging in a particular behavior in a specific situation. An individual will exhibit whichever behavior has the highest behavior potential. Expectancy is the individual’s subjectively predicted probability that a given behavior will lead to a particular outcome. Reinforcement is another name for the outcomes of our behavior. Reinforcement value refers to the desirability of these outcomes. Things we want to happen, things we are attracted to, have a high reinforcement value. Conversely, things we do not want to happen, things we wish to avoid, have a low reinforcement value. If the likelihood of achieving reinforcement is equal, we will exhibit the behavior with the greatest reinforcement value (i.e., the one directed toward the outcome we prefer most). Rotter (1966, p. 2) stated that “a reinforcement acts to strengthen an expectancy that a particular behavior or event will be followed by that reinforcement in the future.” Psychological situation does not fit exactly into Rotter’s formula for predicting behavior, but he believed it was important to keep in mind that different people interpret the same situation differently (Rotter 1966, 1982).

Locus of control was not a major concept in the social learning theory (Rotter, 1982). Instead, his observation was that reinforcement varied systematically on the basis of specific characteristics of a specific person being reinforced in a specific situation (Rotter, 1982). Hence, the resulting concept was what he called empirical law of effect. Individuals perceive reinforcement as the effect either of their behavior or skill—comparable to an internal locus of control—or of external forces such as luck or fate—comparable to an external locus of control (Rotter, 1966).

Researchers have focused on how internal and external loci of control beliefs impact an individual’s behavior and general well-being (Cotton, 1995; Phares, 1991;
Rotter, 1966; Strickland, 1989). Early work suggested distinct differences between the two loci and the resulting behavior. Those with more internal characteristics were shown to be significantly less conforming, more independent, more alert to aspects of their environment, more active in pursuits that would improve their environmental circumstances, and generally more concerned with their ability or skill (Cotton, 1995; Rotter, 1966; Strickland, 1989). Phares (1991) confirmed the same findings and added that individuals with an internal locus are more student achievement-oriented, have better physical health, and may be well adjusted, less anxious, and less prone to mental health problems.

In 1952, Bandura was initially trained in Iowa in the learning theory tradition, which was the primary center of research in psychology. Bandura expanded on the works of others such as Millar and Dollard (in Pajares, 2004), who had coined the term “social learning theory” in 1941. He added two crucial elements of change to the theory. First, he explained the mechanism of reinforcement in terms of expectancies, which added a cognitive focus. Second, he described the primacy in humans, as opposed to lower animals, of the process of observational learning through the imitation of others. He focused on our learning from others to launch the theory further into the social realm (Watson, 2002).

Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory posited that people tend to learn from one another through observation, imitation, and modeling. Bandura’s famous 1961 “Bobo Doll” experiment demonstrated this theory. In the experiment, he filmed a woman beating up a Bobo Doll and shouting aggressive words at it. The film was shown to a group of children. Afterward, the children were allowed to play in a room that contained
the Bobo doll. The children beat the doll excessively, imitating the actions and words of the woman in the film.

This study was crucial because it departed from behaviorism’s insistence that all behavior was directed by reinforcement or rewards. The children received no encouragement or incentives to beat up the doll; they simply imitated the behavior they had observed. Bandura termed this phenomena *observational learning* and characterized the elements of effective observational learning as attention, retention, reciprocation, and motivation. The theory has often been called the bridge between the behaviorist and cognitive learning theories because it encompassed attention, memory, and motivation. His theory integrated a continuous interaction between behaviors, cognitions, and the environment (Pajares, 2004).

Later, Bandura (1997) clarified the distinction between self-efficacy and internal or external locus of control. He provided data that showed perceived self-efficacy and locus of control were not the same phenomenon when measured at different levels of generality. (Pajares & Schunk, 2002, p. 211): “Beliefs about whether one can produce certain actions (perceived self-efficacy) are not the same as beliefs about whether actions affect outcomes (locus of control).” Further data proved that perceived self-efficacy and locus of control had virtually no empirical relationship to one another and, moreover, that perceived self-efficacy was a strong predictor of an individual’s behavior, whereas locus of control was a weak predictor (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). Rotter’s (1966) internal versus external locus of control is concerned more with causal beliefs in relation to actions and outcomes than with personal efficacy (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). Although individuals may feel an outcome is controllable, they may still have the confidence to accomplish it.
However, humans have certain attributes that can help them explain why they do what they do. Next, the attribution theory is described, which may hold more answers that help explain our world.

Attribution Theory of Motivation for Learning

Human beings have a need to explain the world, both for themselves and for others, because attributing cause to events around us gives us a greater sense of control. Explanations for behavior can affect the standing of people within a group, especially in our own group. Attribution theory examines the ascribed causes of, or reasons for, behaviors and how those attributions guide our actions (Weiner, 1972).

Weiner (1972) and Heider (1958) provided a theory to help us make better sense of the world we live in. Heider (1958) was the originator of attributional thinking. He found that attributions were relevant to a person’s perceptions, event perceptions, and attitude change—all of which can affect individuals’ self-esteem and levels of anxiety. Heider (1958) specifically believed that people would act on the basis of their belief systems. He also believed that individuals’ actions were the result of factors both internal to them (within the person) and external to them (within the environment): “His person-versus-environment framework was the first systematic analysis of causal structure” (Cotton, 1995, p. 16).

Weiner (1972) developed an attribution theory of motivation and emotion, which provided a theoretical framework that focused on achievement. Within this framework, individuals base their achievement behaviors on the belief that they have control over their actions and over whether outcomes can be achieved. Individuals are seen as proceeding through consecutive steps when they analyze their behaviors (Cotton, 1995).
They first identify perceived causes of success or failure, and only later do they analyze the causal structure or dimensions (Cotton, 1995). In the final step, they relate these structures to their emotional reactions (Weiner, 1972, 1985, 1986).

An individual is likely to search for the cause of failure to prevent future negativity. Weiner (1986) identified the following perceived causes of success in teaching and learning: ability, immediate effort and long-term effort, task characteristics, intrinsic motivation, teacher’s competence, mood, and luck. Cross-culturally, ability, aptitude, effort, and temporary exertion were the most salient causal ascriptions of perceived success in achievement-related situations (Cotton, 1995).

As adapted from Weiner (1985, 1986) and Cotton (1995), the following three dimensions make up the structure of causality:

1. Locus of causality: Causes of behavior are attributed directly to the individual and to variables outside the individual’s control.

2. Stability: Stability refers both to constant traits and to traits that can fluctuate. It is influential in judging expectancy for future success.

3. Controllability: This area examines whether the cause is under the individual’s personal volition.

All three causal dimensions were shown to have a direct influence on emotional reactions. Following any event, a individual may encounter either positive or negative emotions, depending on the perceived success or failure of that event (Cotton, 1995).

Weiner (1985, 1986; Cotton, 1995) discussed two types of attributional emotions: attribution-dependent and outcome-independent. Attribution-dependent emotions are determined by the outcome when seeking a desired goal, not by the cause of the outcome.
If success is experienced, these emotions tend toward happiness. But when failure is experienced, these emotions turn to frustration and sadness. The outcome itself, then, determines attribution-dependent emotions. In contrast, outcome-independent emotions are linked to the structure of causality. Pride and self-esteem, for example, are linked to locus of causality. Emotions such as anger, gratitude, guilt, pity, and even shame relate to the dimension of controllability. In controllability, causes that one can control, such as skill or efficacy, are contrasted with causes that one cannot control, such as others' actions and luck. Feelings of hopefulness or hopelessness are linked with the dimension of stability. The stability dimension captures whether causes change over time or not. Emotional attributes figure into the day-to-day life of human beings, including the lives of teachers and students in a classroom setting.

Writing Practices in the Classroom

The previous sections of this review focused on the philosophical underpinnings of the current study and on the concept of self-efficacy. For students, teachers can promote self-efficacy not only by having it themselves, but also through the instructional practices they use. A review of current literature (see Table 2) identified eight components that affect the use of writing in the classroom: (a) purposes, (b) kinds, (c) assessment and grading, (d) teacher feedback, (e) frequency, (f) teacher beliefs, (g) deterring factors, and (h) supporting factors (Brown, 1996).
Table 2

Writing Practice Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of the study</th>
<th>Researchers</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching essentials</td>
<td>Routman (2005)</td>
<td>Found that teachers teach the same skills and strategies from grade to grade so you do not have to have a separate list for each grade level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching essentials</td>
<td>Corgill (2008)</td>
<td>Writers create pieces for real audiences and the purpose is for communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy attributes</td>
<td>Silver and Mitchell (1995)</td>
<td>Teachers with low self-efficacy attribute failure to uncontrollable factors which increase feelings of despair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching strategies</td>
<td>Snoball (2006)</td>
<td>Teachers model integrating strategies with students other strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of writing</td>
<td>Sheilah (1987)</td>
<td>Incorporate creative assignments for writing such as information versus personal experiences and concepts instead of skill drills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose and frequency of writing, and across-the-curriculum</td>
<td>Yates (1987)</td>
<td>Use math and science for expressive writing, frequent opportunities to write, and that teachers are already asked to do more in the classroom but cannot always make that happen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing process versus writing workshop</td>
<td>Ray and Laminack (2001)</td>
<td>Writing process is prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publications while writing workshop is focused on the writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus of the study</td>
<td>Researchers</td>
<td>Outcomes</td>
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<td>--------------------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing writing</td>
<td>Tchudi (1993)</td>
<td>Grade writing for content and clarity of understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing writing</td>
<td>Leopold and Jenkinson (1988)</td>
<td>Do not focus on the grammatically aspect of the writing process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing writing</td>
<td>Dorn and Soffos (2001)</td>
<td>Explained a link between assessment and instruction and that teachers need to develop formal assessment tools such as rubrics and checklists to examine young students’ understanding of the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing writing</td>
<td>Houston (2004)</td>
<td>Use verbal assessment of students writing and progress but be aware of the time factor involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher feedback on writing</td>
<td>Manning, Morrison, and Camp (2009)</td>
<td>Noted that children need regular feedback from the teacher and their peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside factors and support</td>
<td>Gribbin (1991)</td>
<td>Found that the time administrators give teachers to accomplish writing determines its value and provides teachers with ongoing professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change as a barrier</td>
<td>Evans (1993)</td>
<td>Those teachers willing to change will exhibit qualities to do so although age and experience may be a factor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Purposes of Writing

Regie Routman (2005) suggested, in her book, *Writing Essentials: Raising Expectations and Results While Simplifying Teaching*, that teachers should teach what is essential but keep it simple and keep in mind its purpose:

The question we need to be asking is, how can I teach writing so that all students become effective and joyful writers and communicators? Not, what does the best writing program look like? Or what skills should I be teaching? Teaching the skills is crucial, certainly, but those skills need to be taught because the writer needs them to convey a message, not because they are on a checklist or in a prescribed “scope and sequence” program. Also, and this is so important, the skills and strategies that writers use are the same across grade levels; their depth and sophistication are what increase…What advance are the writer’s control, application, application, and competent use of these “skills” through demonstrations, guidance, support, practice, feedback, and authentic use (p. 12-13).

Routman (2005) offered twelve writing essentials that should be taught and re-taught, beginning in kindergarten. Her advice was to teach them well but with purposeful writing in mind. Then, with teacher guidance, students will be able to use them in any form of writing situation:

1. Write for a specific reader and with a meaningful purpose. Keep the audience in mind, and define the writing task.

2. Determine an appropriate topic. Plan, research, keep a narrow focus, and decide what is most important to include.

3. Present ideas clearly, with a logical, well-organized flow. Use an easy-to-follow style and format, sentences, paragraphs. Put like information together, stay on the topic, know what and when to add or delete information, and incorporate transitions.

4. Elaborate on ideas. Use details and facts to support ideas, explain key concepts, support judgments; create descriptions that will evoke mood, time, place, and development of characters.
5. Embrace language. Simply “fool around with” your words. Use of parts of speech and literary language, sensory details, dialogue, rhythm, sentence length, and paragraphs can be used to craft specific, lively language for the reader.

6. Create engaging leads. Grab the reader’s interest right from the start.

7. Compose satisfying endings. Be original so that the ending has a sense of closure.

8. Craft authentic voice. Bring out your personality through dialogue, humor, and point of view.

9. Reread, rethink, and revise while composing. This is the time to analyze, reflect, evaluate, plan, redraft, and edit—all part of the recursive nonlinear nature of writing.

10. Apply correct conventions and form. Produce legible letters and words, and employ editing and proofreading skills. Be accurate with spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar. Adhere to formal rules of the genre.

11. Read widely and deeply—and with a writer’s perspective. Read avidly, and notice what authors and illustrators do so as to develop an awareness of the characteristics of various genres such as fiction, poetry, and persuasive pieces. Look at how genres work, and apply that knowledge and craft when writing.

12. Take responsibility for producing effective writing. Use relevant responses and willingly revise, sustain writing effort, monitor and evaluate, and set goals. Publish whenever possible and appropriate. Ensure that the text is meaningful and clear to the reader.
Routman (2005) offered these twelve writing essentials that “are applicable from kindergarten and beyond…. Since we teach the same skills and strategies from grade to grade, we don’t need a separate list for each grade level” (p. 14). She also suggested that teachers should be explicit with their instruction and show students the “how” and “why” of writing so that it makes sense to them. Effective writing breaks the cookie-cutter model, but it is important that students see and experience the thinking behind what actually goes into producing effective writing. Modeling the use of think-alouds as teachers read and write demonstrates for students what good readers and writers do as they grapple with ideas. Routman (2005) also articulated the need to celebrate student writing and how it keeps student engaged as writers:

The celebration of children’s writing needs to move right up front to become a major teaching goal. Too many of our students find writing painful, and much of that pain comes from too much concern with correctness at the expense of enjoyment. Enjoyment and writing have not coexisted, and they must do so if our students are to become proficient writers. We are much more apt to do optimum work when we know our best efforts will be supported and celebrated and when we believe we can succeed. (p. 18)

Corgill (2008) offered the following “essentials of must dos” that teachers should provide for young writers: (a) daily writing time; (b) choice of topic, format, and genre; (c) demonstration, practice, teaching, and celebration during writing; (d) write for a purpose and an audience; (e) time for writers to think, talk, and share every day; (f) opportunities for writers to read the kinds of books they want to someday write; (g) writer support through the use of classmates or the classroom library resources; and (h) tools necessary for the writer to write and publish the kinds of pieces they envision.

Corgill (2008) wrote that teachers should, “Be that groundbreaking, goal-reaching, mandate-questioning, child-advocating teacher for your students. Be the teacher
who creates and teaches and learns in a classroom full of students where differences are treasured, time is honored, and true learning can take place” (p. 16).

Corgill further stated that it is important for children to understand that writers create pieces for real audiences and that the purpose of writing is to communicate with the reader. Manning, Morrison, and Camp (2009) also supported the goal of writing as a way to communicate one’s ideas, and the idea that when communication is accompanied by skillful instruction and support, then mandated assessments will become a byproduct of classroom writing experiences.

Diane Snowball (2006) added that when the focus is on learning to teach the strategies to students, the students will become proficient users of those strategies. The following list is adapted from her ideas about the purposes of learning strategies that should be taught at all grade levels:

1. Explain the purpose of the instruction and specifically describe the strategy as well as how and when it is helpful.

2. Demonstrate the use of a particular strategy in an authentic situation.

3. Think-aloud about strategy use as you write.


5. Integrate the use of different strategies and explain the why, when, and how they are processing them.

6. Provide many opportunities for students to use the strategies in context.

Snowball noted that when teachers model integrating strategies with students, other strategies will naturally occur at the same time. Have discussions about what is
occurring to figure out the meaning, even though the focus may be helping students to use each strategy automatically as they write.

Kinds of Writing

Ray and Laminack (2001) found that many different kinds of writing instruction go on under the names of “writing process” or “writing workshop.” What exactly is the difference between “doing the process” and “having a workshop”? Perhaps the difference is with two little words—do and use. Graves (1994) stated that “understanding writing as a communication is the heart of teaching the writing process” (p. 37). If that is true, then what is the writing process? Graves defined it as “a process of refinement on the part of the writer to meet the needs of the reader in order to communicate information through written discourse” (in Houston, 2004, p. 210). Although this definition sounds solid, what does it mean in terms that are easily understood for the classroom teacher? Ray and Laminack (2001) break down that definitions into more easily digested terms. Writing process, they said, is “a focus on a piece of writing and how to take those pieces of writing through each of the steps of the writing process—prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publication” (p. 4). In contrast with that down-the-line emphasis in process writing, they defined writing workshop as a place “where the focus is very much on the writers rather than on the process that leads to finished pieces… [T]he focus is on writers who use writing to do powerful things in the world in which we live” (p. 4-5). Still, writing workshop utilizes the steps of the writing process. In a workshop, teachers can instruct in a less linear environment that allows students to “use” the process, and so learn how to “do” the process. Ray and Laminack stated “that may sound like a subtle difference… [But] the difference in those words—do and use—represents a huge shift in
how we go about teaching writing” (p. 4). Teachers who have worked on personally meaningful writing pieces in their own lives understand firsthand how the writing process can be used as a tool for learning.

With a focus on writers in writing workshop, the environment is such that students can research, explore, collect, interview, talk, stare off into space, co-author, and still prewrite, draft, revise, edit, and publish. A classroom focused on the writing process may limit what a writer can actually do. According to Ray and Laminack (2001),

> When you think about your own teaching and beliefs behind it, you may feel that you have a “writing workshop” philosophy but that you’ve been calling it “writing process” or something else… Labels don’t matter so much as what’s behind them that drives our teaching. (p. 5)

Under our care, [students] will come to know themselves as people who write, and we have the responsibility to help them care for themselves as writers. That sense of self, that sense of being “one who writes” that is nurtured in a writing workshop, is a hard thing to lose. (p. 40)

No matter what writing approach is adopted in a classroom, if students are going to become invested in their writing, the luxury of time is needed for students to develop their craft (Calkins, 1986).

Sorenson (1991) and Brown (1996) identified two general kinds of content writing: expressive and product. Expressive writing includes learning logs, journals, exit summaries, problem analysis, dialogues, and writing that allows students to write their own vocabulary without being corrected or graded in which the teacher assists students in clarifying their understanding. Product writing includes more formal products, such as essays, test questions responses, letter writing, reports, research papers, lab reports, poetry, broadcast new scripts, and writing that would generally be graded. Product
writing is when students demonstrate their understanding of content (Brown, 1996; Sorenson, 1991).

Different subjects require different kinds of writing (Brown; 1996; Gribbin, 1991). Yates (1987) suggested that math and science provide opportunities to use expressive writing. Using learning logs, problem analysis, and how-to writing would be appropriate for these areas of the curriculum. Sheilah (1987) proposed using critical essays, journals, and research reports. She continued by suggesting that teachers can use other varieties of creative assignments to incorporate an array of modes serving different purposes, such as information versus personal experiences and concepts versus skills. Understanding of content emerges clearly through writing, but so does the lack of it (Tchudi, 1993). Brown (1996) stressed that the dichotomy between using writing, on the one hand, to clarify and understand and, on the other hand, to express understanding makes it all too critical that teachers understand and communicate the purpose of any writing assignment. Many studies have focused on writing practices.

Assessing and Grading

Grading and assessing student writing assignments has long been a complicated problem for teachers, especially when writing on demand is a fact of life. Graves (1994) suggested that if the students’ writing performance will be judged on the basis of district, state, or national standards, then the teacher should examine the evaluative context before formulating a system for the classroom. This does not mean that teachers have to tailor-make their design into the existing system, but they should try to understand clearly the reasoning behind a system’s grading approach and then accommodate that approach with their classroom-based assessments. Although experts recommend that teachers grade
writing, many teachers have difficulty in deciding exactly what basis to assign a grade on. Should the focus be on skills, craft, growth, effort, or organization? Tchudi (1993) suggested teachers grade writing for content and clarity of understanding when the purpose of a task is to demonstrate or apply understanding. Holbrook (1987) cited Myers, stating, “The emphasis of writing to learn is on learning content, not the skills themselves… [T]eachers need not dwell on the technical or mechanical problems of writing; if they do not interfere with clarity of meaning, ignore them” (p. 216). Leopold and Jenkinson (1988) reported that teachers felt nagged by a sense of the students’ work not using acceptable grammar, correct spelling, and accurate content. A strong emphasis on mechanics by teachers only serves to bias their students’ views of writing, leading them to believe that the appearance of the text is more important than the process of writing it.

Classroom-based assessments can include, but are not limited to, writing folders, portfolios, rewritten work, rubrics, anecdotal records from conferences, and self-assessments (Routman, 2005). Another form of evaluation for writing is the use of questioning. Teachers continually assess their students by asking many questions throughout the course of a day (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). However, it is the kinds of questions asked and the way they are asked that is important. In the real world, when we need a question answered, we immediately think of who would have the answer to it. However, the writing teacher’s questions should show students how to think about their own writing. Questions become both assessment and curriculum. There are questions of history, action, and process. Questions of history reference timelines. Questions of action simply ask writers about the kinds of things they are doing to support their writing lives,
such as “Where have you taken your journal lately to gather entries?” Questions of process focus on specific processes that are used by the writer to take ideas through to publication (Ray & Laminack, 2001).

Dorn and Soffos (2001) explained that there is a link between assessment and instruction because “we cannot plan writing instruction for our students without first understanding what they know about the process” (p. 10). They further suggested that primary teachers must create for students instructional opportunities that include problem-solving solutions for their writing, as well as develop formal assessments tools such as rubrics or checklists to examine young students’ understanding of the process. Houston (2004) offered the idea that it makes more sense to write a verbal assessment of a student’s work, efforts, and progress, but also noted that because time is a constraint, an accurate written assessment is not always possible. A portfolio or folder using a record of students’ ongoing work, progress, and problems with examples of student writing seems to be the best compromise (Houston, 2004). This allows the teacher of writing to speak more knowledgeably to both learners and parents about student progress (Glazer & Brown, 1993). Ray (1999) said that assessment should match what the teacher values, such as a strong sense of self and what the writer knows.

Houston (2004) remarked, “The most unpleasant part of all teaching for me is the mandated assessment. What a learner has or has not accomplished cannot be measured in a number or letter grade” (p. 237). Unfortunately, grading is a reality of the teaching profession that must be addressed, and writing is difficult to assign a value. Most teachers would rather not think about the evaluation in terms of grading. The following quote about evaluation of writing from Ray and Laminack (2001) is noteworthy:
Writers don’t get grades from teachers. For writers the ultimate evaluation comes not from an editor, a publisher, or even a reviewer, but from the reader. Readers decide whether the work of writers is worthy of attention, and it is that evaluation that drives our work. It is that evaluation that must be in our minds even as we begin the work. Writers get “grades” from readers. (p. 219)

Teacher Feedback

As teachers incorporate more writing into their classroom practices, the writing becomes more complex and the need for practice increases: “Focusing on the writer above everything else is like being a good counselor, one who is empathetic, nurturing, validating, gently nudging” (Routman, 2005, p. 223). Routman (2005) noted that “feedback about organization, style, craft, and structure falls primarily to us… [M]ost students do not have the sophisticated knowledge to give the kind of feedback that we can give” (p. 220). Manning et al. (2009, p. 314) noted that “Children also need regular feedback from the teacher as well as their peers. Adults and peers can provide the scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) necessary to transform ordinary writing into good writing and good writing into exceptional pieces.” With time of the essence, feedback for students’ writing needs to be frequent and adequate (Booth, 1994). Booth pointed that there is a critical need for daily feedback on student efforts and that time should be set aside to conference for this purpose. On conferencing, Routman (2005) stated that “we have to ensure that the child leaves the conference ‘intact’—that is, eager to continue writing” (p. 223). She reminded teachers that during conferencing “the writer is exposed… [W]riting is scarier because it is just the writer and the blank page.” (p. 223). Therefore, the conference is a critical time for giving students positive feedback about their work, and that time should be used as a confidence-building process.
Frequency of Writing

Teachers find it difficult during the course of daily routines to work writing into their practices. Time is a definite factor in the frequency with which students are able to engage in the process. “Time is a funny thing. In real life you can’t speed up the clock or slow it down. But in writing you control the element of time” (Fletcher, 1999). Teachers have to trust that students benefit from the time spent doing it. Ray and Laminack (2001) found that “because we are uncomfortable with writing ourselves…we are uncomfortable giving over our teaching time to it” (p. 25). Many teachers start their day with that mindset. However, “writing is something you learn to do because you do it all the time…Developing an identity as a writer (in life or in the classroom) assumes that you participate in the act of writing regularly” (p. 26).

Although one general recommendation is that students should write at least once a week in a content area (Booth, 1994; Gribbin, 1991; Tchudi & Huerta, 1983; Yates, 1987). Yates (1987) recommended providing frequent opportunities for students to write and for teachers to promote different kinds of assignments. In the words of Ray and Laminack (2001):

The plain truth is, every one of my students writes. I did say that. And I have to keep on saying it and thinking about it so that it reminds me of the huge implications our teaching of writing will have in students’ lives. (p. 40)

Vacca and Vacca (1993) believed that American children do not write frequently enough and need to be given assignments that require them to think deeply.

Teacher Beliefs

Sensenbaugh (1989) believed that the most critical factor to writing in the classroom is teachers’ beliefs. He further believed that teachers are the single, most
crucial element to the success and effectiveness of the writing process. Darling-Hammond (1993) concurred that the teacher is the key to success in writing instruction. In the literature reviewed for the present study, five common perceptions emerged regarding the implementation of writing in the classroom.

1. Teachers are reluctant to assign more writing in their classroom unless they are convinced that the writing will help students learn subject matter (Leopold & Jenkinson, 1988). When achievement results do not indicate improvement after the use of writing (Sensenbaugh, 1989; Wool, 1994) and when data are scarce to indicate a direct link between writing and improved achievement (Sorenson, 1991), teachers may be skeptical of using writing activities (Sensenbaugh, 1989; Sorenson, 1991; Wool, 1994). Leopold and Jenkinson (1988) summed up this general attitude about the efficacy of writing: “Thus, teachers of subjects other than English are reluctant to incorporate more writing into their classrooms unless they are absolutely convinced that the writing can help their students learn the subject matter” (p. 741).

2. Teachers are confused by evaluating writing and subject matter at the same time (Gribbin, 1991). Leopold and Jenkinson (1988) noted that teachers are uncomfortable trying to balance content and the written medium fairly and appropriately, with consideration for the best use of time for students and themselves.

3. Teachers are concerned about how to evaluate writing. They express fear based on the perceived inability to evaluate writing competently (Gribbin, 1991; Sorenson, 1991). Few teachers outside the university are comfortable writing, even if the content is their specialty. They are even less comfortable with the idea that they should evaluate someone else’s writing.
4. Most teachers see writing as an addition to their existing workload, as opposed to seeing writing as a learning tool (Tchudi & Huerta, 1983). Sorenson (1991) pointed out that such teachers may feel robbed of the time necessary to meet other curriculum requirements.

5. Teachers also worry about having extra work. This perceived “worry” interferes with the use of incorporating writing into their practices. Manning (2006) challenged teachers to refine their teaching and mindset when it comes to beliefs about writing. Manning et al. (2009) encouraged teachers to examine current teaching practices, belief system, and goals. They further suggested teachers should evaluate present research studies in the professional literature arena, as well as personal experiences and observations, and then make shifts in thinking and teaching as necessary to benefit children in the classroom.

Deterring Factors

Teachers’ beliefs about writing instruction in their classroom are reflected in the issues or barriers they face on a day-to-day basis. Several factors related to such beliefs have been discussed in this review: skepticism about its effectiveness, confusion about assessment responsibilities, fear of incompetence, resentment against adding more work, stress to fulfill greater expectations, and self-perceptions about teaching writing (Brown, 1996).

Still further issues facing teachers are external conditions—conditions that are out of the reach of the teacher’s control, yet have a powerful impact on instructional choices (Brown, 1996; Hightshue et al., 1988; Leopold & Jenkinson, 1988; Sorenson, 1988; Tchudi, 1986; Yates, 1987). One such external factor concerns the expectations and
support of others—students, faculty, administration, and parents (Brown, 1996; Culp et al., 1987, Gribbin, 1991; Leopold & Jenkinson, 1988).

Leopold and Jenkinson’s questionnaire showed that teachers who experienced the most success in writing instruction felt strongly that they had the enthusiastic support of their principals, whereas those teachers who did not have such a support system were frustrated. Gribbin (1991, p. 114) stated that “teachers know exactly how much something means to the administration by how much time they are given to accomplish it.” Student attitudes that reflect lack of motivation in their writing also tend to discourage teachers (Brown, 1996; Leopold & Jenkinson, 1988), and lack of interest from colleagues can further frustrate teachers (Leopold & Jenkinson, 1988).

The deterrence that comes from teachers’ beliefs and external conditions is further complicated by philosophical concerns about, and psychological barriers to, change (Brown, 1996). In “The Hidden Agendas in Writing Across the Curriculum,” Tchudi (1986) quoted a teacher who expressed the combination of these barriers:

You’re not just asking me to add more writing to my course…You’re asking me to change my whole style of teaching… To include good writing in my class…I’d have to change from deductive to inductive teaching, from covering the textbook to letting students do more finding out for themselves. (p. 22)

Yates (1987) pointed out how barriers to change involved the philosophy behind the writing-across-the-curriculum movement: It was a teaching philosophy based on the concept of doing (Brown, 1996). Psychological deterrents are inherent whenever people consider innovations and the change process itself (Brown, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Evans, 1993; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Heckman, 1993; Margolis, 1991; Slotnik, 1993; Tchudi, 1986). These barriers can be raised against changes in practices, in this case, changing practices to incorporate more writing in the classroom (Brown, 1996;
Margolis (1991) noted that resistance to change is both natural and difficult. Innovation may make sense, but it does not always mean that it will be supported in the classroom (Brown, 1996).

One specific issue that Faucett-Fox (1992) addressed was that individuals have a tendency to protect the status quo. Eastwood and Lewis (1992) found that the psychological state of all but the most enthusiastic staff members may shift from occasional anxiety to fear to resentment. This ambivalence to change (Evans, 1993) may be due, in part, to the depth of philosophical change is also required, as also suggested by Tchudi (1986). Teachers are expected to change beliefs, knowledge, and actions as a result of being introduced to an innovation (Brown, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1993). Doing so requires teachers to unlearn practices and beliefs, rethink practices, and construct new classroom roles and personal experiences (Brown, 1996; Tchudi & Huerta, 1983). Then teachers must leave their safety zone and teach in ways they have never attempted or experienced as students (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). It requires teachers to investigate and alter their thought processes and actions within the context of the school (Heckman, 1993). Not only does it require them to change their attitudes but their behaviors as well (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992).

Barriers to change depend in large part on the teachers’ willingness and readiness to change. The teachers who are ready for change will exhibit certain qualities such as flexibility, energy, and enthusiasm, willingness to take risks, and a high level of interest in their work. Many of these qualities may be a result of the teacher’s age. One consideration of age is that when veteran teachers are asked to change their practices, they are in mid-life or mid-career. Evans (1993) suggested that this is a time when they
are encountering a particular point in life, and career stress may make them prone to a lack of motivation and decreased performance level. Moreover, this is a time when family health and transitions; a focus on material rewards, security and comfort; and reduced flexibility may increase their reluctance to choose the path of change (Brown, 1996; Evans, 1993). Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) agreed that the effect of the human life-cycle deeply affects teachers because the mid-life status of veteran teachers incurs more caution and requires delicate balance for success. However, they also argued that even though the mid-career cycle is a concern, the flip side is that such teachers may be more open and interested in tinkering around with the craft of teaching.

Supporting Factors

The current literature suggests that many factors support writing instruction in the classroom and have been identified at the school or district levels (Culp et al. 1987; Kruft & Emberger, 1988; Tchudi & Huerta, 1983; Yates, 1987). One suggestion was to seek, with teacher input, textbooks and materials that provide many, varied writing activities. Another suggestion focused on the need for school administration to commit to providing the time for study groups to review articles and books. Another way to support teacher interest in writing is for the school to provide professional development funds for teachers to attend workshops, seminars, conferences, courses, in-service events, and other professional development activities (Culp, et al., 1987; Gribbin, 1991).

Yates (1987) and Sorenson (1991) supported an interdisciplinary curriculum approach in content-area writing. Kruft and Emberger (1988) believed that support from colleagues is accessible not only through interdisciplinary teaching but also through commonality of curriculum content and reinforcement of skills. Tchudi and Huerta
(1983) recommended that a school or system-wide program be developed by stakeholders to establish an expectation for and commitment to writing in the classroom. Finally, Carter (1991) urged having the school draw from its pool of teacher experts in the area of writing and let those experts help implement changes in partnership with their colleagues.

Summary of Writing in the Classroom

Proponents have provided a strong rationale for teachers to focus more on writing in the classroom. A myriad of studies have been done over the past 25 years connecting teachers’ sense of self-efficacy or the personal responsibility that a teachers assume for academic outcomes on instructional effectiveness (Armor et al., 1976; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Berman & McLaughlin, 1977; Gibson & Dembo, 1985; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993; McLaughlin & March, 1978). Although certain conditions may enhance using writing as a learning tool, three major deterrents may impede its use: teacher beliefs, external conditions, and necessary philosophical and psychological changes (Brown, 1996). The extent to which writing is valued appears to rest with the teachers’ passion for it.
CHAPTER 3
METHODS

The method used to conduct this study was based on a qualitative approach to gathering and analyzing data, and specifically followed the case study tradition (Creswell, 2007). This approach guided the design of the study, the choice of qualitative research tradition, the selection of the site and participants, data collection, data analysis procedures, role and trustworthiness of the researcher and, finally, the ethical considerations for this study. Each of these processes is addressed in this chapter.

Design of the Study

Numerous changes affect the daily life of teachers within a classroom setting. Teachers must also be able to address these changes to impact instructional practices. With a desire to respect the reality of professional teachers, this researcher attempted to explore teachers’ self-efficacy for writing and the impact it has on their writing instruction. Therefore, it was decided that the qualitative approach would elicit the most useful and rich information for this study.

In qualitative research, the researcher asks broad, open-ended questions and collects primarily text data through interviews, observations, and written artifacts from the participants, acknowledging that the research is biased and subjective (Creswell, 2005). Qualitative research is invaluable when the focus of the research is to explore the lived experience of an individual or a group of individuals. The qualitative approach is
appropriate for exploring a problem that requires additional investigation and for developing a complex understanding of the phenomenon taken from the participants’ perspective, as opposed to the researcher’s view (Merriam, 1997; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Additionally, the details needed could be established only by talking with the participants directly, by going to them in their contexts and allowing them to share information without being burdened by what the researcher expected to find. Furthermore, Hatch (2002, p. 9) stated that, “Qualitative methods provide means whereby social contexts can be systematically examined as a whole, without breaking them down into isolated, incomplete, and disconnected variables.”

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) defined qualitative research as a type of multi-method focus that involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach in regard to its subjective matter. In short, “qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37).

To achieve the objective of conducting this inquiry using a qualitative approach, specific characteristics were used to ensure validity of the study. These characteristics are made evident through the description of the methods, findings, and implications of this study. The research begins with assumptions, worldviews, or the use of a theoretical lens in order to study research problems. To study a problem, qualitative researchers collect data in a natural environment that is conducive to the participants in the study, then analyze that data to reach a conclusion based on observation and to establish themes or patterns. To better understand the impact of teachers’ self-efficacy on their writing instruction, the final written account must include the participants’ voices, researcher
reflexivity, and a detailed description and an interpretation of the problem being studied. Finally, the researcher provides recommendations for further action.

Tradition of Qualitative Inquiry

The topic and questions drove the researcher’s determination of which tradition to be used. The qualitative tradition chosen for this study is that of the case study. The case study allows the researcher to thoroughly explore the experiences of a small group of teachers and how they describe the impact of their own writing self-efficacy in relation to their classroom writing instructional practices (Yin, 2003). Merriam (1988, p. 13) stated that “case studies must be bounded by a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group.” Because the researcher was a teacher in the school where the study took place, the study was bounded by time and location (Yin, 2003). The case study tradition best matched the topic and questions being addressed by this study.

Site and Participants

In order to answer the study research questions and to remain in conformity with the qualitative approach to research, a purposeful sample (Creswell, 2007) was used. Qualitative samples tend to be purposefully selected because the process of sampling is crucial for later analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and informs the researcher’s understanding of the problem being studied (Creswell, 2007). In a case study, the purposeful sampling technique takes the form of criterion sampling. The criterion sampling in this particular study was that all of the participants were early childhood school teachers (Hatch, 2002). Merriam (1988, p. 48) states that “Criterion-based
sampling requires that one establish the criteria, bases, or standards necessary for units to be included in the investigation; one then finds a sample that matches these criteria.”

The study took place in a Southeastern United States school district. The site was selected primarily as a matter of convenience because the researcher was employed as a teacher in the same district and had established rapport and trust of classroom teachers within its location. The criteria for selecting the participants were that they (a) were recommended by the school principal as participating in the classroom writing process; (b) taught kindergarten through third grade; and (c) volunteered to participate.

Leedy and Ormrod (2005) suggested that to gain access to a site, the researcher must identify the gatekeeper, or a person who can provide access to the site. The gatekeeper was the superintendent of the school district. The gatekeeper was contacted by letter (Appendix A). An approval letter was written and signed by the superintendent (Appendix B), allowing the school and its teachers to be a part of the study. The gatekeeper provided permission to study the impact of teachers’ self-efficacy on classroom writing instruction.

After Superintendent approval was obtained, elementary school principals were contacted by letter (Appendix C) and asked if they would like to have their school participate in the study. The principals who agreed to be part of the study were asked to make teacher recommendations based on the study criteria. Once the recommendations were made, participants were recruited for the study.

The goal was to obtain 10 early childhood teachers for the study. The overall sample included 8 early childhood teachers. Once the teachers committed to participating in the study, each was given a letter (Appendix D) confirming the invitation to take part
in the study and to further explain the participants’ role in the study (Moustakas, 1994). All 8 participants completed the study and received a $25 gift card.

Data Collection

The case study tradition requires the use of multiple data sources (Yin, 2003). The researcher used a focus group interview meeting, individual interviews, analysis of participants’ reflective journals, and observations of the participants classrooms.

Data collection at the site was carried out through a focus group interview in May 2009 at CB Elementary School, which allowed the participants to interact and provide data (Morgan, 1997) about their experiences with writing, classroom writing instruction, and general self-efficacy. Additionally, 1-hour individual follow-up interviews were held with each participant. Moustakas (1994) explained that an informal, long interview, composed of open-ended questions and carried out with a conversational tone, is the most typical form of data collection. Therefore, a protocol was developed that outlined the guidelines for carrying out the interview, as well as listing important questions for beginning the discussion and probing further (Appendix E). The focus group interviews were structured as conversations, using open-ended questions and then probing further into the perspectives of the participants as they revealed information.

The focus group interview involved all participants in the study. The meeting was held after school hours in the Special Education classroom at the CB Elementary School site. Participants were given a hard copy of the questions 24 hours in advance of the group session. The meeting lasted approximately 1 hour. The atmosphere was comfortable and began with the participants signing a consent form for the audio-taped session. The moderator was introduced, ground rules were established, followed by an
icebreaker question and then in-depth questions about the study. At the end of the focus group interview, the participants were asked to keep a reflective journal, based on six questions (see Appendix F), in which they reflected about their own writing experiences as well as their classroom instructional practices. Journal entries were discussed after each individual interview. Information from the journals was used to help in the data analysis stage of the study. To preserve the integrity of the participants’ words, transcripts of the focus group interviews were reviewed and analyzed within a 24-hour period in order to provide an initial understanding of the impact of teachers’ self-efficacy on classroom writing instruction and to identify areas that needed further exploration in individual interviews.

The focus group session began with an informal exchange intended to put the interviewees at ease and build rapport. All teachers were reminded of the purpose of the interview and were assured confidentiality. All teachers agreed to have the focus group interview session tape recorded. A set of six open-ended questions were posed to the participants:

1. What do you think self-efficacy means in terms of your writing instruction?
2. How would you describe yourself as a writer?
3. When you were in elementary school, what is an example of your own writing experience?
4. How have your own writing experiences from elementary school affected the way you teach writing in your classroom?
5. What is the most important influence on your classroom writing instruction?
6. How would you describe yourself as a classroom writing teacher?
This protocol provided probing questions that would allow each participant to share written information that they had perhaps been uncomfortable sharing otherwise.

The information learned via the focus group interview served as a guide for the individual interviews with each participant (Appendix G). The individual interviews took place at a time, date, and location that was convenient for the participants. In-depth interviews were semi-structured for individual interviews and followed the same protocol as the focus group session. Individual interviews lasted approximately 1 hour. A set of 14 open-ended questions were posed to each interviewee:

1. Describe how you implement and evaluate writing instruction in your class room.
2. Please explain what you think the “meaning of self-efficacy is” (a definition in your own words).
3. What qualities, both internal and external, foster teachers’ self-efficacy?
4. What qualities, both internal and external, hinder teachers’ self-efficacy?
5. How do these qualities contribute to your success as a classroom teacher?
6. How do these qualities prevent your success as a classroom teacher?
7. Describe five important characteristics a writing teacher should have.
8. Considering the students you teach, what are some ways in which you could bring these qualities into your writing instruction with them?
9. What are the most challenging aspects of writing instruction in your classroom?
10. What supports do you have for writing instruction in the classroom?
11. What types of feedback do you receive about writing instruction in your classroom? Why do you think it was given?
12. When students experience success with writing in your classroom, who do you believe should be given credit for it? Why?

13. Describe yourself as a writer.

14. Describe yourself as a writing teacher.

The order of the questions varied for some respondents, depending upon the way they directed the conversation. Follow-up questions were asked if clarification or more detail was needed. Responses were sometimes restated for clarification.

Both the focus group interview and all individual interviews were transcribed, and each participant was given a hard copy of the transcriptions. They were given an opportunity to review all notes taken and to reflect on the observation. One week later, the researcher emailed the participants about any concerns regarding the interviews or the study itself. None of the participants noted questions or problems with the transcriptions. All participants received a rough draft of this document to review before the final presentation and publication.

The researcher also conducted classroom observations of each participant’s classroom. Each observation lasted approximately 40 minutes. The observation protocol (Appendix H) was a checklist adapted from Routman (2005, 2008). The purpose was to view the writing teachers in action with their students and gain more information for study. The protocol was given to the participants 24 hours in advance of the observation. The observation was scheduled at a time that worked into their daily schedule for using the writing process. Anecdotal notes were also made during the observation and typed after the observation. Participants were given the opportunity to review the checklist as
well as the researcher’s notes for recording accuracy. None of the participants expressed concerns about the observation.

In summary, the researcher used unobtrusive data collection to aid in the selection of an appropriate purposeful sampling and used multiple forms of obtrusive data collection to develop an in-depth understanding of the participants and their perspectives. This data was used to develop a detailed description of the case and to identify common themes.

Data Analysis

According to Hatch (2002, p. 148), “data analysis is a systematic search for meaning. It is a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others.” Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 46) pointed out that the data analysis process is “looking beneath the obvious to discover the new.” Through this data collection, a detailed description emerges, and the researcher describes aspects of the case (Creswell, 2007). After the descriptions are in place, the researcher focuses on key issues, not for generalizing beyond the case, but for understanding the complexity of the case (Creswell, 2007). The case study analysis is “rich in the context of the case” (Creswell, 2007, p. 75) and details all elements of the case that surface during the research.

Yin (2003) stated that analysis of case study evidence not highly developed may be the most difficult phase in doing a case study. It may be an embedded analysis of a specific case or a holistic analysis of the entire case. Holistic design encompasses the entire case better than embedded analysis (Yin, 2003). However, embedded analysis of a specific case element allows a more detailed perspective should questions shift during the fieldwork (Creswell, 2007).
For the pages of the transcribed interviews, a two-inch margin was used to allow space for the researcher’s notes to be written during the remainder of the data analysis phase of the study. The transcripts were saved as text documents; however, all coding was done by hand, rather than by using a computer. The researcher then read and reread the transcriptions several times. The first and second readings of the interviews were simple reviews of the participants’ oral descriptions of research questions. During the subsequent readings, the researcher began to highlight sections of the text that contained commonly used words or phrases. The participants had the opportunity to read the transcriptions and delete any of the information they thought did not describe exactly what they had said.

The analysis also included preparing and organizing the data through a process of coding and condensing the codes and then, finally, by representing the data in tables and a discussion (Creswell, 2007). The goal for this study was to look for patterns in the data and identify themes in order to effectively convey the detailed experiences of the participants. Interview transcripts were reviewed line-by-line. Codes were grouped together into categories and then aggregated into broader themes. The process of coding the text and developing themes was consistent with Hatch’s model of inductive analysis (2002). This model demonstrated how “categories emerge from the analysis of the data set as a whole” (Hatch, 2002, p. 52). Initial coding was written in pencil in the left margin of the transcript. This coding involved the researcher’s notation of non-overlapping statements, discussions, or ideas. The researcher considered the underlying meanings of the codes that had been written in the left-hand margin of the text. These codes were grouped into overarching themes. The theme was then written in the right-hand margin of
the text. Once these themes were identified, the researcher listed all possible themes in a separate notebook. Corresponding quotes were then partially annotated to provide a more complete textural vision of the categories. The researcher then sought to organize the categories into themes and subthemes (Stake, 1995).

Trustworthiness

One of the many strengths of qualitative research is its capacity to provide rich and evocative stories (Smith & Stewart, 2001). At the same time, these stories may contain a myriad of meanings and be subjected to multiple interpretations (Denzin, 1994). Problems of interpretation can be compounded by the researcher’s bias (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This bias, of course, further complicates the question of which interpretation is more credible and dependable. Yet numerous strategies can be used to improve the credibility of the results and confirm the findings. To begin with, the researcher should always allow appropriate space for the respondents to feel comfortable enough to provide insightful information and views. In this way, extreme cases can provide a counter-balance to the researcher’s predispositions and even challenge the views of the more conservative respondents (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Next, the researcher should triangulate the data. This involves obtaining data from more than one source and using more than method to get at it (Berg, 1998).

Credibility depends on the richness of the information gathered and on the analytical abilities of the researcher (Patton, 2002). The standard of credibility, like internal validity, is applied to test the integrity of the data. The crucial question to ask oneself is whether the participants find the researcher’s analysis and interpretations to be accurate. Do the results fit the descriptions, which represent the multiple realities of the
participants (Merriam & Simpson, 2000)? Denzin and Lincoln (1994) found that one of the important criteria for credibility is the portrayal of constructed realities. It is only when constructions are plausible to those who constructed them that the study is credible; this is called member checks. Another technique to address credibility is to make segments of the raw data available for peers to analyze.

The researcher employed several verification procedures to ensure the authenticity and accuracy of the data that was collected. First, rich, thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) were used to ensure in-depth descriptions into the central phenomenon, so the reader can transfer the information to other settings or make decisions regarding transferability of the reported findings. Next, member checking was used as a verification procedure. This was done to clarify any personal beliefs, biases, and values that the researcher may have brought to the study. The data, analysis, interpretations, and conclusions were taken back to the teachers who participated in this study for review. This was done to judge the accuracy and credibility of the reported account.

Triangulation

“Triangulation of data is crucially important in naturalistic studies” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 283). Triangulation, according to Creswell (2007, p. 208) “make[s] use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence.” For this study the data sources were a focus group interview, individual interviews, reflective journaling about teachers’ writing beliefs, and classroom observations. The researcher reviewed all documents for the purpose of determining if each one supported the study topic as described by the teacher. One source of information
should not be used unless it is triangulated with other sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The documents were found to confirm the explanations provided by the teachers.

Member Checking

Member checking is the process of having participants review the data and findings to check for accuracy to make sure their thoughts were accurately described (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking is considered “the most critical technique for establishing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). It involved returning the data and analyses to each participant to review for accuracy in terms of their thoughts and words. The participants were asked to review the interview transcripts, observation checklists, and anecdotal notes to be sure that the researcher had accurately represented their beliefs about writing. Member checking actively involved the participants the research study.

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing is a process of having a disinterested party review the research study and provide honest feedback. It is a useful way to elucidate ideas for further research (Creswell, 2005). During the process of peer debriefing, this study was reviewed by colleagues and committee members as the findings of the study progressed. This process provided an external check of the research process. Peer debriefing allowed the researcher to get an objective point-of-view from multiple perspectives. The researcher allowed peers to review the study, ask questions pertaining to the study, and offer suggestions on areas of improvement. This process occurred periodically throughout the entire dissertation process.
Audit Trail

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend keeping an audit trail to enhance the credibility of a study. All data sources from the interviews, journals, observation checklists, recordings of interviews, and anecdotal notes were kept. For this study, all raw data were kept, including tape recorded interviews, transcripts of focus group interviews and individual interviews, reflective journals, and observations notes. All data sources were considered an audit trail and were maintained for future reference and for accuracy of the data and findings.

Transferability

Transferability relates to a study’s findings and whether they are applicable in other contexts: “The degree of transferability is a direct function of the similarity between two contexts” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 124). A case study provided information about the context of it through rich descriptions. If the context of a study is considered congruent to another context, then the hypotheses may also be applicable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Presenting the findings of the research to a target audience is suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Ethical Considerations

Because this study involved the use of human subjects, review and approval was sought from the Institutional Review Board (IRB; Appendix I). A copy of the IRB approval form is on file at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) as Protocol Number X090417006 (4/22/09). Additionally, all participants signed an informed consent document (Appendix J), which was also reviewed and approved by the IRB.
This study was guided by and compiled in conjunction with local, state, and federal regulations for research purposes, as outlined by the Office of the IRB at UAB. Research with human participants demands careful deliberation and respect for individuals contributing to the study. Ethical consideration is important in a qualitative study because dilemmas can arise at any step in the process. Recognizing that the spirit of the ethics exists in one’s own accountability, it is important to consider the issues that permeate the research process (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). The following guidelines were applied to ensure the researcher’s conduct respected the rights of individual participants, consideration of the aforementioned potential sources of ethical pitfalls, and adherence to strict ethical standards for the present study: (a) participants were informed of the full intent of the study; (b) voluntary consent was sought from each participant; (c) an agreement was attained ensuring the participant’s opportunity to opt out of the study at any time; (d) participant and site confidentiality was respected in all reports associated to the study; (e) before this study was initiated, the proposal was reviewed and approved by the IRB; and (f) to maintain anonymity of the research study participants, pseudonyms were adopted by the participants.

Finally, in working with participants, researchers must demonstrate respect by using non-discriminating language. In this study, guidelines for language were those of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2001). In addition, APA requires that researchers ensure that all participants are afforded the right of justice, confidentiality, and benefits of the study (APA, 2002).

Although the concept of teacher self-efficacy on classroom writing instruction is not considered a particularly sensitive issue, discussing it can be a personal issue for
some people. After conducting the initial focus group interview, an individual follow-up interview was conducted with each participant to ensure the opportunity to share information without an audience. The focus group interview and the individual interviews were audio taped. Before the start of the interview, the participants were reminded that they could end the interview at any time as well as review all transcriptions and findings before reporting. The participants were also given a choice regarding the setting of each of the interviews. Classroom observations were conducted with confidentiality and utilizing the same format as the interview processes. Finally, the audiotapes and transcribed interviews were stored in a locked metal file cabinet in the researcher’s classroom.

Descriptions of the Research Settings

This study took place in Catskill City School District. The district is composed of ten elementary schools (kindergarten-5th grade), three middle schools (6th-8th grade), two high schools (9th-12th grade) and one alternative school. The district has approximately 12,500 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Approximately 15% of the students qualify for the free or reduced lunch program. Among teachers in this district, 35% have a bachelor’s degree, 56% have a master’s degree, and 9% have Class AA through doctorate-level degrees (Alabama Department of Education, 2009).

The study involved teachers from three schools in Catskill City School System: CB Elementary, Fannin West Elementary, and Blue Ridge East Elementary. Table 3 shows the supporting demographic data.
### Table 3

Sites and Demographic Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Race-Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CB Elementary</td>
<td>602 Students</td>
<td>61% Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40 teachers</td>
<td>19% African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22 support staff</td>
<td>18% Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2% Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fannin West Elementary</td>
<td>607 students</td>
<td>78% Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42 teachers</td>
<td>11% African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 support staff</td>
<td>4% Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6% Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Ridge East Elementary</td>
<td>689 students</td>
<td>63% Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>48 teachers</td>
<td>24% African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24 support staff</td>
<td>4% Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8% Asian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School Site A— CB Elementary

Brenda, Caroline, Kaye, Liz, and Shelley all taught at CB Elementary School. It is the oldest elementary school in the district. First, the student population of approximately 600 students was diverse, allowing the teachers the opportunity to serve students from varied ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Second, the teachers in the school engaged in ongoing professional development in writing in order to improve student learning. Last, the administrators of this school had the expectation that the teachers there would seek out and understand the best teaching practices in order to improve student learning. The student demographic data, in addition to that shown in Table 3, reflected a 24% poverty rate. Faculty members included those with bachelor’s degrees in education.
(39%), master’s degrees (47%), and AA certificate or higher degree (13%). Four staff members had acquired National Board Certification.

School Site B—Fannin West Elementary School

Nona and Phoebe were from Fannin West Elementary School. Fannin West was a diverse school. The students were reported at a 24% poverty rate. Faculty members held bachelor’s degrees in education (18%), master’s degrees (67%), and AA certificate or higher degree (14%).

School Site C—Blue Ridge East Elementary School

Lacey taught at Blue Ridge Elementary School, a fairly new school built in the 1990s. The student demographics showed a 15% poverty rate. Faculty members held bachelor’s degrees in education (30%), master’s degrees (58%), and AA certificate or higher degree (9%).

Descriptions of the Participants

Eight Early Childhood Education teachers from three different schools participated in this study (Table 4). All of the teachers participated in the writing process in their classrooms.

Participant A—Brenda

Brenda was a kindergarten teacher at CB Elementary School. She had been teaching for 10 years. She had taught for 3 years at CB Elementary School. She went to an all girls Catholic School in Dublin, Ireland. The school was run and taught by nuns.
Table 4

Participating Teachers’ Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Grade Teaching</th>
<th>Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>CB Elementary</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline</td>
<td>CB Elementary</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ed.S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaye</td>
<td>CB Elementary</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ed.S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>CB Elementary</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>BS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelley</td>
<td>CB Elementary</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacey</td>
<td>Fannin West</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>BS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nona</td>
<td>Blue Ridge East</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>BS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoebe</td>
<td>Blue Ridge East</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

She had a master’s degree from the University of Derby in the West Midlands, U. K., which is near Stratford on Avon. Brenda was a substitute teacher for a brief period of time at CB Elementary. She remembered writing about topics assigned to her in school at a young age. She went on to say that teachers had her write draft after draft, correcting or editing words with a red pen.

Participant B—Caroline

Caroline taught first grade at CB Elementary School. She had taught her entire career in kindergarten through second grade at three different schools during the course of her educational career. Caroline had an Educational Specialist degree from the local university and had just gone through the recertification process for National Boards. Much of her writing, she said, “Was a focus on spelling and editing.”
Participant C— Kaye

Kaye was a second grade teacher at CB Elementary School who loves to read. Kaye had a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer and Information Sciences with a minor in Business Administration from the local university near her district. She went back to school to receive a Master of Arts and an Educational Specialist degree in Elementary Education. She taught as a substitute teacher, an aide, and a teacher for a large suburban city school in central Alabama. Kay had taught for 11 years in the classroom. Her experience in teaching was primarily in second and fourth grades. Kaye always wanted to stay in second grade to teach, but administrative decisions prevented it. She thought that she has adjusted well to the changes throughout her teaching career.

Participant D— Liz

Liz was also a teacher at CB Elementary School. She had taught for 16 years: kindergarten a total of 7 years, first grade for only a year, third grade for 3 years, and second grade for 5 years. One year, she had the opportunity to teach in Anchorage, Alaska and taught first grade there. She had a Bachelor of Science degree in Early Childhood Education. Liz was about to complete a year of college at a nearby university. She were working toward her Administrative certificate.

Participant E— Shelley

Shelley had taught 2 years for CB Elementary School, 1 year each in second and third grade. She had taught a total of 5 years, with 2 of them at a county school on the other side of town. As a little girl, she attended a private school in grades two through six.
She started elementary school in the mid-to-late ‘70s and graduated high school in the late ‘90s. She held a master’s degree from the local university.

Participant F— Lacey

Lacey was a third grade teacher at Fannin West Elementary School, where she was a first-year teacher. She began her elementary teaching career in her early forties and was thrilled to be working with children. She was from Mississippi and graduated high school with a class of only 98 people. She had a bachelor’s degree from Mississippi State University as well as a master’s degree. She also had a MED from a local college in the area. She did some adjunct teaching at both the community and four-year college levels. She beamed and stated, “I am a highly qualified teacher now.”

Participant G— Nona

Nona was a first grade teacher at Blue Ridge East Elementary School. She had taught for a total of 5 years. She went to college north of the city and got a bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education. She lived for 2 years in Tennessee, where she taught in an inner city school system. She had been with Blue Ridge East for 3 years. She was presently working on her master’s in Elementary Education from a local university near her job. She readily admitted that she, personally, was a writer out of necessity.

Participant H— Phoebe

Phoebe was also a teacher at Blue Ridge East Elementary School. She had taught kindergarten for 3 years. She had been teaching for a total of 10 years. She taught for 2 years in another local school system and took a year off to work on her master’s degree.
Phoebe did not remember being taught any specific way to write. She said that she feels that if her students do well, she should get the credit.

Credentials of the Researcher

I brought 15 years of teaching experience to the study. At the time the research was conducted, I was employed as a teacher in the school district in which the study was conducted. I had been a fourth grade teacher for 5 years in the system. Prior to this position, I taught first grade for 5 years, third grade for 2 years, and fifth grade for 2 years in another school system. I began my career in public education as a Title I reading specialist and was in that position for 2 years. As a Title I reading specialist, I worked intensely with the students and teachers within the school district. In addition, I helped plan staff development, collaborated with teachers, modeled strategies, worked with struggling readers, and led professional literature study groups.

I was the first teacher in my prior teaching position and school district to become a National Board Certified Teacher with the certification of Early Childhood Generalist. I hold a bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education with an Early Childhood endorsement, a master’s degree in Elementary Education, and an Educational Specialist degree in Elementary Education. In addition to being a doctoral candidate in the Early Childhood Education program of the School of Education at UAB, I have presented at the local, state, and national levels at conferences, including The International Society of Poets.

Belief System of the Researcher

My belief system about the writing process is grounded in the works and research of Regie Routman (2005). She unraveled the process that writers engage in as they write
to make meaning from it. Since I believe that writing is the ultimate communication tool, 
Routman’s work aligns with my ideas for effective instruction. Her work identifies 
critical elements to inform writers and teachers of writing: myself as writer (beliefs), 
teachers as writers, and teachers as writing instructors.

First, our beliefs affect how we think, feel, and react to any given situation. Our 
beliefs drive our teaching practices, so knowing who we are as a writer is paramount. I
remember all too well how I was taught to write. It consisted of copying paragraphs from 
the chalkboard in the early grades. Writing reports on a teacher-chosen topic was popular 
around the middle school years. In high school I wrote only in history class. History was 
a place I could at least have open-ended questions to write about on a test, even if it was 
content specific. Because of my past experience with writing, I think I tended to 
underestimate my own talent as a writer. I had always engaged in some form of writing 
before I entered the field of education. I realized I was a functional writer. I was good at 
making lists and writing letters. Before I stepped in front of a group of children, I knew I
had to examine my own beliefs as a writer in order to help them be able to communicate 
in a meaningful way. I thought good writing meant that I had to have experiences better 
than those of other people. I realized that “good writing” depended on understanding my 
own experiences and their worth for expression to others. Routman (2005, p. 8) stated 
that “Until we recognize our beliefs, question them, challenge them in light of new 
information, research, and experiences, nothing much happens.”

On the topic of teachers as writers, I think one has to “just write” and begin to 
think about the writing process. Routman (2005, p. 2) said to “recognize that you don’t 
have to be a practicing writer to compose engaging demonstrations.” One of the best
ways for teachers to enhance their own writing is to build on best practices for teaching writing. For example, one of the most effective writing activities I participated in was the Red Mountain Writing Project a few years ago. This was an intense writing and study project, but I learned a lot about myself as a writer and a teacher of writing. I learned to value my own writing and how to analyze it as we discussed research, responded to others’ writing, and wrote about issues that truly mattered to us. It gave me permission to feel like an effective writing teacher and gave me a sense of empowerment to conquer the role of writing teacher.

There is a lot of discussion among teachers who struggle as instructors of writing. I was no different. Just as I had to examine my personal beliefs as a writer, I also had to examine myself as an instructor of writing. The idea that ‘you achieve what you believe’ is a common theme in Routman’s (2005) book, *Writing Essentials: Raising Expectations and Results While Simplifying Teaching*. She said, “Exploring our beliefs about teaching and learning is a prerequisite to changing our teaching practices” (p. 270). To become a better teacher of writing, Routman suggested the following: Read books and journals about writing; engage in professional conversations with colleagues; write a lot with your students and in front of them but keep it simple; visit the classrooms of teachers you consider to be strong in the teaching of writing at different grade levels; attend writing conferences; use colleagues as a sounding board to verbalize your beliefs about writing; and finally, teach authentically without focusing on isolated skills. These are all suggestions I ascribe to as a writer and teacher of writing. I am continually seeking a better understanding of how my own writing self-efficacy impacts my instructional practices.
Summary

The methodology of the research study was detailed in Chapter 3. The design of the study, the research setting, the participants, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness were delineated. The research setting was a suburban city school district. The participants were 8 early childhood school teachers who were identified by their principals as writing process teachers. The data collection was done by means of an initial focus group interview, entries made in a reflective journal, individual interviews, and classroom observations. The design was qualitative in nature. The credentials and beliefs of the researcher were noted.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This researcher designed the study to explore the impact of teachers’ self-efficacy on classroom writing instruction. Data was collected through an initial focus group interview, individual interviews, classroom observations, and reflective journaling. This chapter reports the results of the researcher’s evaluation and interpretation of the data with respect to the research questions and how these questions provide insights relative to the purposes of this study. The themes and subthemes identified in participants’ responses are followed by the lessons the researcher learned and a summary.

Themes

Through analysis of the collected data, 4 themes and 13 subthemes were identified. The themes were Teachers as Writers, Classroom Practices, Teachers’ Experiences, and Support Systems. Table 5 shows these themes and subthemes identified within them, along with data that support them. Each theme and subthemes is further explored in the sections that follow.
### Table 5

**Themes, Subthemes, and Supporting Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME, Subtheme</th>
<th>Supporting Quotation Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>THEME 1. TEACHERS AS WRITERS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 1. Personal Efficacy (Confident)</td>
<td>LIZ: Believing that what I say and do makes a positive difference in somebody's life and always being willing to grow in what you're doing. SHELLEY: Confident at what you are doing. LACEY: It's providing my students with opportunities to gain knowledge and experience in order to instill confidence in their abilities; I've been told I have some ability in writing. NONA: It means to help my kids be successful. KAYE: It's knowing what you need to know to do your job and have confidence at it. BRENDA: Confidence to teach writing and confidence in your own writing and what you are going to write. CAROLINE: The feeling that you have the ability to accomplish you goal through your own efforts; I have been published. PHOEBE: It means being knowledgeable and understanding one's own capabilities of attaining goals; it means setting a goal for my students and know what to do and how to get them there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 1. Personal Efficacy (Successful)</td>
<td>NONA: Being successful or feeling successful in a particular skill and to help my kids be successful. KAYE: When I'm teaching writing I want everybody in my classroom to feel like a writer, even if their writing doesn't look the same as the best writer, but I want them all to feel successful. LACEY: To instill in them about reading like a writer and writing like a reader to help them organize their thoughts and about understanding the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 2. What Kind of Writer Am I (Enjoyment, pleasure)</td>
<td>LIZ: I'm ashamed to say I'm inconsistent; I should do more writing but I don't really develop my own writing skills personally; I'm challenged to do more and be more; writing is something that takes time and when you are tired, or sleepy, it's hard to kind of make yourself do it but at the same time it is one of the most refreshing ways to express strong emotions that you have. SHELLEY: I would really consider myself more of a poet; I just enjoy that type of writing; I enjoy pouring my emotions onto paper. LACEY: I'm a decent writer; I have always loved to write; it relaxes me; I've always considered it to be kind of therapeutic to let my thoughts flow through the ink; I'm still developing my style; I'm definitely a work in progress. CAROLINE: I enjoy writing and write often.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEME, Subtheme (Aspect)</td>
<td>Supporting Quotation Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEME 1. TEACHERS AS WRITERS</td>
<td>KAYE: I do not think of myself as a writer; I find that the stress of my job is too much because I am always supposed to have something completed by a certain date.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 2. What Kind of Writer Am I (Necessity, purpose)</td>
<td>BRENDA: I think I'm a good writer but I'm not very confident; I love to write for my children because they hang on every word; I try to make it as fun as I can because that catches their interest and they they're ready to go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NONA: Necessity and pleasure...I am a writer out of necessity because I have to do things like make lists, emails, letters to parents and papers in college; I'm not very confident it because of the grammatical aspect of it; I have so much trouble with commas and misspellings and just they way to put everything so....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PHOEBE: I am a writer out of necessity; I don't pick up a pen for pleasure; I don't write stories but I write what needs to be written; I write for professional documents such as lesson plans, professional development plans, or for a graduate class; I don't really write for fun and I don't like journaling, so it's not something I do as a hobby or on a daily basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEME 1. TEACHERS AS WRITERS</td>
<td>LIZ: Green and growing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 2. What Kind of Writer am I (Feelings)</td>
<td>SHELLEY: Growing as a writing instructor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NONA: Describe myself as growing; and continue growing myself as my kids grow as writers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PHOEBE: I think every writing teacher should have organization and patience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEME 2. CLASSROOM PRACTICES</td>
<td>KAYE: Positive climate about writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 3. Writing Teacher (Being positive, impact on student learning, time)</td>
<td>PHOEBE: I'm always looking for ways to improve; making sure that I am doing all I need to do to help the young learners learn but time constraints just prevent it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LIZ: I enter my classroom physically prepared for the day; but if I am as prepared as possible, then I've set the goal...contributed to their success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NONA: If they're getting positive feedback they're going to want to do it and cheer for it when it comes around.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LACEY: If I am more positive about tasks and portray confidence, my students are more likely to do the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SHELLEY: If I feel confident about a particular subject matter...I'm going to seek things to supplement it and make it better for the kids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CAROLINE: Some days it's hard to focus on instruction when you are coping with all the other demands on your time; time is always a battle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LACEY: Managing time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEME 2. CLASSROOM PRACTICES</td>
<td>LIZ: Them; they are the ones bringing it to the class; they are the ones creating it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 3. Writing Teacher (Credit for success)</td>
<td>CAROLINE: The students because they wrote the piece.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KAYE: I think they should get the credit because it's hard to make kids do anything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LACEY: I believe the student should be given credit, pure and simple.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NONA: I really, truly think the kids, because they are the ones who really work so hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEME 2. CLASSROOM PRACTICES</td>
<td>LACEY: How confident he or she is in their own ability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme 4. Locus of Control (Internal: confidence)</td>
<td>SHELLEY: You are a more confident writing teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BRENDA: You are confident in what you are teaching children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NONA: Confidence in your own ability to do thing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THEME, Subtheme (Aspect) Supporting Quotation Data

THEME 2. CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Subtheme 4. Locus of Control (External: support systems)

KAYE: Your system.

PHOEBE: School...professional learning communities.

CAROLINE: Supportive school system.

THEME 2. CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Subtheme 5. Deterrents (Internal: lack of confidence)

SHELLEY: If they do not feel confident in their own writing.

BRENDA: It's a lack of confidence in your own teaching ability.

LACEY: The disbelief of being able to accomplish a task.

THEME 2. CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Subtheme 5. Deterrents (External: changing expectations)

CAROLINE: Changing expectations from the school system.

KAYE: Keeping expectations back to where they were years ago.

PHOEBE: Class schedule, the curriculum.

THEME 2. CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Subtheme 6. Challenges (time, diversity)

CAROLINE: Time.

PHOEBE: Finding the time for them to write.

LIZ: It does take a block of time; you can't do it in a five minute reading prompt, or a ten, fifteen minute writing prompt.

LACEY: Managing time.

SHELLEY: My ESL students are out of the classroom a lot.

BRENDA: My ESL children.

KAYE: The diversity of the needs for my students.

CAROLINE: My ESL students.

THEME 2. CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Subtheme 7. Evaluation (Not on the same page)

CAROLINE: Time.

PHOEBE: Finding the time for them to write.

LIZ: It does take a block of time; you can't do it in a five minute reading prompt, or a ten, fifteen minute writing prompt.

LACEY: Managing time.

SHELLEY: My ESL students are out of the classroom a lot.

BRENDA: My ESL children.

KAYE: The diversity of the needs for my students.

CAROLINE: My ESL students.

BRENDA: I evaluate by, um, taking notes or just walking around. Constantly looking at what they're producing. Um, seeing who needs more help than others... Um, sometimes I evaluate by going through the writing folder and just looking at what they have managed to accomplish.

SHELLEY: Every day I give the students an objective to accomplish for the day. They work with their writing partners and independently. I do table and individual conferencing with students. This is when I evaluate to see if students are accomplishing what I want them to accomplish for the day.

PHOEBE: I spend time reading each journal entry that the students write and I help with inventive spelling or dictation, as needed.

LACEY: I am still in the process of developing my evaluation process, because I am a first year teacher.

SHELLEY: I don't really remember us writing in class.

LACEY: I don't really remember any written pieces from elementary school.

NONA: I really don't remember any formal writing instruction when I was in school.

KAYE: I do not remember anything of process writing in my elementary days.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME, Subtheme (Aspect)</th>
<th>Supporting Quotation Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>THEME 3. EXPERIENCES</strong></td>
<td><strong>Subtheme 9. Present (The way I teach)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHELLEY: To use experiences they have had in their life to affect their writing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LACEY: Want them to write from their own experiences.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRENDAA: We write about small moments and it's things that have happened in their lives and how they feel about things.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THEME 3. EXPERIENCES</strong></td>
<td><strong>Subtheme 10. Influences (Experts)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRENDAA: Calkins.</td>
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<td>SHELLEY: Lucy Calkins.</td>
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<td>LACEY: Lucy Calkins.</td>
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<td>CAROLINE: Lucy Calkins.</td>
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<td><strong>THEME 4. SUPPORT SYSTEMS</strong></td>
<td><strong>Subtheme 11. Feedback (Parents, impact of leadership, not so much)</strong></td>
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<td>LACEY: I don't think I have really received a lot of feedback about what is specifically taken place in my class, except for parents telling me.</td>
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<td>CAROLINE: Compliments from parent and teachers.</td>
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<td>NONA: I don't really receive any feedback, like from professionals or my peers that I work with. Some of the feedback is from parents.</td>
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<td>PHOEBE: Don't really get much at all; feedback from the principal on professional development plans and evaluation.</td>
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<td>KAYE: I can't really think of any feedback at all.</td>
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<td>SHELLEY: Principal feedback the first year; I have not had a lot of personal feedback on my writing instruction for a little over two years.</td>
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<td>BRENDAA: Principal.</td>
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<td><strong>THEME 4. SUPPORT SYSTEMS</strong></td>
<td><strong>Subtheme 12. Coaching</strong></td>
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<td>CAROLINE: The reading coach is very supportive.</td>
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<td>LIZ: Reading coach.</td>
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<td>PHOEBE: Reading coach.</td>
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Theme 1: Teachers as Writers

The review of literature identified teachers’ own self-efficacy at the forefront of effective components that promote student self-efficacy. In teachers discussing self-efficacy in terms of their own beliefs about writing and classroom instruction, the theme of Teachers as Writers emerged from the data as reflected in two major subthemes.

*Teachers as writers: Personal efficacy.* Personal efficacy has been defined as teachers’ assessments of their own teaching abilities and confidence in promoting learning. This dimension has been shown to have an influence on types of instructional practices used in the classroom. The personal efficacy dimension has been matched to
Bandura’s efficacy expectations because it measures teachers’ confidence in their abilities to achieve a certain level of performance or success in a particular situation (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). As noted in the literature review, teachers with low personal efficacy tend to feel more stress and a loss of personal self-esteem, whereas teachers who possess high personal efficacy view themselves in a positive way. Teachers noted that confidence was a key factor in their own personal efficacy. As Kaye so aptly stated, “I have natural, intuitive understanding of what a student needs to become a better writer. My understanding of what young writers need comes from my experience with good literature over the years.” Phoebe further added, “It means being able to know and understand the goals I set for my instruction of writing. It means setting a goal for my students and knowing what to do and how to get there with them.” An outspoken Liz eagerly shared her perspective: “Believing that what I say and do makes a positive difference in somebody's life and always being willing to grow in what you're doing and to try to use that in the writing, because it's changing so rapidly.” Smylie (1990) and Gusky (1987) found that the most powerful variable influencing change in individual teacher practice is personal self-efficacy. High self-efficacy teachers such as Kaye, Phoebe, and Liz are more likely to have a positive influence on their students’ learning.

The teachers also cited that feeling successful in their job influenced their personal efficacy. Feeling successful as a writing teacher is something Kaye experiences each day she steps into her classroom:

When I'm teaching writing, I want everybody in my classroom to feel like a writer, even if their writing doesn't look the same as the best writer, or the, uh you know, a professional writer, but I want them all to feel successful.
Lacey agreed that a feeling of success was a high priority for her. She said she wanted to, “Instill in them [students] about reading like a writer and writing like a reader to help them organize their thoughts and about understanding the process.”

*Teachers as Writers: What kind of writer am I.* During the individual interviews, each teacher described the kind of writer she was. Enjoyment and pleasure of writing were spoken about synonymously with most of the participants. While Shelley wrote poetry, Lacey used writing as an escape mechanism. Shelly eagerly interjected, “I would really consider myself more of a poet. I just enjoy that type of writing. I enjoy pouring my emotions onto paper.” Lacey, more hesitantly, commented,

> I’m a decent writer. I have always loved to write. It relaxes me. I’ve always considered it to be kind of therapeutic to let my thoughts flow through the ink. I’m still developing my style. I’m definitely a work in progress.

Necessity and purpose were other topics that surfaced from conversations in individual interviews, the focus group meeting, and in the reflective journaling teachers completed. It was difficult to fit the participants into one category or the other in this area. Therefore, the types of writer overlapped one another in some quotations. However, Phoebe fit the necessity mold perfectly:

> I am a writer out of necessity. I don’t pick up a pen for pleasure. I don’t write stories, but I write what needs to be written. I write for professional documents such as lesson plans, professional development plans, or for a graduate class. I don’t really write for fun and I don’t like journaling, so it’s not something I do as a hobby or on a daily basis.

Nona fit the mold, but not as cleanly as Phoebe:

> I write for both necessity and purpose… I am a writer out of necessity because I have to do things like make lists, emails, letters to parents and papers in college. I’m not very confident it because of the grammatical aspect of it. I have so much trouble with commas and misspellings and just the way to put everything so….
Liz quickly interjected her opinion:

I'm ashamed to say I'm inconsistent. I should do more writing, but I don’t really develop my own writing skills personally. I’m challenged to do more and be more. Writing is something that takes time, and when you are tired, or sleepy, it’s hard to kind of make yourself do it, but at the same time it is one of the most refreshing ways to express strong emotions that you have.

Kaye and Phoebe were a contrast to the other participants when the subject of writing came up. With a low voice, Kaye said, “I do not think of myself as a writer. I find that the stress of my job is too much because I am always supposed to have something completed by a certain date.” Phoebe quickly added:

I don't feel like I am a good writing teacher. I don't always know where to start as a writing teacher outside of journaling and modeled writing. I would like to do more as a writing teacher and just need to spend more time thinking about how to do this better.

Kaye fit the mold of what prior research had suggested—a low self-efficacy factor that described a “needy” predisposition toward writing, with little confidence in individual skill or belief in personal success. In a prior study (Lavelle, 2006), such teachers were marked by a paralyzing fear of writing, based on their perceived needs for social encouragement, support, and a general self-doubt about their writing skills.

As the discussion progressed, the teachers described themselves as writers. When asked how they felt as a writer, brief phrases surfaced. Liz quickly said, “Green and growing.” Shelley added, “Growing as a writing instructor.” Nona energetically said, “I describe myself as growing, and continue growing myself as my kids grow as writers.”

During the individual and focus group session, the participants learned that writing is more than just an “act of writing” for writing sake. It involved tying their own beliefs about the process into their instructional practices. The teachers reflected on
student learning and on their purposes as writing teachers. Caroline’s revelation was clear: “My own experiences have been a major influence [pause] then. I do want my students to have the same positive feelings that I had [about writing].” Some of the teachers did not mention any feelings toward writing. Most teachers did not take the time to think about their feelings in relation to writing because, as they pointed out, they were not used to having a forum to voice those feelings.

Theme 2: Classroom Practices

The reviewed literature provided much evidence about the value of writing. Each teacher in this study brought a belief system that transferred into her classroom practices. Teachers must participate and understand the process and know how to create the kind of conditions that facilitate skillful writing from students. Much of teachers’ resistance to incorporating writing instruction in their classroom comes from poor perceptions of themselves as writers and their uncertainty about how to teach and foster writing in their classroom (Atwell, 1991). One issue, time, was repeatedly discussed at intervals of the interview process. Finally, I asked, “When students are successful, who deserves the credit?” This question was met with either immediate response or lengthy hesitation.

Classroom practices: Writing teacher. The participants agreed that being positive would have an impact on student learning and writing. Liz said, “I enter my classroom physically prepared for the day, but if I am as prepared as possible, then I’ve set the goal… contributed to their success.” Lacey noted, “If I am more positive about tasks and portray confidence, my students are more likely to do the same.” Shelley was adamant
about her impact on student learning: “If I feel confident about a particular subject matter… I’m going to seek things to supplement it and make it better for the kids.”

No matter how positive teachers were, they said one could not dismiss the fact that time is a definite issue facing teachers in the classroom. Caroline mentioned that “Some days it’s hard to focus on instruction when you are coping with all the other demands on your time. Time is always a battle!” Phoebe lamented, “I’m always looking for ways to improve and making sure that I am doing all I need to do to help the young learners learn, but time constraints just prevent it.”

When I asked the question, “When students are successful, who should get the credit?” several responses were provided. For example, Kaye said, “I think they should get the credit because it’s hard to make kids do anything.” Lacey did not hesitate to answer: “I believe the student should be given credit, pure and simple.” Nona added, “I really, truly think the kids, because they are the ones who really work so hard.” Liz went on to say, “[students] are the ones bringing it to the class. They are the ones creating it.” But a contrast to these teachers’ thinking was Phoebe. She perked up and, with a big smile on her face, said,

Me! Because we have worked very hard, um, because we work very hard all year long to learn letters and sounds and talking about how letters form words. And when they realize this and put those letters together to say something about a picture they have drawn, um, I feel like that the light bulb has clicked on for them and they understand, um, the beginning and the early stages of the writing process. And I feel like I deserve the credit, because that's been our main goal for the year.

_classroom practices: Internal and external locus of control._ Locus of control is an individual’s belief system regarding the causes of his or her experiences and the factors to which that person attributes success or failure. The factors that control
experiences, actions, and outcomes are considered either internal or external. As described in the literature review, if a person has an internal locus of control, that person attributes success to his or her own efforts and abilities. A person who expects to succeed is more likely to be motivated and more likely to learn. This person will seek out information and is more likely to have good study habits and a positive academic attitude (Bandura, 1977, 1997; Smylie, 1990).

In addressing the definition of self-efficacy, confidence was the popular answer that surfaced among the participants, and several of the participants commented that self-efficacy was internally based. Kaye explained confidence this way:

I think it's knowing what you need to know to do your job, uh and have confidence at it. Just knowing that when the kids come in you're not having to rethink what it is you're supposed to be doing and how to do it. You just have a kind of intuitive understanding of what's expected. What you expect from them, you know, what they are capable of doing socially, developmentally, what the curriculum, you know, contains? The things you are supposed to do and the things as a teacher you know you need to do based on good practice, you know, from the whatever, like the NCTE and IRA for writing for example, um, I think it's just a combination and experience, you know, working it out over time.

Kaye continued that thought:

Some teachers look at the skills in the course of study as if writing is a list to be checked off. This is like comparing a writing teacher to a cook. Just any old person who shops for groceries to make a meal can pick up ingredients to complete a recipe, but only a person who loves to look notices the quality and brand names of the best ingredients. There are tiny details that good writers notice and include in a story to enrich the experience for the reader.

Phoebe clearly stated a definition:

I think self-efficacy in terms of my writing instruction is being able to know and understand the goals I set for my instruction of writing. It means setting a goal for my students and knowing what to do and how to get there with them.

Some of the participants also mentioned that support for classroom practices can be more externally based. Kaye, Phoebe, and Caroline all noted that a supportive school
system was paramount in relation to classroom practices. However, Caroline thought more about self-efficacy in terms of setting goals for herself and her students.

*Classroom practices: Deterrents to writing.* Teachers’ beliefs about writing instruction in their classroom are reflected in the issues or barriers they face on a day-to-day basis. Several factors related to beliefs surfaced in the literature review, such as skepticism towards the effectiveness of writing, confusion about assessment responsibilities, fear of incompetence, resentment against adding more work, stress to fulfill greater expectations, and self-perceptions about teaching it (Brown, 1996).

Both Shelley and Lacey agreed that lack of confidence was definitely a hindrance in writing and classroom instruction. Lacey stated:

> The disbelief of being capable of accomplishing a task can internally hinder self-efficacy. And this internal belief called doubt, directly impacts what is reflected on the outside, what is projected to the students. If students perceive that their teacher lacks confidence, or mostly is unmotivated about writing, they may become disinterested or less confident about what they can achieve.

Shelley agreed:

> If a teacher did not feel confident in their own writing, you know kind of scared to write, it would be hard to share good examples with their students. And also it would be hard for them to model in front of their students, or it would not be as easy.

Deterrents to writing can also come from external conditions, or the conditions that are out of the reach of the teacher’s control, yet have a powerful impact on instructional choices. Caroline explained:

> Externally would be the changing expectations from the school system, from the national standards, um, and your competing curriculum demands. You get to trying to do one thing and you stop doing another and you run and pick that one up and you stop doing something else. And you get confused and discouraged.
Kaye further added:

Well, keeping expectations back to what they were years ago, like when we were going to school, uh. Thinking about the fact that writing is grammar, punctuation, spelling—and there's a part of my program that involves that, and that is important—but letting that be the only thing and not putting the enjoyment there, which is if you can't get kids to write because they don't like to do it.

Phoebe thought about classroom deterrents more in terms of time and other outside interferences: “Time constraints in the school or class schedule, the curriculum, and within, and by that I mean, like, state department mandates.”

Classroom practices: Writing challenges. Although teachers face many challenges in today’s classrooms, the participants in this study named time and diversity as the most significant. Caroline, Lacey, and Phoebe all noted that finding the time for students to write was a challenge. Liz remarked, “It does take a block of time [to write]. You can’t do it in a five minute reading prompt, or a ten, fifteen minute writing prompt.” In relation to students who speak English as a second language (ESL), Shelley, Brenda, and Caroline stated, “My ESL students are out of the classroom a lot.” Shelley further explained the situation with these students:

It's not because they are not good writers, but because they are out of the classroom a lot. And they are out of the classroom and they miss my mini lessons. Um, and so I try to mix up so that they don't have to miss it every week, or every day, or anything like that, but it is still hard.

Classroom practices: Evaluation. Although experts recommend that teachers grade writing, many of the participating teachers remarked that they are not on the same page with the process and have difficulty in deciding exactly what to assign a grade on. Grading is a reality of the teaching profession that must be addressed, but writing is
difficult to place a value on. Most of the teachers stated that they would rather not think about evaluation in terms of grading student writing. Brenda said,

I evaluate by, um, taking notes or just walking around. Constantly looking at what they're producing. Um, seeing who needs more help than others... Um, sometimes I evaluate by going through the writing folder and just looking at what they have managed to accomplish.

Caroline stated, “Evaluation is done by observation. I'm looking for growth in sound-letter correspondence and other skills and growing complexity of thoughts and sentence structure, thought structure.” Phoebe added, “I spend time reading each journal entry that the students write, and I help with inventive spelling or dictation, as needed.” Lacey admitted, “I am still in the process of developing my evaluation process because I am a first-year teacher.” Shelley commented on her own evaluation practices:

Every day I give the students an objective to accomplish for the day. They work with their writing partners and independently. I do table and individual conferencing with students. This is when I evaluate to see if students are accomplishing what I want them to accomplish for the day.

The participants discussed how confusing the grading process actually is. Some said they used authors with established quality as examples, as well as conferencing and modeling. They used many ways of looking at grading. Some evaluated using notebooks, rubrics, and journals. Others used a folder system or portfolios with their students. They commented how frustrating it was because the guidelines were vague and no one seemed to be on the same page with what should be graded or how.

Theme 3: Experiences

The literature review showed how individual teachers’ belief systems and prior experiences directly affect teachers’ instruction in their classrooms. The participants shared many ways in which they experienced writing within the classroom setting, or the
lack of it. The focus group meeting, individual interviews, and reflective journaling provided information that related to both their prior and present teaching experiences, as well as to the influences of experts in the field of writing.

**Experiences: Prior writing in school.** Shelley, Nona, and Kaye said they really could not remember how they were taught to write. Of her prior experience Lacey said, “I mostly remember being taught rules regarding language arts. Then, you just simply wrote within the teacher’s specification. Mostly, I guess, it was through practice and trial and error.” Karen’s experience was quite different: “I was taught later in life using wonderful children’s literature.” Caroline reported, “The focus was on spelling, outlining and following the proper format. Writing prompts were the norm. Editing and revising even more. I remembered using the word ‘dog’ instead of ‘dachshund’ because I could spell dog.” Liz said she remembered always imitating her teachers’ behaviors very carefully because she wanted to be a teacher. However, she admitted, “I never remember imitating the teaching of writing,” she said. She remembered many memories and play—“teaching spelling, handwriting, reading, math, science and social studies abound… But not writing!”

**Experiences: The way I teach today.** Shelley and Lacey both agreed that the way they teach today is to use experiences that students have had in their life to affect their writing. Brenda confirmed what Shelley and Lacey do, adding, “We write about small moments, and it’s things that have happened in their lives and how they feel about them.”
Liz said she ascribed to the ‘I do, we do, you do’ of modeling writing in her classroom, and then added, “I do a lot of one-on-one conferencing with my students.”

Shelley interrupted excitedly by saying to Liz:

I normally introduce a writing genre by showing examples from actual children’s literature, to show, to show the students what a real author does in their work. I then show the students some of my writing and writing of other children from other years. I will frequently write with the children in the new genre, with their help for ideas and wording. I spend several weeks teaching a new genre. They work with their writing partners and independently. I do table and individual conferencing with students. This is when I evaluate to see if students are accomplishing what I want them to accomplish for the day. We normally publish one piece at the end of the genre study.

Kaye talked confidently about her experiences teaching writing, as she loved to read and incorporated the reading and writing connection in her instruction. She said of her style,

We start with examples from good literature. I read a lot to my children and everything I read has to have some kind of meaning in their world. Either it's something that goes with our curriculum, but most of the time it goes with things that are important to second graders. So a lot of the things I read are stories that I know that children love. They're those timely stories about friendship and, you know, working things out and sometimes they involve some fantasy, but I use these stories because I know that's the kind of writing that I know they like to do too.

Brenda got excited as she talked about teaching writing with her students. She happily reported:

Well, um, I use Lucy Calkins most of the time, and to implement the lesson I usually give them an example of something of something that I have written myself, something that maybe we can go over. Maybe it's an example of what I want them to do, or it's something that I want them to point out. I may have a writing mistake, uh, especially a sight word might be misspelled, and I want them to pick up in my writing and help me correct it.

It was fascinating to listen to how the teachers’ experiences with teaching writing differed from the way they remembered being taught. By the responses made, they teach
quite differently today. Observations in their classrooms confirmed a rich reading and writing environment.

**Experiences: Influences.** Almost every participant, when asked in the focus group interview who influenced their writing, unanimously said, “Lucy Calkins.” The participants further stated that Calkins has had the most direct and powerful effect on their writing practices. They went on to say that things are changing so rapidly in the field of writing that they typically referred to Calkins for her expertise because she has helped them to articulate their experiences and to reclaim writing for themselves.

Theme 4: Support Systems

The participants cited feedback and coaching in the area of support systems as being important to their teaching of writing. The participants were hopeful to have more feedback about their writing practices from the principal and from their grade-level team members. The writing coaches helped the teachers in a variety of ways because they not only modeled lessons in writing for teachers, but also provided constructive feedback from lessons that they taught and the coach observed.

**Support systems: Feedback.** The participants discussed feedback from parents and coaching as support systems for writing instruction. Although some teachers admitted having principal feedback about their writing practices, others voiced concerns because they were not given much feedback at all. Lacey said, “I don’t think I have really received a lot of feedback about what is specifically taking place in my class, except for parents telling me.” Nona agreed: “I don’t really receive any feedback, like from
professionals or my peers that I work with. Some of the feedback is from parents.”

Caroline agreed with both Lacey and Nona, saying only “compliments from parent and teachers.” In general, Kaye, Shelley, and Phoebe got feedback from the principal only on professional development plans or evaluation. Shelley commented, “I have not had a lot of personal feedback on my writing instruction for a little over two years.” However, Brenda eagerly shared a different experience with feedback about writing:

Um, [pause] is this feedback from my kids? Uh, [very long pause] well at the moment, writing is such a huge area, um, for development in our, in our school. We have professional development. We have the support of our principal with this school-wide professional development that's going on. We share lots and lots of talk time where we talk about what we are doing in our classroom and what we actually do, um, in writing workshop and in writing instruction in our class. We support each other within our grade level. [pause] We have book studies for writing. And we're reading Reggie Routman at the moment as a faculty, and we are trying to make our writing a precious thing at our school at the moment.

Support systems: Coaching. During the interviews with the participants, they all talked about the value of having coaching support. The participants felt that coaching support was one of the most valuable elements helping them implement new ideas in their classroom practices.

Phoebe proudly said, “We have a reading coach here at my school, and we also have a writing spot curriculum that helps us with lessons and planning.” Liz added, “We have a reading coach who is very strong in writing instruction and loves to work with us on that… I got some coaching this year, and it actually happened and I'm excited with the progress that I've seen.” Caroline remarked:

The reading coach is very supportive. And I have a teacher that I have done a lot of writing stuff with and she's um, [pause] to share our kids work back and forth and say "What's the next step?" is really helpful.
The participants also felt like a coach as a support system is someone that would be beneficial to have more access to, but teachers realized that probably would not happen given that the coach is shared by so many classes. Teachers would like to see better scheduling of the coaches coming into the classroom to help them so they would know they could depend on the extra help on a regular basis.

Lessons Learned

Through analysis of the data collected, the researcher learned that teachers displayed an intrinsic enjoyment of their work and a strong commitment to writing and to the mission of their respective schools. I also learned that having a support system in place for teachers was significant to their overall feelings—especially a reading coach, which supported a reading-writing connection.

The teachers commented on how their vision for writing transferred into their everyday classroom practices. They indicated that they now have a better understanding about their personal self-efficacy as it relates to writing instruction. The teachers now ask themselves, “How does my belief system impact how I teach writing in my classroom?”

Teachers said they now use the question as a guide for their instruction. They reported that they were rarely ever asked how they think of themselves as writers or teachers of writing, and they enjoyed having the forum to think, reflect, and re-evaluate their instructional practices.

The teachers voiced concerns that grading and evaluating student writing was confusing. Grading is a reality of the profession, but it is difficult to place a value on writing. I shared with the participants a quotation from the reviewed literature about the evaluation of writing by Ray and Laminack (2001) that is worth revisiting:
Writers don’t get grades from teachers. For writers the ultimate evaluation comes not from an editor, a publisher, or even a reviewer, but from the reader. Readers decide whether the work of writers is worthy of attention, and it is that evaluation that drives our work. It is that evaluation that must be in our minds even as we begin the work. Writers get “grades” from readers. (p. 219)

Revisiting the words brought several questions to mind: Who are the “ideal” readers, or “ideal” audience, for the student’s work? What “grades” or feedback are most meaningful to the students? Is it their peers? Is it their teachers? Is it their parents? Is it a combination of their peers, teachers, and parents?

Summary

The results of the data analysis were presented in a detailed report in Chapter 4. The eight participants in the study were teachers who used the writing process in their classroom. Teachers’ beliefs about themselves as writers were presented, compared, and discussed in addressing the six research questions. Findings, implications, and recommendations based upon these results follow in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5
FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Teacher educators must understand the factors that influence the practice of writing instruction. Teachers’ beliefs about writing and their role as writing instructors, as well as teachers’ self-efficacy, significantly affect teaching practices. Making meaning in writing calls not only for advanced skills, but also for self-knowledge of oneself as a writer. It is important to learn how teachers value writing as a tool of learning and evaluation and how they go about implementing related instruction. The guiding question for this study was “How do early childhood teachers describe the relationship between their writing self-efficacy and the impact it has on writing instruction in the classroom?”

In order to fully explore this topic, the researcher set out to answer the following subquestions:

1. How do teachers describe themselves as writers?
2. How do teachers describe themselves as writing teachers?
3. What personal experiences have teachers had that affected the way they teach writing in their classroom?
4. How do teachers describe differences in self-efficacy when students experience academic success or failure?
5. How do teachers evaluate writing instruction in their classrooms?
6. How do teachers describe the educational context that supports teachers and the teaching of writing in the classroom?
Major Findings

The four themes identified were Teachers as Writers, Classroom Practices, Teachers’ Experiences, and Support Systems. The Teachers as Writers theme had subthemes of personal self-efficacy and what kind of writer am I. Classroom practices had five subthemes: writing teacher, locus of control (internal and external), deterrents (internal and external), challenges, and evaluation. Teachers’ experiences had the three subthemes of prior experiences, present experiences, and influences. The theme of support systems had the two subthemes of feedback and coaching. The themes and subthemes were evident in a variety of data sources.

Writing is a complex undertaking and mandates attention at many levels (Lavelle, 2006). To better understand writing as a construct of learning, the findings for this case study were linked to the study’s framed question of “How do teachers describe the relationship between their writing self-efficacy and the impact it has on classroom writing instruction?” To answer that question, six subquestions were explored. The first, “How do teachers describe themselves as writers?” was addressed through the first two themes. They included personal self-efficacy and what kind of writer am I. Each participant realized she brought her own beliefs about writing into the classroom setting. They were not used to examining those beliefs so candidly. They believed writing will improve only if it becomes the focus of the curriculum. The teachers said they already knew that writing fosters young children’s thinking and learning in subject areas, but they realized that in order to teach writing, teachers must first be writers. They shared the idea that teachers must “wear the proverbial writer’s hat” and grapple with the same writing process they assign to their students. They also believed that they hold the key which
facilitates skillful writing. Some teachers thought of themselves as decent writers. Several admitted they wrote only out of necessity or purpose. Two teachers did not think of themselves as writers simply because they just did not know where to start.

The second subquestion, “How do teacher describe themselves as writing teachers?” related to the theme of classroom practices. Most teachers described themselves as positive teachers of writing. They said if they portrayed confidence about writing, then the students would likely do the same. But they also noted that a teacher could have a lack of confidence, which could hinder student motivation to write. Four teachers agreed that it was hard to keep writing in the forefront of the curriculum because the time factor was a battle. They cited competing curriculum demands as the biggest culprit that interfered with quality writing time in the classroom. The teachers also said that unexpected interruptions in daily schedules were another deterrent to writing. Several teachers voiced concerns that their ESL or English as a Second Language Learners were out of the classroom for part of the day, especially during writing workshop. However, the issues that the teachers mentioned did not curtail their enthusiasm to keep writing with their students. They said they have a tremendous responsibility to stay confident and to keep their students excited about the writing process.

The third subquestion, “What personal experiences have teachers had that affected the way they teach in their classroom?” related to teachers’ experiences. The teachers shared many ways in which they experienced the writing process or the lack of it. Many of the teachers did not remember writing much in the elementary or middle school years. What little they remembered about writing was in the form of spelling, language rules, or writing prompts. From the reflective journaling teachers completed,
one teacher wrote about the marks of the red pen all over her paper from a high school teacher. One teacher remembered wanting to be a teacher and imitating her a lot. Although she imitated her in all the subject areas, she never remembered imitating her in the art of writing. This statement led to the influences teachers had as models of writing.

Most teachers were influenced by the experts in writing. Buckner (2005) added, “Writers admire other writers.” Almost every teacher mentioned Lucy Calkins as the biggest role model for using the writing process in their classrooms. It was no wonder that particular authors come out in what we say and write because they have shaped our thinking and practice (Manning, Morrison & Camp, 2009 p. 9). Therefore, how do teachers teach today based on past experiences? The way they were taught was not the way they wanted their students to experience writing. The teachers use good writers such as Lucy Calkins to help them have a better understanding of how to bring writing elements into their classrooms. Every teacher said they have students use experiences they have had in their life as a springboard for writing. They made a commitment to challenge their students and model what good writers do. Their feelings about this commitment related directly to the fourth subquestion.

The fourth subquestion was “How do teachers describe differences in self-efficacy when students experience academic success or failure?” This question was answered immediately. Seven of the eight teachers said the students should get credit for their hard work. Only one teacher beamed and said “Me!” She felt that she was the one who worked hard to get her students where they needed to be and, therefore, should receive the credit. None of the teachers addressed who was accountable for any failures the students encountered.
The fifth subquestion “How do teachers evaluate writing instruction in their classroom?” was a concern for the participants. They began to think about what skills and strategies they needed to refocus on during writing and how the writing they were teaching at their grade level would be assessed. Most teachers had their own system of evaluating their children’s writing, such as writing folders, journals, portfolios, rubrics, and anecdotal records. They voiced a need for a system of grading for their respective grade level so that they could all be “on the same page” with the procedures. They admitted that the grading process is confusing at best and that it is an area that needs attention. They remarked that the evaluation of writing added stress for them as teachers because the process was unclear.

It was important to learn what support systems teachers felt they had in place for their writing instruction. This idea led to the sixth and final subquestion: “How do teachers describe the educational context that supports teachers and the teaching of writing?” Feedback and coaching were the two subthemes that teachers expressed as supporting their efforts in the classroom as teachers of writing. Parental support and principal support were noted by the teachers as the most significant feedback in writing instruction. Two teachers said they did not receive much feedback from the principal unless it was about lesson plans. Coaching was popular as the most helpful day-to-day support system teachers have in place. The coaches helped in various ways. They modeled lessons, assisted with lesson plans, and implemented new ideas into classroom in coordination with the teacher. The teachers expressed that the coach was a valuable resource to them and that they would like access to one more often than once a week.
Having to share one coach with so many teachers limited the amount of time they had with the coach.

I found through the interview process, reflective journaling, and classroom observations that even though many teachers thought of themselves as decent writers, they gave much higher marks to themselves as teachers of writing. Even though teachers offered a myriad of information in individual interviews about themselves as a writer and teachers of writing, what they wrote in their journals was much more telling about themselves. The two pieces of data collection that were crucial in pulling the study together were the reflective journaling and classroom observations. Both offered an abundance of information about writing process teachers and teachers as writers. First, teachers reflected in their journals about how they were taught to write. The journaling revealed that most of the teachers did not remember writing in school. A few of the teachers remembered being taught in a more traditional way through the rules of language arts, writing from the teacher’s specification or through trial and error, and by responding to writing prompts. Classroom observations allowed me a different lens with which to view the inner workings of instructional practice. I noticed several details about the nature of classroom talk. Teachers created conversational communities in which the talk between the teacher and student was very personalized. They encouraged real conversation as a means to learn about their students. Authority was decentralized as teachers encouraged students to engage in each other’s ideas. I observed that “no” and “wrong” were not vocabulary words in these classrooms unless they were used constructively. Teachers supported and validated thinking and reflection even about a “correct” answer. Although writing tasks differed substantially both in breadth of genres
and written pieces, the emphasis on writing was clearly about making meaning and the means for doing so.

Summary of Unexpected Findings

During the research process, one unexpected finding that surfaced: Only one of the eight participants study referenced professional development as a support system for herself as a writer or teacher of writing. The school system in which this research was conducted places a high value on providing teachers with the tools to support learning in the classroom through professional development. Additionally, the school system also has a focus specifically on the area of writing. Furthermore, the state in which the study was conducted has several measures in place to ensure an emphasis on writing. The language arts course of study ensures that writing is taught at all grades. The state also has a writing assessment for elementary, middle, and high school students and has implemented it since 1991. Finally, the state has a reading initiative in place, which relies heavily on writing, introducing journaling and story-mapping in kindergarten and requiring a writing component in every grade. The state in which the research was conducted was one of the first three states to be awarded federal funding from the United States Department of Education as part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Additionally, the state reading initiative is an ongoing professional development opportunity for school faculty member. Approximately 900 schools across the state actively participate in the state initiative, which requires at least 85% of the faculty be trained in and participate in the school-wide commitment. Local universities also require graduates to be trained in the state reading initiative. Therefore, the lack of response to professional development resources as a system of support was quite surprising.
Implications

Based on the results of this study, three specific implications for further consideration appeared: the necessity of reflection, the need to change teacher self-efficacy, and the role of writing through professional growth.

The role of reflection is important and necessary in order for teachers to understand why they are doing what they are doing in the classroom. Ongoing reflective practices are needed to meet the ever-challenging individual needs of children in the classroom. Within a school year, teachers are confronted with many changes. Within a teaching career, the number of changes in expectations, regulations, and curriculum can be overwhelming. Teachers are often asked to make changes without being given the extra time needed to do this effectively. Reflection is part of the process of dealing with changes faced by teachers, both in their day-to-day work and throughout their career. Because teachers are called upon to reflect and analyze, the need exists to know more about how practicing teachers experience this phenomenon on a day-to-day basis.

Given the current and potential value of the teacher self-efficacy construct, efforts to impact changes in teacher self-efficacy would be valuable. Bandura (1977) cautioned that positive changes in self-efficacy come through compelling feedback that may disrupt any preexisting disbelief in one’s capabilities. Consistent evidence showed that self-efficacy is most malleable in the preservice years, but tends to be resistant to change in experienced teachers (Anderson et al., 1988; Housego, 1990; Ohmart, 1990; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). Personal teaching self-efficacy appears to be more difficult to impact in experienced teachers because self-efficacy is an internally held belief about self that solidifies with experience and time (Henson, 2001).
“Teacher efficacy research must grapple with the issue of efficacy change” (Henson, 2001, p. 12). Research that looks seriously at experimental studies and longitudinal design can address this issue because any positive impact on efficacy beliefs is unlikely without long-term professional development (Henson, 2001).

The impact of professional development was surprisingly lacking in this study because only one out of eight early childhood teachers mentioned it as a support system. Furthermore, all participants had at least 5 years of experience in the classroom, except one, which supports evidence that change is more difficult to impact in experienced teachers. Professional development is intended to improve, enhance, or transform teaching practices. Previous research indicated the importance of ongoing professional development on classroom change. The researcher found that the depth of professional development and the ongoing nature of it helped make lasting changes in instructional practices when accompanied with appropriate follow-up activities (Guskey, 2000).

Specific to the implications of this study, professional development must address the extent to which teachers view themselves as writers and writing teachers (Frager, 1994). This aspect of professional development is important because teachers’ beliefs about writing and their role as writing instructors directly impacts teaching practice and student learning. Many factors may influence student success, but the individual teacher has an undeniably powerful effect on students’ learning (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Wright, Horn, and Sanders (1997, p. 63) found that the classroom teacher is “the most important factor affecting student learning.” For educators, it is essential to continue to understand factors that influence the practice of writing instruction. Through ongoing professional opportunities, an attempt to close the gap can be made.
Recommendations for Practice

Based on the results of this study and others, several recommendations for future practice are evident.

1. Principals should continue to validate teachers’ self-efficacy and should give feedback more frequently in writing instruction.

2. Teachers should have a thorough understanding of the writing process and be well versed in research related to writing and learning because these practices lead to better teachers. Reading professional journals and texts helps support instructional practice, especially when teachers share the information. Teachers who become engaged in professional dialogue with others of similar or different philosophies have enhanced personal learning and instructional practices. Many researchers have found that it helps to bind theory with practice (Grimmett et al., 1990; Tom 1992).

3. Engaging in professional writing communities is recommended on the basis of the work of Graves (1994), who believes that a person cannot be a teacher of writing unless that person himself or herself is a writer.

4. Teachers should be reflective practitioners who put belief into practice within the classroom setting. In the words of Hollins (2006, p. 51), “The way the teachers as a community talked about the students reflected dramatic changes in the teachers’ beliefs and practices.” Furthermore, teachers who choose to participate in self-initiated professional development will find better writers in their midst if they (a) attend quality conferences and meetings that are planned with clear learning goals and objectives in mind (Joyce & Showers, 2002), (b) maintain membership in professional organizations, and (c) continue to learn by enrolling in formal graduate courses.
5. Teachers should keep notebooks for “super words” and extraordinary events to spark writing.

Recommendations for Future Research

From the results of this study, recommendations for future research include replicating the study with varying elements such as male teachers as participants, an increased sample size, the time period of a full-scale academic year (i.e., 9 months), and a more diverse range of schools.

Participatory teacher research is recommended because personal teaching efficacy, an internally held belief about oneself that solidifies with experience and time, is particularly difficult to impact in experienced teachers. Positively impacting teachers’ efficacy beliefs is not likely to occur outside of long-term professional development that compels teachers to think critically about their classrooms and to behave actively in instructional improvement. Participatory teacher research is a collaborative process by which teachers themselves critically examine their classrooms, develop and implement educational interventions, and evaluate the effectiveness of those interventions (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994).

Another recommendation is to use a different hierarchy that is not based not on time but on acquired skills and performances when planning professional development for teachers. A model that addresses such a hierarchy is called the Concerns-Based Adoption model (CBAM; Hord, Rutherford, & Huling-Austin, 1987; Sweeney, 2003). The CBAM model has seven stages. The bottom three stages focus on self-concerns in relation to awareness (What is it?), information (How does it work?), and personal tasks (How does this impact me and what’s my plan to do it?). The focal point of the middle
stage is on management task concerns (How can I master the skills and fit it all in?). The upper three stages concentrate on impact tasks: consequence (Is this worth it and is it working?), collaboration (It is working fine but how do others do it?), and refocusing (Is there anything else that is better?). This type of conceptual framework describes, explains, and predicts probable teacher concerns and behaviors.

Improved feedback is recommended because it is the most important aspect of the process of evaluating writing and the teaching of writing. The participants in this study valued feedback as important as a support system and in the evaluation process. Teachers are confused on how to evaluate student writing and cited vague guidelines as a culprit. Using guidelines devised by Edward de Bono (1973) to help improve the quality of the feedback given by evaluators and for evaluating student writing should be considered. Feedback helps both students and teachers to understand their strengths and weaknesses, and it motivates them to improve their skills. Edward de Bono suggested that attention be given to four areas in talking with students about their work: praise, clarification, criticism, and amplification. Praise gives positive acknowledgement of one’s effort, creativity, and major strengths. Clarification involves clarifying one’s ideas. Criticism allows the evaluator to suggest areas in need of improvement. Amplification allows the evaluator to make comments that help students expand their ideas, push their thinking, and improve the quality of their problem solving. Criteria for feedback are grouped into four categories of scales. Frequency scales are used to award points on the basis of specific responses. Rating scales award points based on the degree or extent to which a descriptor is met. Weighted scales award points for fluent or relevant responses that are found infrequently and are indicative of high-quality thought. Composite scales award
points based on a total of points earned on individual elements. The criteria to measure student skills include the content, structure, and process of writing.

Reflective journaling is recommended and can be an extremely useful tool for providing insight into self-awareness: What you do (behaviors); why you do it (values, assumptions, aspirations); how you feel (emotions); and how you think. Journaling can expose contradictions, misconceptions, and conflict. In short, it helps one turn every incident into a new potential learning experience. Writing about one's experiences can be useful as it helps to make explicit knowledge that one may have learned and practiced implicitly for better or worse. It also helps to provide perspective and structure for daily events that sometimes appear chaotic and random. Journals provide a place for personal responses about connections to self, text to text, and text to world. Furthermore, educational research suggests that active reflection is needed if true transformational learning is to be realized (Manning et al., 2009, Schön, 1983).

Because of the limitations in methodologies that are available for measuring classroom practices, more information needs to be collected on a broad scale regarding the quality of instructional practice. This is important for providing formative feedback to teachers and administrators on ways to improve the quality of learning and instruction, and for supporting teachers’ reflection on and self-evaluation of their practices.

Finally, action research or teacher research is suggested to further understanding of the purposes that underlie instructional decision making, especially in the area of writing (Kincheloe, 2003; Stringer, 1996).
Conclusion

While the teaching of self-efficacy has been supported as an important construct related to teacher competence (Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2000), little is known about how teachers think of themselves as writers, or of their writing efficacy (Lavelle, 2006). Problems in understanding the construct also occur as researchers attempt to disentangle the influence of independent constructs such as teacher expectations, locus of control, and self-esteem. Researchers are not certain whether these constructs exist independently or have interactive influence with perceived self-efficacy (Smylie, 1990). Lack of agreement on the nature of self-efficacy and its contributing variables makes it challenging to create conditions that support or instill a high sense of self-efficacy.

As studies have shown, teachers’ personal beliefs about their ability to affect student achievement may be the variance in teacher effectiveness (Armor et al., 1976; Berman & McLaughlin, 1977). For this reason, teachers must acquire a strong sense of self-efficacy that will allow them to lead students to academic gains (Lewandowski, 2005). Teachers who believe in their personal efficacy will nurture students so they can soar to academic heights.

No matter what the context may be, writing is a complex undertaking in any teaching situation, especially within the area of early childhood education. Perhaps no other task mandates attention at so many different levels—thematic, paragraph, sentence, lexical, and grammatical. The genre may be familiar or novel, comfortable or perplexing, and issues such as audience and development of voice in writing are vague to say the least. But the power of writing as a tool of learning for both communication and reflection cannot be underestimated (Lavelle, 2006).
According to Calkins (1986, p. 3), whom four of the participants in this study cited as an influence on them as teachers of writing, “Writing allows us to turn the chaos into something beautiful, to frame selected moments in our lives, to uncover and to celebrate the organizing patterns of our existence.” Therefore, it could be said that we write because we want to understand our lives and because we have a deep need to represent our experiences through writing. Corgill (2008, p. 16) pleaded, “Be the teacher who creates and learns in a classroom full of students where differences are treasured, time is honored, and true learning can take place … to be the writing teachers our students deserve.”

Perhaps Fletcher (1993 p. 161) said it best: “Don’t be afraid to live like a writer. Writers explore. There are two whole universes to explore—the one on the inside, and the physical one on the outside. Take your choice.” Teachers have a unique opportunity to explore both these worlds: By gaining a strong sense of their own self-efficacy as writers, teachers can gain a sense of self-efficacy in their use of writing in their classrooms and, in turn, impart to their students a sense of self-efficacy about their own writing.
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APPENDIX A

GATEKEEPER LETTER
February 23, 2009

_______, Superintendent
_______ Schools

Dear __________:

I, Judy Rapp, am a graduate research student at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and a teacher at ____ Elementary in the ____ School System. To meet the requirements for my dissertation, I would like to conduct a research study exploring the impact of teachers’ self-efficacy on classroom writing instruction.

In studying the most recent research, I have discovered that for more than 20 years, teachers’ sense of self-efficacy has been studied in the educational arena. Countless studies have shown that sense of self-efficacy is significantly connected to effective teaching and individual and organizational changes. While teaching self-efficacy has been supported as an important construct related to teacher competence, little is known about how teachers think of themselves as writers, particularly as it relates to their classroom writing instruction. Therefore, this study supports the developing notion that teacher self-efficacy is an important element in understanding how it is that teachers think about their own writing and how it impacts their writing instruction. Specifically, it is important to learn how teachers value writing as a tool of learning and evaluation and how they go about implementing it in their daily instruction.

For the purpose of the research study, the principal researcher requests your consent / approval to conduct this research in the Catskill City School System. I would like to contact principals at several elementary school sites for possible participants for this study. Principals will be sent a letter explaining the study and to recommend teachers in grades k-3 who focus on writing instruction in their classrooms. When principals have made their recommendations, an informed consent document will be given to teachers asking for their participation in this study through interviews and a classroom observation.

For your convenience, I have attached a consent form to this letter. The form may be sent to me by school fax at: _____, email, or by school pony. Please feel free to draft your own letter in response to this request. Pending approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I would like to contact principals as soon as possible so I can begin my research on this important topic. A copy of the findings will be sent to you. If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact me in the following ways: at work using the school number at: ____ or my cell phone number at: ____ or by email: ____. Thank you sincerely for your time and consideration regarding this research in our profession. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Judy Rapp
Consent of Superintendent

By signing below, you agree to allow the investigator to conduct the described research study at elementary schools in the Catskill City School System—The “Write” Tools: Teachers’ Self-Efficacy on Classroom Writing Instruction.

________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Superintendent                               Date:
____________________________________________________________________
Signature of Investigator                                 Date:
APPENDIX B

GATEKEEPER APPROVAL LETTER
February 25, 2009

Judy Rapp  
_____ Schools

Dear Ms. Rapp:

I have reviewed the proposal for your research study entitled The “Write” Tools: The Impact of Teachers’ Self-Efficacy on Classroom Writing Instruction in Suburban Central Alabama,” and you have my permission to conduct the research in our district with teachers who volunteer to participate in the study. I understand that you will be conducting interviews with volunteer teachers at Fannin West Elementary School, CB Elementary School, and Blue Ridge East Elementary School.

Sincerely yours,

____________, Superintendent

cc: __________, Principal of Fannin West Elementary School  
__________, Principal of CB Elementary School  
__________, Principal of Blue Ridge East Elementary School
APPENDIX C

PRINCIPAL APPROVAL LETTER
Permission Letter

Dear ____________:

I, Judy Rapp, am a graduate research student at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and teacher in the ____ School System. To meet the requirements for my dissertation, I would like to conduct a research study on the impact of teachers’ self-efficacy on classroom writing instruction. I seek to understand how teachers think about their own writing, how they value writing as a tool of learning and evaluation, and how they go about implementing related instruction. I also hope to understand to what extent teachers view themselves as writers and writing teachers as it reveals itself in their experiences.

For the purpose of this study, the principal researcher requests your consent / approval to recruit participants.

There will be no known risks to you, your facilities, students, or parents. To insure that all information in this study is kept and handled confidentially, the principal researcher will use the information for your site under a different name (pseudonym). Consent to use your site is voluntary, and as gatekeeper / principal, you can withdraw your site from the study at any time, without consequences.

___________, Catskill City Schools Superintendent, has endorsed this study. If you have any further questions or concerns before signing this consent, you may contact me by email: ____ or by phone at: ____ Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Consent of Site Administrator

I, ____________________________ agree refuse to consent the use of ____________________________Elementary School to recruit participants for a research study to explore the impact of teachers’ self-efficacy on classroom writing instruction.

_________________________________  ____________________________
Gatekeeper/Principal                                      Date

_________________________________
Signature of Investigator                                      Date
APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER
Dear Fellow Teacher:

You are invited to participate in a qualitative research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of teachers’ self-efficacy on classroom writing instruction. I value the contribution that you can make to my study and I am excited about the possibility of your participation in it. I seek to understand how teachers think about their own writing, how they value writing as a tool of learning and evaluation, and how they go about implementing related instruction. From the perspective of teachers, how do teachers describe the relationship between their writing self-efficacy and the impact it has on writing instruction in the classroom?

Through your participation as a co-researcher, I hope to understand the extent teachers view themselves as writers and writing teachers as it reveals itself in your experience. You will be asked to recall specific episodes, situations, or events that you have experienced as teachers. I am seeking vivid, accurate, and comprehensive portrayals of what these experiences were like for you: your thoughts, feelings, behaviors, as well as situations, events, places, and people connected with your experience.

I value your participation and thank you for the commitment of time, energy, and effort. Your participation in the study will require approximately one hour of your time for a focus group interview, approximately one hour of your time for an individual interview to include a response in a reflective journal, and approximately thirty to forty-five minutes for one classroom observation. The interviews and classroom observation will be arranged at a mutually convenient time for you. Interview questions will be open-ended and provided in advance. With your permission you will be audio taped for later transcription. Additionally, the researcher may take hand-written notes during the interview.

The audio tapes will be for the sole purpose of accurate data collection, and your responses will be strictly confidential. During the research process, the following groups will have access to private information that identifies you by name: The Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), and the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) but your name will never appear on any collected data to protect your anonymity. The information from the interview will be used for recording and analysis purposes. All data, including the audio tapes, will be stored in a metal locked file cabinet, and will be destroyed in three years after the research is completed. In any publication related to this research, no information which could potentially identify any participants will be disclosed.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. The results of the study are intended to benefit a varied audience, including administrators and instructors, as well as other graduate students.

Although your participation in this study is voluntary, you will be compensated with a twenty-five dollar gift card if you complete the study. The gift card will be delivered to you at your school site one week following completion of all interviews and classroom observations. If you do not finish the entire study, no payment will be given. You are free to withdraw from this research at any time without penalty.
You have the right to have any of your questions answered prior to agreeing to participate, at any time during the study, before signing the attached release form, or if there is a problem with the date and time of our meeting, by contacting the following researcher: Judy Rapp: ____ I can also be reached at: ____.

Sincerely,

Judy Rapp

Thank you in advance for your contribution to this important research work.

Consent of Participant
I, _____________________________________________ agree / refuse to participate in this research study about the impact of teachers’ self-efficacy on classroom writing instruction.

________________________________________________________________________
PARTICIPANT                                         DATE

________________________________________________________________________
SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR                      DATE
APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
The “Write” Tools: The Impact of Teachers’ Self-Efficacy on Classroom Writing Instruction
Focus Group Meeting Protocol with Teachers

Date: _______________________

Time: ______________________

Site: _______________________

Participants: __________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Note to moderator: 
- have participants sign consent form
- make a nametag for participants
- invite participants to help themselves to food
- moderator’s speaking points are printed in italics

I. Introduction:

The moderator will introduce himself to the group.

“How do you do? My name is Judy Rapp. I teach fourth grade at Gwin Elementary School. Thank you for agreeing to participate in the focus group. You were invited to this focus group in order to begin exploring the impact of teachers’ self-efficacy on their classroom writing instruction. The aim of doing this will be to better inform other teachers and administrators of the meaning, importance, and relationship of self-efficacy in the teaching of writing. Your input is particularly important because of your expertise and dedication to the field of teaching.”

II. Ground Rules:

“We have several questions to go through and we want to try to let everyone answer them in approximately 40-60 minutes. Let’s follow some guidelines in order to make the best use of our time.”

- there are no right or wrong answers. All thoughts are important, so please don’t be afraid to give your opinion; it’s important just to get your thoughts written down.
- please speak up so everybody can hear if you have any questions;
- please speak one at a time;
this conversation is confidential. Your names will not be identified with the comments you share with us today;
- we won’t take a formal break, but feel free to go to the restroom or get more food;
- this session is being tape recorded in order to have an accurate account of your comments.”

“Are there any questions? OK, let’s start.”

[make sure the tape recorder is turned on]

III. Icebreaker

“Let’s go around the room and tell us your name. Please explain who you are and what grade you teach, and how long you have been teaching.”

IV. In-depth: Opening Question about self-efficacy in teaching in relation to classroom writing instruction; Reflective Journal

1. “You were recruited to be in this focus group because each of you has knowledge about the teaching of writing. Because you are a writing process teacher and have a strong sense of self-efficacy, you are invaluable to the profession. For the purposes of the topic of discussion today, self-efficacy is defined as the belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute courses of actions that include how people think, behave, and feel.

2. What you think self-efficacy means in terms of your writing instruction?

3. How would you describe yourself as a writer?

4. When you were in elementary school, what is an example of your own writing experience?

5. How have your own writing experiences from elementary school affected the way you teach writing in your classroom?

6. What is the most important influence on your classroom writing instruction?

7. How would you describe yourself as a classroom writing teacher?

“At this point, you will be given four questions/statements to make a response to in your journal. When you have completed it, please take it with you and reflect on the information included in the journal. We will discuss the questions/statements during the individual interview session. Additionally, please review the questions on the individual interview protocol I am giving you so we can further discuss your thoughts, experiences, and reflections.”

V. Closure

“Thank you for your time. If you would like to add to what you said today or you like to know how I am using the information you gave me, please contact me at school or by phone at 936-0649. I would like to invite you to participate in an individual follow up interview at your convenience.”
APPENDIX F

REFLECTIVE JOURNAL PROTOCOL
The “Write” Tools: The Impact of Teachers’ Self-Efficacy on Classroom Writing Instruction
Reflective Journal Protocol

Participant: ___________________________ Interviewer: ___________________________

School: ______________________________ Location: ___________________________

Title: ________________________________ Date: _______________________________

The extent, to which we enjoy teaching writing, has a lot to do with our own experiences of writing when we were in school. To better understand how teachers think of themselves as writers, particularly as it relates to their writing instruction, please respond to the following questions or statements before we meet for our individual interview:

1. Describe a favorite memory of writing you have either in school or outside of school.

2. Describe a piece of your writing that you especially liked.

3. What were some things your elementary teacher did to encourage you as a writer?

4. What did your teacher in elementary school do that inhibited you as a writer?

5. How were you taught to write?
APPENDIX G

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
The “Write” Tools: The Impact of Teachers’ Self-Efficacy on Classroom Writing Instruction
Interview Protocol

Participant: ____________________________ Interviewer: __________________

School: ________________________________ Location: _____________________

Title: __________________________________ Date: _________________________

Introduction
I want to thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I will be recording and transcribing, verbatim, what we say. It is important to me to give you a voice by accurately interpreting and representing what you say; therefore, I will be asking you to review my transcriptions and any notes I make regarding my interpretations. The transcription will be verbatim; including “uhs” and “ahs”, so that I do not paraphrase something you have said with an incorrect interpretation (These will not be included in the direct quotes of the final written paper).

What I am interested in exploring the impact of teachers’ self-efficacy on their classroom writing instruction. You’ve had a chance to review the questions I am going to ask you today and give them some thought. I really want to know your perspective so please feel free to discuss your views. In order to clarify what you mean, I may ask you some additional questions that you have not reviewed as we go along. Are you ready to begin?

Questions:
1. Describe how you implement and evaluate writing instruction in your classroom.
2. Please explain what you think the “meaning of self-efficacy is”? (A definition in your own words)
3. What qualities, both internal and external, foster teachers’ self-efficacy?
4. What qualities, both internal and external, hinder teachers’ self-efficacy?
5. How do these qualities contribute to your success as a classroom teacher?
6. How do these qualities prevent your success as a classroom teacher?
7. Describe five important characteristics a writing teacher should have.
8. Considering the students you teach, what are some ways in which you could bring these qualities into your writing instruction with them?
9. What are the most challenging aspects of writing instruction in your classroom?
10. What supports do you have for writing instruction in the classroom?
11. What types of feedback do you receive about writing instruction in your classroom? Why do you think it was given?
12. When students experience success with writing in your classroom, who do you believe should be given credit for it? Why?
13. Describe yourself as a writer.
14. Describe yourself as a writing teacher.
APPENDIX H

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION_protocol
The “Write” Tools: The Impact of Teachers’ Self-Efficacy on Classroom Writing Instruction

Classroom Observation Protocol

Participant: _____________________________ Interviewer: ______________________

School: _______________________________ Location: _________________________

Title: _________________________________ Date: _____________________________

Introduction
I want to thank you for allowing me to observe in your classroom today. The observation will last for approximately 30-45 minutes. What I am interested in finding out is how teachers value writing as a tool of learning and evaluation and how they implement related instruction in the classroom. Per your interview, the meaning of self-efficacy was defined and examples were given of how teachers’ sense of self-efficacy impacted classroom writing instruction from a teacher’s perspective. I am interested in observing your classroom during writing instruction time with your students and documenting it; my purpose is not to make any value judgments about the merit of your teaching practices. You’ve had a chance to review the observation protocol and to set a convenient time for the observation. It is important to me to give you a voice by accurately interpreting and representing what I observe; therefore, I will be asking you to review any notes I make regarding my observation. I really want to know your perspective so please feel free to reflect and discuss your views.

Description of Setting
The setting for this observation is in a local suburban elementary school with approximately ____ students in grades K-5th. This ____ grade classroom represents a broad range of diversities with a common bond of community. While English is the primary language of the students, ____________. The majority of these students come from upper-middle class families and live in comfortable homes. Demographics of this class show ____ Caucasians, ____ African-Americans, ____ Asians, and ____ Hispanics. Most of the children live with two parents in which both work outside the home.
## Observational Notes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Writing in the Classroom</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Reflective Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evidence that students write everyday</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prewriting, drafts, revisions, publishing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher writes with students / shares own writings with students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher modeled writing process steps</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher provided time and opportunity for students to use the process steps</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing strategies modeled through the context of student writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers provides opportunities for self-selection of writing topics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students working with partners or in small groups when they are writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students are encouraged by teacher to be independent writers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feedback provided by teacher through conferencing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher reads students’ writing for focused purpose, idea development, and organization without immediately focusing on grammatically errors or misspellings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategies for evaluation: e.g. selected, fully revised pieces, reflective portfolios, folder system, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evidence of published student writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evidence that students share/celebrate writing</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Form adapted from Regie Routman (2005; 2008)
APPENDIX I

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN USE
UAB's Institutional Review Boards for Human Use (IRBs) have an approved Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). The UAB IRBs are also in compliance with 21 CFR Parts 50 and 56 and ICH GCP Guidelines. The Assurance became effective on November 24, 2003 and expires on January 23, 2012. The Assurance number is FWA00005960.

Principal Investigator: RAPP, JUDY R
Co-Investigator(s):
Protocol Number: X090417006
Protocol Title: The "Write" Tools: The Impact of Teachers' Self-Efficacy on Classroom Writing Instruction

The IRB reviewed and approved the above named project on 4/22/09. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services. This Project will be subject to Annual continuing review as provided in that Assurance.

This project received EXPEDITED review.
IRB Approval Date: 4/22/09
Date IRB Approval Issued: 4/22/09

Marilyn Doss, M.A.
Vice Chair of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (IRB)

Investigators please note:

The IRB approved consent form used in the study must contain the IRB approval date and expiration date.

IRB approval is given for one year unless otherwise noted. For projects subject to annual review research activities may not continue past the one year anniversary of the IRB approval date.

Any modifications in the study methodology, protocol and/or consent form must be submitted for review and approval to the IRB prior to implementation.

Adverse Events and/or unanticipated risks to subjects or others at UAB or other participating institutions must be reported promptly to the IRB.
APPENDIX J

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Informed Consent Document

TITLE OF RESEARCH: The “Write” Tools: The Impact of Teachers’ Self-Efficacy on Classroom Writing Instruction

IRB PROTOCOL: X090417006

INVESTIGATOR: Judy Rapp

SPONSOR: UAB Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Explanation of Procedures

You are being invited to participate in a doctoral research study. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore teachers’ beliefs about their effectiveness on classroom writing instruction. The study seeks to understand how teachers think of themselves as writers, and how teachers describe the relationship between their beliefs about writing and implementing writing instruction in their classroom.

You have been purposefully selected for this study based on the fact that you are a teacher in kindergarten, first, second, or third grade and were recommended as a teacher of writing by your school principal. In this study, I am interested in finding your views and perspectives of your experience. You will be part of one focus group discussion held at Harriette W. Gwin Elementary School at a time convenient to participants, one face-to-face audio-recorded interview which will include a discussion of responses you will be asked to make in a reflective journal, and one classroom observation. You may request a second interview, if needed. The location and times of the individual face-to-face interview and the classroom observation will be designed to accommodate your schedule.

Prior to conducting any interviews with you, I will provide you an outline of questions I want to ask in order to give you time to think about your responses. Throughout the interviews, you might be asked some clarifying questions to elicit additional details and examples from your responses. Every precaution will be taken to ensure your confidentiality.

The time frame for your participation the study will be April, 2009 through September, 2009.

Risks and Discomforts

The risks and discomforts involved in this study are no greater than the risks and discomforts of day-to-day living. There is a risk of loss of confidentiality. Should you experience any anxiety or any type of reservation about the study, the interview and/or observation process will be stopped. Any interim results or protocol modifications, if necessary, will also be provided to my UAB dissertation committee for guidance.

Benefits

You may not benefit personally benefit from your participation in this research; however, your participation may provide valuable information for understanding teachers’ beliefs about their effectiveness on classroom writing instruction, how teachers think of themselves as writers, and how teachers describe the relationship between their writing self-efficacy and implementing
writing their classroom.

**Alternatives**
Your alternative is not to participate in this research study.

**Confidentiality**
Information obtained about you for this study will be kept private to the extent allowed by law. The data from this research will be used in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my degree of Doctor of Philosophy. I may choose to publish the findings of this study at a later date. I will take precautions to ensure your confidentiality by using a pseudonym instead of your real name. Research information that identifies you may be shared with the UAB Institutional Review Board (IRB) and others who are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to research, including the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP).

The audio tapes will be for the sole purpose of accurate data collection, and your responses will be strictly confidential. Your name will never appear on any collected data to protect your anonymity. The information from the interview will be used for recording and analysis purposes. All data, including the audio tapes, will be stored in a metal locked file cabinet, and will be destroyed in three years after the research is completed. In any publication related to this research, no information which could potentially identify any participants will be disclosed.

**Refusal or Withdrawal without Penalty**
Your taking part in this study is your choice. There will be no penalty if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide not to be in the study, you will not lose any benefits you are otherwise owed. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time. Your choice to leave the study will not affect your relationship with this institution.

**Cost of Participation**
There will be no cost to you from taking part in this study.

**Payment for Participation in Research**
For your participation, you will be compensated with a twenty-five dollar gift card if you complete the study. The gift card will be mailed to you one week following completion of all interviews and classroom observations. Any interviews that extend past May 2009 will be compensated with an additional twenty-five dollar gift card for participating in the research study. If you do not complete the entire study, you will be paid a pro-rated amount for the parts you do complete.

**Questions**
If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, please contact Judy Rapp. She will be glad to answer any of your questions. Ms. Rapp’s number is 205-936-0649. Ms. Rapp's email address is: jrrapp@hoover.k12.al.us.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact Ms. Sheila Moore. Ms. Moore is the Director of the Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (OIRB). Ms. Moore may be reached at (205) 934-3789 or 1-800-822-8816. If calling the toll-free number, press the option for “all

Participant’s Initials:______

Page 2 of 3
04/21/09
other calls" or for an operator/attendant and ask for extension 4-3789. Regular hours for the Office of the IRB are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday. You may also call this number in the event the research staff cannot be reached or you wish to talk to someone else.

**Legal Rights**

You are not waiving any of your legal rights by signing this informed consent document.

**Signatures**

Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this signed document.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Signature of Participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Signature of Investigator</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Signature of Witness</th>
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