THE INFLUENCE OF EXPERIENTIAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS ON EFFICACY AND INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES: FOUR CASE STUDIES OF PRIMARY TEACHERS OF WRITING

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THE INFLUENCE OF EXPERIENTIAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS ON
EFFICACY AND INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES: FOUR CASE STUDIES OF
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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this qualitative, multi-case study were (1) to find similarities and differences in writing instruction between self-reported high and low efficacy teachers and (2) to explore the sociocultural and experiential influences which impacted the development of these teachers’ self-efficacy in writing. This study included four cases, two kindergarten and two first grade teachers. Two of the participants reported high efficacy, while the other two reported low efficacy on a writing Self-Efficacy Scale. Data were collected using interviews, classroom observations, and collection of documents.

The constant comparative method of qualitative analysis was used to analyze the data. As conceptual categories emerged from the analysis, the evidence was sorted into categories. Comparison of the categories to one another resulted in theory that is grounded in these findings and this context. Data analysis revealed two major findings: (1) classroom instruction of high efficacy teachers was more systematic, student-centered, and process-oriented than that of the low efficacy teachers and (2) influences on participants’ efficacy included early writing experiences in the home and school, and the influence of colleagues after the participants began their teaching careers. The grounded theory generated from these findings suggests that the writing instruction of teachers with high efficacy is more systematic, more student-centered and more process-oriented, the interactions and responses humans get from other human beings appear to be a critical
factor in the development of writing self-efficacy, and having high self-efficacy as a writer, resulting from positive experiences in regard to writing, increases the chances of a teacher having high self-efficacy as a teacher of writing.
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my husband, Chris, who refuses to take credit or be acknowledged for the overwhelming support, love and patience he has provided throughout our marriage and this process, even though he deserves every ounce of it and more.

Additionally, this study is dedicated to my children, Brooke, Aubrey, and Braydon. Hopefully they have taken from this process lessons about the importance of having a passion in life that leads you to accomplish great things and persistence that allows you to arrive at your destination with a feeling of great pride.
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CHAPTER I
THE PROBLEM

Background

The importance of writing. As American students graduate from high school and pursue various career paths, they are expected to have the ability to read and write at a skill level necessary to fully participate in our nation’s democracy. Unfortunately, our schools are not producing a plethora of students whose writing skills are encouragingly proficient. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress report (Salahu-Din, Persky, & Miller, 2008), only one in four high school seniors is capable of using proper spelling, grammar, or the higher-level writing skills needed to craft a clear, well-organized essay. College instructors report that an estimated 50% of high school students are not prepared for college-level writing (Peter D. Hart Research Associates & Public Opinion Strategies, 2005). In a report issued in 2004, The National Commission on Writing revealed that businesses in the United States spent $3.1 billion annually for writing remediation. Despite the obvious need for drastic improvement in the area of writing, The National Commission on Writing (2003) concluded that writing had become the “neglected element of American school reform” (p. 9), and thus labeled it the neglected “R” in education. Writing is thinking. According to Gammill (2006), “No other exercise in the classroom generates higher thinking skills than does writing” (p. 760). It can be used as a tool for understanding text in deeper and more connected ways.
Writing also helps students to make connections between what they read, understand, and think (Carr, 2002). While competent writing skills are necessary for composing such formal products as essays and reports for career and educational purposes, these skills are just as important in our everyday lives. Writing is one way people express their thoughts, ideas, feelings, and opinions. It is a necessary communication tool required in so many aspects of current culture. Text messaging, sending emails, leaving notes for family and friends, inviting others to a special event, and recording important information are some of the ways that people of all ages use writing throughout their daily lives.

Consequently, writing is also extremely useful and necessary for success within most work environments. A survey of 120 major American corporations initiated by The National Commission on Writing (2004) concluded, “in today’s workplace writing is a ‘threshold skill’ for hiring and promotion among salaried (i.e., professional) employees” (p. 3). Employers reported that two-thirds of salaried employees had some writing responsibility within their field including the production of technical reports, formal reports, memos, emails, PowerPoint presentations, and other forms of correspondence.

For young students, especially in primary and elementary classrooms, writing is also a tool for learning to read. According to Clay (1998), “writing can contribute to the building of almost every kind of inner control of literacy learning that is needed by the successful reader” (p. 130). Graves (2003) described reading and writing as complementary processes and states, “Children who write apply phonics, construct syntax, and experience the full range of skills inherent in authoring a text” (p. 2).
Moreover, writing is a powerful tool that can be used throughout life. Because of this, teachers of all grade levels and content areas should not only promote writing as a tool to extend reading, but also as a way for students to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a social way. Graves (1994) stated, “Unless children see themselves as authors with something to say, as writers with power to initiate texts that command the attention of others, they may remain as sheep both in the classroom and later in the larger society” (pp. 44-45).

The National Commission on Writing (2003) called for a new writing agenda for American schools, one that addresses the issue of the neglect of writing within the nation’s schools. The Commission’s suggestions for change included such action steps as revisiting state standards to ensure a comprehensive writing policy that doubles the amount of time students spend writing in school. This policy mandated writing instruction in all subject areas, as well as in all grade levels. The Commission also believed that reform must happen in the preparation of writing teachers, stating that more money should be devoted to training pre-service and practicing teachers through the development and availability of more courses required for licensing. However, it is doubtful that by simply completing a course in writing instruction, teachers will become effective writing teachers who thread writing throughout the content areas, and devote a considerable amount of time to writing in their classrooms.

Teacher Efficacy

Within the scholarly research community, confidence in one’s ability to affect student performance has commonly been referred to as teacher self-efficacy (Berman,
McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977). Research has shown a link between teacher efficacy and a wide variety of other factors. For example, teacher efficacy has been found to be a strong predictor of student reading achievement (Armor et al., 1976) as well as an influential factor in students’ academic motivation and achievement in other areas (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998).

Unfortunately, a recent national survey of primary teachers revealed that many educators do not feel confident in their capabilities and skills for teaching writing, do not believe they are effective, and do not enjoy writing themselves, or teaching writing (Cutler & Graham, 2008). Far too many teachers report that they do not feel confident in their ability to affect student achievement positively in the area of writing (Cohen & Weiner, 2003).

Cohen and Weiner (2003) attributed the development of low self-efficacy to three factors. First, many teachers have had negative experiences with writing in school. Second, teachers may lack confidence in themselves as writers, in part because they have a perception that writing is difficult. Third, some teachers believe that past experiences within their teacher education programs did not prepare them adequately.

In order to address American students’ inability to achieve writing competence, the issue of teacher efficacy must first be addressed. How efficacy develops and impacts instructional practices within the classroom should be of utmost concern. Fenstermacher (1979) observed that beliefs, including self-efficacy beliefs, may be the single most important construct in educational research. This study compared the beliefs, experiences, and instructional practices of two primary teachers of writing with low self-efficacy to those of two primary teachers of writing with high self-efficacy.
Statement of the Problem

Educators have long recognized the strong connection between writing and reading proficiency; however a large percentage of American students continue to graduate from high school lacking the basic writing skills required for success in higher education and in many careers (Peter D. Hart Research Associates & Public Opinion Strategies, 2005). Furthermore, while many teachers have reported a lack of confidence in their ability to teach writing, little information is available regarding the reasons for varying levels of self-efficacy amongst primary-grade teachers of writing. Since it is widely acknowledged that a teacher’s attitudes, beliefs, and instructional skill are a strong influence on student learning, understanding the impact of self-efficacy on teachers’ writing instruction is an important first step to improving the quality of student writing in American classrooms.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and compare the beliefs, experiences, and instructional approaches of primary teachers of writing. As Hancock and Algozzine (2006) explained, the purpose of a case study is neither to confirm nor prove relationships, but rather to explore and identify themes or categories of behavior. Current research supports the important connection between teacher efficacy and student achievement, yet there is little descriptive data available regarding how positive teacher efficacy develops. This study provides information regarding the development of efficacy among writing teachers, a necessary step in the development of more confident and
skilled writing teachers who can positively impact the writing abilities and attitudes of our youth.

Research Questions

1. What similarities or differences occur within the writing instructional practices of four primary-grade teachers of writing, two of whom report high self-efficacy and two of whom report low self-efficacy?
2. What, if any, sociocultural or experiential factors influenced these primary teachers’ development of self-efficacy as writing instructors?

Assumptions

This study is based on two assumptions. First, teachers work in complex sociocultural settings. The decisions that classroom teachers make on a day-to-day basis are driven by not only their past experiences, but also by the context of their work environment. Second, it is assumed that teachers are ethical professionals who reported beliefs and experiences in a truthful manner.

Definition of Terms

1. Case study. The “intensive analyses and descriptions of a single unit or system bounded by space and time” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 9). Merriam (1998) defined case study research as “an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group” (p. 9). The researcher takes things as they are and does not manipulate variables. The end product will be a holistic, intensive description and interpretation of the phenomenon investigated.
2. Experiential Factors. Influences on individuals’ thinking as “gained knowledge through direct observation or participation…practical knowledge, skill, or practice derived from things personally encountered, undergone, or lived through” as they generally occur over the course of time (experience. Merriam-Webster Online, 2010).

3. Literacy. The capacity to accomplish a wide range of reading, writing, speaking, and other language tasks associated with everyday life (International Reading Association [IRA], 2004).

4. Observer as participant. This role was described by Merriam (1998) as any situation that involves a researcher whose primary mode of participation is that of observer and information gatherer, while participation in the group is secondary.

5. Primary teachers. Classroom-based educators who instruct any grade level within the range of kindergarten through grade three.

6. Professional development. A model for ongoing learning designed to help teachers gain new knowledge and adopt new practices in order to improve student learning. This model could include more traditional, off-site activities such as workshops, conference sessions, and seminars (Joyce & Showers, 1995) or could include more non-traditional, on-site types of development such as study circles and inquiry groups (Ball & Cohen, 1999).

7. Self-efficacy. The measure of an individual’s confidence in mastering a new skill or challenge. It is a cognitive process and future-oriented belief about a person’s capacity to perform at a given level of attainment, which influences effort, persistence, and resilience (Bandura, 1997).
8. **Sociocultural factors.** Large-scale forces within cultures and societies that affect the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of individuals. McLaren (as cited in Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 236) explained that social construction of knowledge is “the view that knowledge is constructed symbolically by the mind through social interaction with others and is heavily dependent on culture, context, custom, and historical specificity. This study considered the impact of these forces in relation to personal writing and writing instruction that participants have encountered both as students and as adults.

9. **Teacher beliefs.** Teacher attitudes about education including schooling, teaching, learning, and students. Various strands of beliefs can influence teachers’ thinking about instructional practices, how teachers conceptualize and learn subject matter related to the subjects they teach, and their views and actions related to diverse and difficult to teach students (Pajares, 1992).

10. **Teacher preparation programs.** Educational programs responsible for the preparation and licensure of classroom teachers at the elementary, middle, and secondary levels. Most teacher preparation programs provide coursework in child development and pedagogy as well as a variety of instructional experiences in real classrooms.

11. **Theoretical orientations.** Types of epistemological beliefs that include teachers’ theories about schooling, students, curriculum, pedagogy, and the teachers’ role (Porter & Freeman, 1986). These philosophical principles guide teachers in their decision-making within their own classrooms (Harste & Burke, 1977). Researchers tend to describe teachers of writing using one of the following theoretical orientations: the traditional approach, the process approach, or a combination of the two.
12. **Triangulation.** A qualitative research technique. Triangulation occurs when data obtained from one method is compared to data obtained in other ways. If the data agree or at least do not contradict, triangulation has occurred and provides support for a finding (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 266).

13. **Writing.** “…composing and expressing ideas through letters, words, art, or media and print, something that only occurs when mental operations (processes) are mobilized for the purpose of composing and expressing ideas” (Dahl & Farnan, 1998, p. 5).

**Summary**

Although research has shown the importance of learning to write at proficient levels, many students leave American classrooms without the writing skills they need to succeed in furthering their education or entering the work force. Furthermore, many teachers report negative attitudes toward the teaching of writing, even within the primary grades. Whether teachers report having high or low self-efficacy, the perception of their ability to teach writing impacts their teaching behaviors and practices.

Currently, research lacks descriptive information regarding how teachers’ sense of self-efficacy in the area of writing develops over time. This study, therefore, was designed to explore the impact of experiential and sociocultural factors on primary grade teachers’ efficacy in regard to writing instruction. By comparing the sociocultural and experiential background as well as the instructional practices of two primary grade teachers who reported high self-efficacy with that of two teachers who reported low self-
efficacy in the area of writing instruction, this study intended to shed light on the factors which lead to the development of these self-perceptions.

Chapter II offers an in-depth review of literature that addresses the areas of writing instruction from a historical perspective, effective instructional practices in the area of writing, and the belief systems of teachers. Chapter III describes the methodology for the study. Chapter IV presents the data and data analysis, along with an in-depth review of the findings. Chapter V summarizes the findings of the study and also includes recommendations for increasing primary teachers’ self-efficacy in the area of writing instruction.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to explore the development of teachers’ self-efficacy in the area of writing instruction. The study focused on those classroom instructional practices as well as various sociocultural and experiential factors identified by research literature to be influential on the self-efficacy of teachers. A review of the literature on the following topics provided the conceptual framework for this study and is included in this chapter: the history of research on writing instruction in the United States, classroom instruction in the area of writing, and teacher belief systems.

History of Research on Writing Instruction in the United States

**Early research on the writing process.** In the times of colonial America, it was traditionally believed that children learn to read and then write. During this time writing instruction placed an emphasis on penmanship and transcription of text, and was only considered necessary if one planned to go to college or work outside the home (Farnan & Dahl, 2003).

It was not until 1947 that the professional literature mentioned the steps of the writing process (Day, 1947; Mills, 1953). Early research on the stages of the writing process began with a focus on what professional writers did while they composed texts
One of the most widely referenced descriptions of the writing process was Rohman’s (1965) linear three-stage model: prewrite, write, rewrite. Although researchers refer to the various stages of the writing process using a variety of terms, most include sub-processes such as the following: topic selection, rehearsing, accessing information, paying attention to spelling and handwriting, reading, organizing, editing, and revising (Graves, 1981).

In the 1970s and 1980s research in the area of writing processes shifted from quantitative to qualitative, and researchers such as Emig, Graves, and Murray started to observe writers while they were in the midst of the writing process. This resulted in the finding that children write using slightly different strategies and processes than more experienced writers. Emig’s (1971) study involving twelfth graders’ composition processes led her to believe that the writing processes of her students’ were somewhat linear in nature. However, almost a decade later, a revolution in writing research occurred as a result of research by Flower and Hayes (1980), which presented evidence that the writing process was instead recursive—meaning that as the writer composes, text decisions are constantly being made that involve moving back and forth through subprocesses.

In his work with second-grade writers, Graves (1973) discovered that young students display writing processes that include the use of talk to move through the process, as well as a greater quantity of drawing than older students. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) found that young children and novice writers differ from more experienced writers in that they have a hard time separating planning from actual text writing or drafting. Case studies of other young writers illustrated how they experiment
with written language and ways of representing meaning (Calkins, 1983; Dyson, 1989) which then led Dyson (1993) to conclude that inexperienced young writers can vary widely in the path that they take as they write.

During this same time period, writing was described as a dynamic process that is influenced by many variables including purpose, audience, type of writing, and the writer as an individual (Brozick, 1976; Flower & Hayes, 1980, 1981). Writing was considered more of a complex, cognitive act than a social one, and was viewed as a series of problems to be solved, sometimes automatically and other times with more attention and time (Flower & Hayes, 1980).

**Social aspects of writing.** During the 70s the social aspects of writing were only briefly addressed in the literature. Students’ interactions with others during the writing process were reinforced by Vygotsky’s early work concerning the zone of proximal development and the importance of adult guidance in developing students’ abilities. Research began to reveal that children need social interactions with others, including their teacher and peers, during the writing process so that these processes can then gradually be internalized (Vygotsky, 1935/1978).

It was not until the late 80s and into the 90s that researchers began to explore more deeply the social aspects of writing. The writing process was now being viewed from the sociolinguistic perspective, which means that the social dynamic of the community of writers needs to be considered (Gunnarsson, 1997). Some researchers felt that earlier studies neglected some social aspects of the writing process such as the effects of social structures and classroom dynamics (Cooper & Holzman, 1989). Researchers found that when children planned their writing and composed drafts, their ideas were
influenced by the relationships they had with peers, the social values of the children (Dyson, 1989), and the social pressures within their environment (Dyson, 1994). As children wrote they accomplished social goals like gaining social status, group inclusion, and defining their identity (Dyson, 1993).

**The reading/writing connection.** During the 1960s Marie Clay introduced the term “emergent literacy.” She presented evidence that contradicted the past assumption that students should first learn to read and then be formally introduced to writing instruction. Within her research, she discovered that a child’s contacts and experiences with print at home and prior to any formal literacy instruction contribute to the future development of their literacy abilities (Clay, 1966). Writing played a significant role in the early learning of how reading works (Clay, 1975). Clay’s research revealed that writing instruction facilitates growth of developmental skills such as concepts of print and identification of letters and sounds. For very young children in the primary grades, writing also facilitates growth in phonemic awareness, while enhancing their awareness of how genres work as they find similarities within the framework and concepts of their writing and the texts they are reading (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006).

Reading and writing were described as “intertwined and inseparable language tools” (Langer & Flihan, 2000, p. 127). In his review of fifty years of studies about the reading/writing relationship some basic conclusions were drawn by Stotsky (1983) about the connection of the two: better writers tend to be better readers and tend to read more than poorer writers, while better readers tend to produce more mature writing than poorer readers. This research led us to believe that children develop simultaneously as readers and as writers. Gavelek, Raphael, Biondo, and Wang (2000) later discovered that
integration of the two leads to growth in both areas. During the whole language
movement in the 1980s, writing was often not taught as a separate subject in the early
grades, but rather, writing was used to support learning during reading instruction, as well
as during content area instruction.

Writing Instruction

**The complexity of writing development and instruction.** According to Bruning
and Horn (as cited in Boscolo, 2008), writing is a very complex task, especially for
young, inexperienced writers, and involves the learning of a variety of cognitive and
linguistic processes as well as motivational aspects like interest and efficacy. The
complexity involved in writing entails learning a large repertoire of tools and strategies
that will be used throughout the writing subprocesses (Boscolo, 2008).

The Position Statement of the IRA and the National Association for the Education
of Young Children (NAEYC) (1998) warned that teachers not only need to understand
the developmental continuum that children generally follow while learning such tasks as
writing, but also must understand that this continuum is not a rigid set of stages that stays
the same for all children. In essence, the Position Statement supported the stance that
students learn the skills needed to master the complex task of writing at varying degrees
and in varying amounts of time.

In regard to teaching the writing process, Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) made the
following point, “We don’t want to teach our students the writing process; rather, we
want each one of them to find a process that works for him or her” (p. 62). By helping
students to find an effective writing process of their own, teachers are more likely to get
“exemplary writing” from their students (p. 61). Murray (1985) noted that in light of the fact that the process of writing is so complex and also varies greatly among individuals, there is no one way to teach it. The “most effective and efficient way to teach writing” is any effort that is responsive to students’ efforts in ways that helps them to write more effectively (p. xiii). The IRA and the NAEYC suggested that effective teachers make instructional decisions based on their “knowledge of reading and writing, current research, appropriate expectations, and their knowledge of individual children’s strengths and needs” (IRA, 1998, p. 207).

**Best practices in writing instruction.** Within the literature, a variety of best practices for writing instruction were described. Researchers concurred that time set aside for writing needs to be frequent and predictable (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). Graves (1994) suggested that in order to become good writers, students need to write every day. Yet, many studies of writing instruction in American classrooms in the 80s showed that in general, children did not get ample opportunities to write (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006). One such study reported that students only spent 15% of their day writing and two-thirds of this time was spent copying in workbooks (Anderson, 1985). In addition, national studies revealed that children not only wrote for very short periods of time, but reportedly wrote in a limited number of genres (Applebee, 1981, 1984). According to the 1998 NAEP Reading Report Card (Donahue, Voelkl, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1999), students who reported writing large amounts regularly in response to questions scored higher than those who said they hardly ever write substantially in response to questions. The same results were confirmed by Donahue, Finnegan, Lutkus, Allen, and Campbell (2001).
Advocates of writing reform supported the notion that in order for true change to happen, American classrooms needed to double the amount of time spent writing, and suggested one way to do this was to encourage quality writing assignments in all subjects (National Commission on Writing in America’s Schools, and Colleges, 2003). However, in order for students to become proficient at writing, teachers cannot simply add time for students to write. Teachers also need to provide students with opportunities to participate in a wide variety of writing experiences (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006). Assignments in writing that combine the following key elements produce stronger writing: content and scope, organization and development, audience and communication, engagement and choice (Storms, Gentile, Riazantseva, & Eidman-Aadahl, 2000). An assignment designed to use these elements requires students to engage in critical reflection, analysis, and synthesis of the information from the text. It also gives the student a framework for organization and support in understanding the guidelines.

Inclusions of assignments that target a real audience and require students to produce authentic pieces of writing are essential to a quality writing program. Students need to write for a real audience, not for the teacher (Calkins, 1983; Graham, Harris, Fink, & MacArthur, 2001). In addition, students need a real purpose to write, which consists of authentic tasks such as creating real items like books, letters, and the like (Lapp, Flood, Moore, & Nichols, 2005).

Students need to have a reasonable amount of choice in their pace of writing, topics, and how they move through the process (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001; National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006). Students do not all work at the same pace during the writing process, so a teacher should not expect each student to start and finish their
writing at the same time with the same results (Dahl & Farnan, 1998). Allowing students to also determine the topic of their writing is one of the most highly endorsed instructional strategies due to the fact that most writing strategies can be used with any topic (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001; Graves, 1994, 2003; Ray, 2004; Spandel, 2005). Researchers discovered that there was not one process that worked for everyone, so students should be given the freedom to experiment with ways that work best for them (Graves, 1975; Murray, 1985).

Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) as well as Graves (2003) believed that teachers should use real literature within their classrooms as an instructional tool to enhance writing. By using literature within writing instruction, teachers then build reading/writing relationships, which allow students opportunities to talk about literature, and also show students what good examples of a writers’ craft look like. As noted by Graves (2003) children’s literature should be used to illustrate examples of a writer’s use of craft skills even if children are not yet able to use the techniques themselves.

According to Graves (1994) best practice includes the belief that students need to hear response to their texts while they are in the process of writing. In order to accomplish this, teacher-to-student and student-to-student conferences are used as an effective instructional tool. Teacher-to-student conferences allow an opportunity for the teacher to model for the students how to evaluate their own work and the work of others. Graves (2003) also suggested that teachers should use conferences regularly to listen to the processes students are using, to hear about their purpose, topic, and place in the draft and to ask questions about their work. Murray (1985) reported that while “conference teaching is the most effective and the most practical method of teaching composition,”
there are a variety of acceptable ways for teachers to hold conferences with students (p. 147). One of Murray’s recommendations for conferences was to have students lead them. If led by students, instead of the teachers, “conferences stimulate children” because the child takes charge of their own learning (p. 119).

Because Graves (1994) considered writing to be a social act, he emphasized the crucial need for time to be set aside for students to share their writing. According to Graves (2003), “writing is a public act, meant to be shared with many audiences” (p. 54). Graves also noted that publishing contributes to a sense of audience and further explained that all students should be given opportunities to publish their writing. The writers’ workshop format is an instructional framework that promotes the social aspects of writing such as students sharing their writing, as well as giving and receiving feedback (Atwell, 1987; Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). This instructional format originated from writing retreats designed for professional writers and was modified for use in the classroom (Atwell, 1987).

Teacher modeling is one of the most supportive of instructional approaches used within writing instruction and should be used to show every aspect of the process of writing (Lapp et al., 2005). Graves (2003) found that children often believe that adults do not struggle with writing. In order to assist children in their understanding of how the true writing process works, children need to see adults grappling with writing issues while in the act of composing. When teachers write in front of children in this way, it provides children a chance to see that nothing “magical” happens when experienced writers draft; words do not just appear without effort or revision. “The objective of composing before children is to make explicit what children ordinarily can’t see: how words go down on
paper, and the thoughts that go with the decisions made in writing” (Graves, 2003, p. 51). Ada and Campoy (2004), as well as Kara-Soteriou and Kaufman (2002) reported that despite the evidence showing the value of modeling in writing instruction, teachers fail to use it as an instructional approach. These researchers also found that modeling of the reading process by teachers in the study far outweighed teacher modeling of the writing process within the classrooms they observed.

**Teachers as writers.** Murray (1985) stated, “Teachers of writing do not have to be great writers, but they should have frequent and recent experience in writing” (p. 74). Teaching writing requires a deep understanding of the writing process itself. These experiences with writing and the understanding of writing enable teachers to demonstrate writing during class instruction in order to show children the process in action. Graves (2003) stated that, “teachers can answer children’s questions only if they know the writing process from both the inside and the outside” (p. 220) and that “the teaching of writing demands the control of two crafts, teaching and writing” (p. 5).

Graves (1994) declared, “the greatest long term influence on what the children in your classroom do is your own literacy” (p. 153). Teachers are more confident writing in front of children if they are actively writing themselves. They become more skilled and find solutions that help them to become better writers, which in turn helps their students. Lastly, Graves believed that teachers who write in front of their students are able to give children the clearest demonstration of the power and function of writing.

Most of the successful professional development programs designed to increase teachers’ competence in teaching writing are designed based on this premise that writing teachers need to be writers themselves. These types of trainings do not just teach the
participants how to teach writing, they immerse participants in the act of writing and allow teachers to self-reflect and discuss the processes that they use (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006).

**Current student achievement in writing.** In 2001, with the reorganization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, legislation titled No Child Left Behind required that states receiving Title I funding participate in assessments in the area of writing as well as math and reading. Generally, schools were required to assess writing in fourth, eighth and twelfth grades (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002).

In 2003, the National Center for Education Statistics issued a national report card on student writing performance. The Center found that between 24 and 31 percent of students in grades four, eight, and twelve performed at or above the proficient level.

The most recent NAEP report card results for writing did not include fourth graders, but did report results for both eighth and twelfth graders that revealed some improvement nationally (Salahu-Din et al., 2008). Average writing scores were higher than in previous assessments in 2002 and 1998, and increases in the percentages of students performing at or above the level of Basic were reported. In the state in which this study was conducted, at grade eight there were no significant changes in writing scores. Consequently, the average scores for students actually dropped by four points since the 2002 assessment. Just 32% of Ohio’s students reportedly performed at or above the Proficient level in 2007.
Belief Systems

Teacher beliefs. Pajares (1992) reported that all humans have a personal belief system that consists of a variety of types of beliefs including, but not limited to, educational, political, and religious beliefs. Beliefs help people to understand themselves and others, and to adapt to the world and their place in it. They provide “personal meaning and assist in defining relevancy” (p. 317). Beliefs help people identify with each other and “form groups and social systems,” and they “reduce dissonance and confusion” (pp. 317-318). The term teacher belief has been used inconsistently within the literature, sometimes being referred to instead as perspectives, personal epistemologies, personal knowledge, or conceptions, among others (Kagan, 1992). However, no matter what term is used, beliefs in regard to teachers can be defined as teacher attitudes about education including schooling, teaching, learning, and students (Pajares, 1992). Fenstermacher (1979) stated that beliefs may be the single most important construct in educational research, while both Nespor (1987) and Pajares (1992) felt that improving schools must start with understanding teacher beliefs.

Throughout the literature on teacher beliefs, discourse can be found in regard to whether beliefs and knowledge are related, and if so, in what ways. While beliefs result from an array of personal experiences in which individuals partake throughout their lives, knowledge refers to a person’s acquisition of factual information (Sigel, 1985). When compared to teacher knowledge, teacher beliefs are far more influential in determining how people organize and define tasks or problems, and are a stronger predictor of behavior (Nespor, 1987). In fact, Ernest (1989) discovered that teachers with similar knowledge taught in very different ways. In Pajares’s (1992) summary of the literature on
teacher beliefs, he concluded that knowledge and beliefs are “inextricably intertwined,” and that the nature of beliefs makes them a filter through which people interpret new phenomena (p. 325).

Harste and Burke (1977), as well as Fang (1996) found that the relationship between beliefs and teaching practice is complex and that teachers’ educational beliefs shape their instruction. Teachers draw on their beliefs to guide many on-the-spot decisions and their behaviors (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Kagan, 1992). As influential as beliefs are in determining actions taken by teachers, many other contextual and environmental variables were found to be influential. These included national, state, and local policies; school climate; the time period during which teachers are trained and enter the profession; the stage of their career; and the confidence they have in their own teaching (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1994).

Teacher beliefs have often been measured using self-report instruments (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Graham, Harris, MacArthur, & Fink, 2002). Although teachers are often reluctant to express unpopular beliefs on self-report measures (Alexander, 1992), teacher-stated beliefs regarding literacy generally do match up with actual instructional practices (Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996). In some instances when disconnects were found between beliefs and practices, it was often due to diverse contexts in which teachers were working, including the educational environment within the building and classroom (Fang, 1996).

**Self-efficacy of teachers.** Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as “belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 2). The RAND study (Armor et al., 1976) was the first national study
that looked specifically at the two dimensions of teacher efficacy: personal teaching efficacy and general teaching efficacy. In this study personal teaching efficacy referred to teachers’ beliefs about their own personal teaching competence, while general teaching efficacy referred to the extent to which teachers believe that they can overcome external obstacles in the lives of children in order to help them succeed (Ashton & Webb, 1986). A teacher with a high sense of general teaching efficacy believes that all students can learn, while a teacher with a low sense of general teaching efficacy believes that some students cannot or will not learn in school, and there is nothing the teacher can do about it (Ashton & Webb, 1986).

In his investigations, Bandura (1986) found that behaviors are better predicted by beliefs people hold about their capabilities, their self-efficacy, than by what they are actually capable of accomplishing. Generally it was believed that the level and distribution of effort a person puts forth were determined by the effects one believes actions would have, so behavior is better predicted from beliefs than from the actual consequences of a teacher’s actions (Bandura, 1986). Teachers’ sense of efficacy has been linked to quality and type of classroom practices implemented, students’ motivation and achievement, and also was found to influence effort, persistence, goals, and aspirations (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Teacher efficacy even predicted what the teacher would do when being observed (Ashton & Webb, 1986).

According to Guskey (1987) teachers’ perceived sense of efficacy influences teaching effectiveness. Moreover, teachers’ beliefs about their abilities to instruct students impact student performance (Armor et al., 1976; Berman et al., 1977). Gibson and Dembo (1984) also noted that teachers who have greater confidence in their own
abilities and believe that teaching influences student learning have students who then experience larger gains than students whose teachers do not feel they influence student learning.

Review of the research literature revealed that teachers who reported high efficacy were often linked to higher quality instruction (Rubeck & Enochs, 1991) as well as to higher student achievement (Armor et al., 1976; Ashton & Webb, 1986). Teachers with high efficacy also generally possess similar characteristics such as being more humanistic and less controlling (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990), more positive about teaching (Guskey, 1984), and better organized (Alinder, 1994). High efficacy teachers also tend to be more willing to figure out ways to meet the needs of struggling students within their classroom (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Stein & Wang, 1988).

Review of the research literature also revealed that teachers who have low efficacy tend to share some general characteristics. They have more anxiety and stress (Bandura, 1986) and are not as likely to maintain high academic standards and to have clear expectations (Ashton et al., 1982). Ashton and Webb (1986) found that these teachers are more likely to sort and classify students by ability, to distrust low-achieving students, and to use embarrassment and isolation in order to manage student behavior. Ashton and Webb also found that low-efficacy teachers often deemphasize instruction and possess an unwillingness to push students while monitoring their progress.

Additionally, these researchers noted that the gender of a teacher impacts their level of perceived self-efficacy, as was confirmed by Norwicki, Duke, and Crouch, (1978), when they found that females tend to be less confident in their abilities to perform certain tasks than males.
Some researchers noted that years of experience and professional training impact teacher efficacy. Gibson and Brown (1982) reported that beginning teachers with the least amount of training also demonstrate the least amount of personal teaching efficacy, which refers to the belief that teachers hold concerning their personal ability to effectively teach students. Consequently, these researchers found that personal efficacy scores increase with education. However, these researchers also found that the positive beliefs that these teachers held in relation to the power teachers have to overcome external obstacles to student learning (general teaching efficacy), such as family environment and support, declined as these teachers gained years of experience. Ashton et al. (1982) also reported on the difficulty teachers have in maintaining their levels of general efficacy as they gain more years in the teaching field. Uncertainty, isolation, and a sense of powerlessness were identified as threats to teachers’ efficacy within this study.

**Self-efficacy of writing teachers.** Self-efficacy has been described as context specific and variable from one situation to another (Bandura, 1981). Ashton and Webb (1986) further described a teacher’s sense of efficacy as situational, and variable depending on both direct and indirect influences on the situation. Direct influences included the students and the principal, while indirect influences included the students’ backgrounds, the school climate, the community, and the culture.

Teachers can have content specific low self-efficacy such as when they have low self-efficacy in teaching reading, but not in teaching math. However, there are only a few studies that specifically investigate self-efficacy of writing teachers in regard to their writing instruction. One such study by Graham et al. (2001) asserted that a large percentage of teachers reported feeling confident in their own teaching of writing, but not
as confident in their beliefs that teachers in general could overcome obstacles in order to help students succeed in their writing. This same study found that teachers who reported higher levels of efficacy in the area of writing also devoted more time to allowing students to compose and spent more time teaching grammar and usage in addition to the writing process. This concept of teachers with high self-efficacy devoting more time to instructional areas was further supported by the work of Schmidt and Buchman (1983).

Some teachers who work with primary children have reported negative feelings in regard to writing instruction. One recent national survey of primary teachers (Cutler & Graham, 2008) revealed that teachers only “moderately agreed” with the statements that they are effective teachers of writing, that they like to teach writing, and that they enjoy writing themselves (p. 911). In another study only a little more than half of the experienced teachers reported feeling confident about their capabilities and skills for teaching writing (Yates, 2004). To further support the concept of low efficacy in writing teachers, two other researchers reported that when they met with staff and teachers in order to plan a professional development program for a group of teachers, many of the teachers admitted feelings of low confidence in regard to their current approach to writing instruction (Oswald & Still, 2004).

Most of the current research that specifically investigates teachers’ sense of efficacy in the area of writing does not specifically address the reason why teachers feel so defeated, even though the reality is that “far too many teachers admit that they lack confidence in their ability to effectively teach writing” (Cohen & Wiener, 2003, p. 153). Cohen and Wiener attributed this common occurrence to a combination of four factors: the teachers’ own negative experiences with writing in schools, their lack of confidence
in themselves as writers, their perception that writing is difficult, and their perception that their teacher education programs were ineffective.

Theoretical orientations of writing teachers. Theoretical orientations are a type of epistemological belief that includes teachers’ theories about schooling, students, curriculum, pedagogy, and the teacher’s role (Porter & Freeman, 1986). They have been defined as philosophical principles that guide teachers in their decision making (Harste & Burke, 1977). Deryakulu (2004) found that teachers were likely to create programs within their classroom that were consistent with their orientations to teaching and learning. However, Davis, Konopak, and Readence (1993) discovered that teachers with similar theoretical orientations can vary considerably in their practices due to curriculum requirements, and also due to social, psychological, and environmental situations within which participants find themselves.

Oftentimes, researchers have categorized teachers’ instructional beliefs and practices into one of two different theoretical orientations: the traditional and the process approach. The traditional approach to writing has been characterized by an emphasis on using explicit instruction that focuses on correct form so that the written product is the main concern. The focus is on manuscript form, spelling, grammar, mechanics of writing, and copying text. The topic is selected for the students and writing time is more limited with less independent writing (Graham, 2000).

Teachers who have used this type of instruction tend to use the bottom-up approach, which is a focus first on small units like words, sentences, and paragraphs, progressing into larger units such as types of writing genres (Williams, 2003). Also generally associated with this approach to teaching writing is a focus on teacher
correction of student errors. Williams compared this practice to that of an editor “preparing manuscripts for publication” (p. 45). Consequently, Emig (1971) found little evidence showing that marking every error on students’ papers led to an elimination of these errors. Even though new research has surfaced regarding the negative aspects of the traditional approach, Williams (2003) described this approach as “the most influential and widely used approach to teaching writing today” (p. 46).

The process approach, sometimes called the progressive approach or natural learning approach falls more at the whole-language end of the continuum as it emphasizes informal methods of learning, producing a writing curriculum that uses real literature and interaction among teachers and peers (Graves, 1994, 2003). Some researchers described the process approach as a combination of direct strategy instruction, guided practice, theories and activities that emphasize procedures, and strategies that writers use for specific purposes (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1986; Cramer, 2001; Honeycutt & Pritchard, 2005). It usually involves the workshop approach, which focuses on the process more than on the product (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). As children participate in working through the processes of writing, they learn how they individually navigate the process while they take ownership of their writing. This approach is considered more student-centered and includes student choice, lots of time to write, writing for real audiences, and sharing their work with others (Graves, 1994, 2003).

Gray (2000) and Wilson (1994) used the descriptor “process approach” to describe an instructional balance focused on both the writing process and product, which is viewed as the most beneficial method for teaching writing. Teachers have reported
using instructional practices that align with this balanced approach to teaching writing. In fact, in the most recent national survey of primary teachers, 72% of teachers self-reported that they use the process approach to writing combined with the traditional skills approach (Cutler & Graham, 2008). In this study, only 20% reported using the process approach exclusively, while 6% reported using the traditional approach. But when asked to self-report the amount of time these teachers spend on various components of instruction, teachers actually spend more time teaching skills than allowing students to work through the process. Half of the time spent on teaching skills is time spent teaching grammar and usage. In another study, just over half (51%) of the respondents reported a focus on grammar and skill-based instruction, which tends to be associated with a more traditional approach (Applebee, 2000). Like the study by Cutler and Graham, Applebee concluded that most teachers were not reporting one or the other, but instead reported that they use both the traditional and process approaches in various combinations.

Past research has focused on the comparison of the process approach to the more traditional product-oriented approach and has resulted in the conclusion that the process approach results in better attitudes toward writing and stronger writing skills (Scannella, 1982). A NAEP report showed that teachers who reported using instructional techniques that were associated with the process approach to writing had students who scored higher on national assessments than students from more traditional writing classrooms (Goldstein & Carr, 1996). In a study done by Robinson (1986), students taught using the process approach not only scored higher on writing samples, but also did two and a half times more revisions than students who were taught using the traditional approach.
Instruction using the process approach has also helped students with learning disabilities improve their writing performance in the elementary grades (Croes, 1990).

Graham et al. (2001) found that teachers’ orientation to writing instruction made a significant contribution to predicting their efficacy. Teachers who were more positive about the process, or natural learning, approach were more likely to have confidence (or high teacher efficacy) in their teaching of writing. Teachers who placed less emphasis on the importance of being correct were more likely to be confident about the fact that they could overcome external factors in order to help students succeed.

Some debate stirred during the late 90s and early 2000s as to whether the process approach includes direct instruction. Some researchers believed that the term process approach is synonymous with the natural approach, which does not include direct instruction (MacArthur, Schwartz, Graham, Molloy, & Harris, 1996). However, research provided evidence that explicit instruction is beneficial to students (Hillocks, 1995; Honeycutt, 2002) and is necessary for their development in both reading and writing (IRA, 1998). Gersten and Baker (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of 13 studies in order to determine what effective writing instruction includes. They reported that it should include explicit instruction in the steps of the writing process and in the varying dimensions of writing genres as well as a structure that allows for writers to get feedback on their writing from peers and teachers.

In their study, Graham et al. (2002) reported that even though most teachers identified themselves with only one orientation, they actually combined aspects of various orientations within instruction. Ninety-nine percent of the teachers surveyed believed that explicit instruction was more important than the other two orientations.
However, 73% of the teachers also reported valuing natural learning, and 39% of them reported feeling that correctness is important. The findings from this study contradicted what past researchers believed. Freedman (1993) and Goodman (1992) felt that teachers cannot value both explicit instruction and the natural learning process approach.

Most of the research on teachers’ theoretical orientations to writing instruction used only self-report measures. However, Seban (2008) used a combination of teacher self-report surveys and classroom observations to confirm the information reported by teachers. This study revealed that four out of the six participants observed used a skill-based traditional approach to writing instruction despite the fact that they had initially self-reported being more process oriented. However, the remaining two teachers who stated they were more skill-based in their beliefs actually were consistent in their practice, based on classroom observation.

**Influences on belief systems.** Van Fleet (1979) reported that beliefs are formed simultaneously through cultural transmission in three ways: enculturation, education, and schooling. Enculturation describes the incidental learning that people experience throughout their entire lives, which includes observations, participation, and imitation. *Education* includes all directed and purposeful learning where the main task is to promote behavior that is considered “in-line” with mainstream culture. Education includes learning at home and outside of the school walls, but *schooling* refers to teaching and learning that specifically happens within the educational setting (Van Fleet, 1979). Graves (2003) found that some writing teachers who did not like to teach writing reported having “horrendous” writing experiences in school as students as well as at the university.
level and felt that they could not pass on the joy of writing because it had not been a joyful experience in their lives (p. 11).

Bandura (1977) explained that self-efficacy is formed in three ways: involvement in mastery experiences, observing others manage tasks successfully, and social persuasion. If a teacher had successfully performed a specific task in the past, then this had likely contributed to a high self-efficacy. Bandura contended that the successful completion of a desired behavior is the most potent source of self-efficacy; however other variables also impact self-efficacy. Teachers were also likely to feel confident in their ability to perform a specific instructional task if they had witnessed other, very comparable teachers, do so. Social persuasion such as positive verbal messages from others also contributed to a growing sense of efficacy. Bandura (1997) stated that in order to raise the self-efficacy in teachers, they need ample opportunities to observe experts in their field, practice new instructional strategies, and receive positive feedback from colleagues, students, parents, and administrators.

Allowing teachers to participate in decision-making has also had a significant impact on the development of teachers’ sense of competence (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978). Brookover and Lezotte (1979) suggested that principals who are strong instructional leaders influence teacher motivation. In another study, a principal’s support and positive recognition of teachers positively influenced teachers’ attitudes toward their job (Chapman & Lowther, 1982). Little (1982) suggested that the ways that these principals interacted and supported their staffs may have helped sustain these teachers’ sense of efficacy, which could have led to more effective instruction. Lastly, Ashton and Webb (1986) suggested that a lack of cultural awareness that can arise from racial and
socioeconomic differences between teachers and parents causes teachers to develop a low sense of efficacy.

Rokeach (1968) reported some assumptions about belief systems. According to him, beliefs differ in their intensity and power. Also, the more central a belief is, the more it will resist change. Munby (1982) found that the earlier a belief is incorporated into a belief structure, the more difficult it is to alter. Once a belief system is in place, it acts as a filter for all new information and it affects one’s perception of new ideas and information. The power of beliefs has been found to outweigh even the most convincing contrary evidence. So even if people were presented with scientific evidence that strongly enforced views to the contrary of their beliefs, it most likely did not affect their belief system much. Nisbett and Ross (1980) reported that people actually used cognitive tricks to turn conflicting evidence into support for their currently held beliefs. So, beliefs generally did not change even if it seemed logical or necessary.

Using Piaget’s assimilation and accommodation concepts, Posner, Strike, Hewson, and Gertzog (1982) described two ways that information might be incorporated into belief systems that result in belief change. Through assimilation, new information is incorporated into existing beliefs. Accommodation, which requires a more radical change, is when new information can not be assimilated, so existing beliefs must be replaced and reorganized. In their study, Posner and associates found that belief change was the last alternative for students who were presented with information that could not be assimilated. First they tried to reject the new information; then they considered it irrelevant. Next, they compartmentalized it to prevent it from conflicting with their existing beliefs. Then they attempted to forcefully assimilate it even though it obviously
conflicted. Usually someone has to be dissatisfied with existing beliefs or they have to have had an experience where their beliefs were challenged before they choose to accommodate.

**Impact of teacher preparatory programs on teacher beliefs.** Many researchers agree that understanding the belief structure of teachers and teacher candidates is essential to improving both teacher preparatory programs and teaching practices (Ashton, 1990; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Brookhart & Freeman, 1992). Cohen and Wiener (2003) attributed poor preparation in teacher education programs to one reason why teachers lacked confidence in their ability to teach writing effectively. Bartlett (2003) concluded that teacher education programs, even those found at the nation’s best colleges, treated writing as an afterthought instead of a high priority, which resulted in low-quality writing programs and writers. In a random survey of 36 universities conducted by Graves (1978), he found that 169 courses were offered in reading, 30 in children’s literature, and only two focused on the teaching of writing. This is supported by the work of Mathers, Shea, and Steigerwald (2009) who found that of the teachers they surveyed, the amount of reading courses elementary teachers completed as an undergraduate student outnumbered the number of writing courses at a ratio of four to one. The participants in this study, as well as those in a study by Chambless and Bass (1995), agreed that teacher education programs were not preparing them for teaching writing. Spandel (2005) and Thomas (2000) go so far as to state that most practicing teachers were never formally educated to teach writing.

As teachers leave teacher preparatory programs feeling ill-prepared, they often “revert to teaching in the manner in which they have been taught” (Stover, 1986, p. 21).
Unfortunately, teachers’ previous school experiences in the area of writing usually involved more traditional activities such as “assigning, collecting, and correcting writing” instead of “thinking out loud, talking about where personal writing topics come from, drafting on an overhead or chalkboard, reading an in-process piece aloud…” (Spandel, 2005, p. 78).

**Impact of professional development on teacher beliefs.** Professional study after entering the teacher profession has been found to be somewhat effective in helping form and change teacher beliefs about writing. Mathers et al. (2009) contended that teachers whom they surveyed reported most of their positive experiences with learning to teach writing related to post-undergraduate experiences like inservices, workshops, graduate courses, and collaboration with colleagues. In regard to teacher collaboration, participants reported that they turned to colleagues for guidance when they entered the profession under-prepared. Perry (2008) also found that the collegial support of colleagues during collaborative inquiry groups (CIGs) improved primary teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs in the area of writing instruction. However, Mathers et al. (2009) expressed their concerns that teachers who are giving advice may also be under-prepared and likely to be teaching in ways they were taught, which can contribute to the ongoing use of ineffective and traditional forms of writing instruction getting passed from one generation to the next.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Using an explanatory, multi-case research design (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Yin, 2003), this study compared the instructional practices and sociocultural or experiential factors identified as significant influences on the writing efficacy of primary teachers who reported low or high self-efficacy in the area of writing instruction. In this section, the researcher describes the methodology used in the study, as well as the population and setting. Additional sections describe the data collection and data analysis processes, as well as procedures for increasing validity. A timeline of the research is included at the end of this chapter.

Design of Study

Past research in the area of self-efficacy of writing teachers has often focused on measuring the self-efficacy of teachers and then comparing the results in a quantitative manner (Graham et al., 2001). While the use of such instruments to gather self-efficacy beliefs can reveal some insights into the personal attitude of teachers, these types of studies cannot investigate more deeply the sociocultural or experiential factors which may have influenced teachers’ current level of writing self-efficacy (Fang, 1996).

Case study design has been widely used to study teacher beliefs (Shulman, 1987). However, to date, no published studies have been designed for the purpose of identifying
and comparing the instructional practices with the sociocultural and experiential factors that may have influenced classroom teachers with high or low self-efficacy. According to Yin (2003), explanatory research tries to answer a “how” question. This study attempted to “explain” a course of events and relate the cumulative impact of those events and experiences on individual teachers’ efficacy levels.

Hancock & Algozzine (2006) defined case study research as, “intensive analysis and description of a single unit or system bound by space and time” (p. 9). Further clarified by Merriam (1998), a case could be a person, an event, a program, an incident, or a community studied within its natural context. In this study, a case was defined as a teacher of writing who perceived herself as either having low or high self-efficacy in the area of writing instruction. The goal of case study research, as described by Merriam, is to gain insights that can directly influence policy, procedures, and future research. Essentially, this study intended to shed light on what factors influenced primary teachers’ efficacy levels and the impact these influences had on classroom instruction.

Research Questions

Two research questions guided this study:

1. What similarities or differences occur in the writing instructional practices of four primary-grade teachers of writing, two of whom report high self-efficacy and two of whom report low self-efficacy?

2. What, if any, sociocultural or experiential factors influenced these primary teachers’ development of self-efficacy as writing instructors?
Research Setting

This study was conducted in a demographically diverse school district located in a large Midwestern state. The district is a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural areas. At the time the study was conducted the student population was 87% Caucasian, 8.5% African American, 3% multiracial, and 1.3% various ethnic categories. Fifty-one percent of students were eligible for the free or reduced lunch program. Over the last five years, the district had either been described as “Effective” or “Excellent” by the state’s Department of Education. These descriptors were used by the state to recognize schools which passed a specific number of indicators on school report cards, as determined by the achievement of students on the common state assessment administered in grades four and above.

The school district is composed of four school buildings, including a high school (grades nine through twelve), a middle school (grades six through eight), an elementary building (grades two through five), and a primary building (kindergarten and grade one). This study took place within the primary building, which was composed of approximately 280 students who were enrolled in all day, every day kindergarten and grade one. Approximately 62% of the students enrolled in kindergarten and first grade were enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program. At the time, thirty-five staff members were employed in the building. Fourteen of those staff members were classroom teachers, all of whom were Caucasian women.
Participant Selection

For this case study, the procedure used to identify and select participants was one described by Merriam (1998) as useful for identifying nonrandom, purposeful, and small samples. This study focused on four classroom teachers who either taught kindergarten or first grade. According to Merriam purposive sampling involves the selection of “respondents on the basis of what they can contribute to the researcher’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” (p. 83), so two teachers were chosen who reported low self-efficacy in the area of writing, as well as two teachers who reported high self-efficacy in the same area. Miles & Huberman (1994) explained, “by looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single-case finding, grounding it by specifying how and where and, if possible, why it carries on as it does” (p. 29).

After receiving informed consent, all classroom teachers in this building were given a survey to complete that was composed of two sections: a demographics section, followed by a section containing a scale on which they rated their perceived self-efficacy (see Appendix B). The demographics section included questions related to gender, age, years of professional experience, degrees held and institutions from which degrees were awarded, current position held, as well as other teaching experiences. The Self-Efficacy Scale ranged from one through ten, with descriptors including “Low Confidence,” “Some Confidence,” and “High Confidence.”

The researcher, who also served as the literacy coach in the building at the time of the study, administered this survey. The results of the survey were used to identify potential participants for this study, because they identified themselves as having high or low self-efficacy as writing teachers. Teachers chosen for the study were selected first
and foremost for their response to the self-efficacy scale. Teachers who fell at either end of the confidence continuum (i.e., “Low Confidence” and “High Confidence”) were deemed most appropriate for this study. In the event that more than two teachers identified themselves as having low or high self-efficacy, demographic information (e.g., years of experience, degrees held) were also considered as part of the selection process. Moreover, the researcher identified two teachers who had comparable efficacy levels as well as similar demographic characteristics, since as Merriam (1998) observed, some uniformity across cases that will be compared is desirable.

Thirteen out of the fourteen classroom teachers completed the demographics survey and self-efficacy scale. One teacher opted not to participate. After collecting the surveys, the researcher found that two teachers reported efficacy levels that fell into the “low confidence” range (a score ranging from one to three), while a total of four teachers reported self-efficacy scores in the “high confidence” range (a score from eight to ten).

The two teachers who reported low confidence, one kindergarten teacher and one first grade teacher, both agreed to participate in the rest of the study. Only one first grade teacher reported having high confidence, and that teacher was asked to be a part of the study. Three teachers of kindergarten reported having high levels of self-confidence on the scale. Two of these teachers had been teaching for almost twenty years, while one reported only four years of kindergarten teaching experience. In order to create a group of participants who were more comparable as far as years of teaching experience, the kindergarten teacher who reported having four years experience teaching kindergarten, plus additional years subbing and working in preschool was asked to participate in the next stage of this research. So after the completion of the initial demographics survey and
self-efficacy self-report scale, four participants were determined by the researcher to be ideal for the study: one kindergarten teacher and one first grade teacher who reported high efficacy as well as one kindergarten teacher and one first grade teacher who reported low efficacy.

Participants

Ms. Jessica

On the self-efficacy scale provided by the researcher, Ms. Jessica (pseudonym) self-reported her efficacy level in the area of writing instruction as an eight, which was considered “high confidence.” At the time of the study, she was in her fourth year of teaching every day, full day kindergarten in the district. Before teaching kindergarten, she had several years of experience as a substitute teacher in the district. During her years of substitute teaching she filled in for various teachers on long-term leaves of absence and also served as a kindergarten interventionist for part of a year. Ms. Jessica also worked for a year and a half as a preschool teacher in a private preschool immediately after graduating with her undergraduate degree. In addition, her past work experience included a few years of working outside of education while raising a son.

Ms. Jessica earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Elementary Education (kindergarten-grade eight) with a minor in Literature from a private, religious university in a rural part of the state in 1995. At the time of this study, she had been working toward a graduate degree in Special Education at a local Christian university. Ms. Jessica had completed five courses focused on the topics of general learning disabilities and reading development.
**Mrs. Lippy**

Mrs. Lippy (pseudonym) self-reported her efficacy level as a “2/3” (she drew a circle that included both numbers), which was in the “low confidence” range on the writing instruction self-efficacy scale. During this study, Mrs. Lippy was finishing her first year as a full-time kindergarten teacher in the district. However, she had many years of experience in a variety of other roles. The year prior, she served as a Title I tutor in this district in the mornings and in a neighboring public school district in the afternoons. In the past, she had also served as a long-term substitute teacher in a second grade classroom in the neighboring district. All of these experiences occurred after she received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education (pre-K through grade three) from a local Catholic university in 2007.

Prior to receiving her bachelor degree, Mrs. Lippy had worked as a preschool teacher. She received her Associate degree in Early Childhood Education from a local Christian university in 1994. She then worked at a private, religious preschool for ten years where she also served as a mentor teacher and worked with school faculty to gain state accreditation.

**Mrs. Rose**

On the self-efficacy scale, Mrs. Rose (pseudonym) rated herself as having “high confidence” in the area of writing instruction by selecting an eight. She was completing her eighth year as a full-time first grade teacher at the time of the study. Prior to being hired as a first grade classroom teacher, she worked in the district as a Reading Recovery teacher, Title I teacher, and LD tutor. Before coming to this district, Mrs. Rose worked in
a public school district in a neighboring county for a total of four years as an LD tutor, Reading Recovery teacher, and Title I tutor.

Mrs. Rose graduated from a local public university in 1996 with a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education (grades one through eight). During the 1998-99 school year she was trained in Reading Recovery and then went on to receive her Master’s degree in reading in 2004 from the same university she attended for undergraduate studies.

Mrs. Roz

At the time of the study, Mrs. Roz (pseudonym) was in her sixth year teaching first grade in the district. Prior to coming to the district she worked in a neighboring public school district as a first grade teacher for three years, and as a special education teacher for five years. During her time as a special education teacher she first worked with students with multiple disabilities in grades six through eight, and then with students in kindergarten through third grade.

Mrs. Roz received her Bachelor Degree in Elementary Education (grades one through eight) and Special Education (K through twelve, LD/DH/MH) from a local private Catholic university in 1994. Then in 2008, she went on to receive her Master’s degree in The Art of Teaching from an out-of-state college through off-campus correspondence courses. Recently she had applied for and received a “Master Teacher” designation through the state Department of Education.

Role of Researcher

Qualitative case study research is based on the view that “reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). In order to attain
in-depth information about these interactions, various methods of data collection are common; however, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). Guba & Lincoln listed a variety of benefits in regard to the researcher as instrument. They stated that humans are “responsive to the context…can adapt techniques to the circumstances…can process data immediately, can clarify and summarize as the study evolves, and can explore anomalous responses” (as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 7)

Data Collection

The key concern in qualitative case study research is to understand the phenomenon under study from the participants’ perspective (Merriam, 1998). In this study three established data collection procedures were used: interviews, observations, and documents. No data was collected until the appropriate paperwork had been submitted and approved by The University of Akron Institutional Review Board.

**Interviews.** According to Merriam (1998), researchers can use interviews in order to elicit information that cannot be observed or replicated. Data collection for this study involved the use of two individual interviews conducted with each participant. According to Hancock & Algozzine (2006), individual interviews “yield significant amounts of information from an individual’s perspective” (p. 39) and are also appropriate when a researcher is interested in events that happened in the past, and that are impossible to replicate.

The first interview for each participant was a semi-structured interview using a protocol that had been developed based on the current literature in the area of writing
instruction and teacher efficacy. Hancock & Algozzine (2006) described a semi-structured interview as one in which the researcher asks predetermined questions that can be flexibly worded. This type of interview also allows the researcher to ask follow-up questions to probe more deeply into any areas of interest. This protocol consisted of questions developed by the researcher that were related to a variety of sociocultural or experiential influences pertinent to the development of self-efficacy (see Appendix C).

Interviews took place at a mutually agreed upon location that allowed for privacy and uninterrupted conversation, as suggested by Hancock & Algozzine (2006). After getting permission from participants, these interviews were audio taped and thereafter fully transcribed by the researcher. As described by Hancock & Algozzine, the researcher “transcribes the recording for closer scrutiny and comparison with data derived from other sources” (p. 40).

After these initial interviews, the researcher conducted observations of writing lessons in each participant’s classroom. Additional interviews with each participant followed as needed, sometimes through email correspondence, after analysis of these observational notes. Patton (1990) explained that such post-observational interviews assist the researcher in being “highly responsive to individual differences and situational changes” (p. 282). These brief interviews were used to elicit any information not yet gathered, or data necessary to answer any questions that remained unanswered. Since these interviews were specific to questions that arose from classroom observation, as well as initial interview data, an identical protocol was not used for each participant because information needed in regard to the research questions, prior interviews, and observations varied among participants.
Observations. Merriam (1998) described observational data as “a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest” (p. 94). Kidder (1981) noted that observation is a research tool which not only serves a “formulated research purpose,” but also is deliberately planned, and recorded systematically (p. 264). During this study, the researcher conducted two classroom observations for each participant. These observations were deliberately planned to coincide with regularly scheduled writing lessons within the classroom setting.

During these observations, the researcher filled the role of observer as participant. This role was described by Merriam (1998) as any situation that involves a researcher whose primary mode of participation is that of observer and information gatherer, while participation in the group is secondary.

Descriptive field notes were gathered during the observations and were fully expanded as soon after the observations as possible, often within 24 hours. As Merriam (1998) suggested, these field notes included descriptions of the setting, people, and activities, as well as comments made by those being observed, as well as the researcher. Furthermore, these observations of classroom instruction were videotaped for the purpose of verifying field notes taken by the researcher.

Documents. Merriam defined documents as, “a wide range of written, visual, and physical material relevant to the study at hand” (p. 112). In order to assist the researcher in answering the question related to classroom instruction, participants were asked to produce photocopies of lesson plans for writing instruction spanning at least two weeks. These documents augmented field observations, thus allowing the researcher to understand each participant’s classroom instruction more fully. The data gathered
through the use of these specific documents also assisted in confirming the analysis and findings of data gathered from other sources throughout this study.

As the researcher encountered more documents during the course of the study that were deemed useful in answering research questions, they were collected and analyzed as additional data sources. Merriam (1998) stated that although qualitative fieldwork is systematic, it also allows for “accidental uncovering of valuable data” (p. 120). The types of documents that were collected for this study included student writing samples, graphic organizers, pictures of charts created during writing instruction, as well as copies of district assessments and state standards.

The interviews and observations took place over a period of two weeks during the last half of the school year. After the conclusion of data collection and analysis, results were shared with participants. At that time, participants were encouraged to share their reactions, questions, and concerns. Participants were given a small gift card to a local business after completing all components of the study and were guaranteed anonymity throughout. All data was stored in a secure, locked file cabinet to which only the primary researcher had access.

Data Analysis

Grounded theory was first introduced by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 and is a specific research methodology that is meant to derive meaning from the data, which results in an emerging theory (Merriam, 1998). This theory that develops was described by Merriam as “substantive” and furthermore, as having a “usefulness to practice” (p. 17). This study aimed to generate a new theory as to how specific sociocultural and
experiential factors contribute to the development of high and low efficacy of teachers in the area of writing instruction.

Merriam (1998) described the first stage of data analysis as “holding a conversation with the data” which entails review of the data collected while simultaneously making comments and observations about it. The researcher then labels the data by coding it into schemes or topics related to the research questions (Patton, 1990). While all data sources were enlisted to answer the research questions, observational and document data were primarily analyzed to identify patterns within the instructional practices of these teachers. Interview data were primarily scrutinized for key phrases and recurring themes that described teachers’ sociocultural and experiential influences on their self-efficacy and writing instruction.

A “discovery-focused” procedure for analyzing data was used to establish patterns and connections among elements of data (Tesch, 1990). When using this procedure, the unit of analysis is usually larger than single words or a phrase. Most often it is segments of texts that contain a particular meaning. In this study, these types of units of analysis were grouped and coded according to sociocultural and experiential influences on efficacy determined by previous research. Some of these previously determined influences on self-efficacy included: years of experience and professional training (Gibson & Brown, 1982), school climate, community, and culture in which they teach, as well as colleagues’ actions, views, and attitudes (Ashton Buhr, & Crocker 1984), teacher experiences with writing as a student and as an adult including those within teacher preparatory programs (Cohen & Wiener, 2003; Graves 2003), and the teacher’s history of successfully teaching writing as well as opportunities to observe colleagues who
successfully teach writing (Bandura, 1977). The researcher also coded any other themes that emerged as influential factors on efficacy levels that were not previously mentioned within the literature.

As the process of data analysis continued, “Major modifications become fewer and fewer as the analyst compares the next incidents of a category to its properties” (Patton, 1990, p. 110). The process used by this researcher in this study was mainly inductive; however, the researcher did go back and forth between deductive and inductive modes of thinking. The researcher continually evaluated the data support in relation to categories that were constantly emerging. According to Merriam (1998), the overall object of this analysis is to seek patterns in data. These patterns were arranged in relationship to each other in the building of a grounded theory. New data gathered from all sources were constantly compared to other data sets. Glaser & Strauss (1967) described this “constant comparative” method as a process in which the data are continuously scrutinized, so that it gradually evolves into an emerging framework that guides the researcher’s further data collection.

Stake (1995) described the process of data analysis as “trying to understand behavior, issues, and contexts” by asking ourselves, “What did that mean?” (p. 78). He also stated that, “we must take more time, looking them over again and again, reflecting, triangulating, being skeptical about first impressions and simple meanings” (p. 78). To that end, a separate “case” that provided insights about the research questions was constructed for each participant. The researcher identified patterns within each case and generated categories based on those patterns. Next, categories were compared in order to determine what, if any, patterns were evident across cases. The ultimate goal of data
analysis was to generate a theory about the instructional practices and influence of sociocultural or personal experiences that impacted the writing self-efficacy of these participants.

Validity

Merriam (1998) reported the use of a variety of strategies to enhance internal validity within qualitative research. Some of these basic strategies include triangulation, member checks, and peer examination, all of which were used by the researcher within this study.

Triangulation is generally described as a procedure for establishing validity. It has been used within case study research for over sixty years (Foreman, 1948). Within this study, triangulation occurred as multiple sources of data were used to assist in answering research questions (Yin, 1984). Observations, in conjunction with interviewing and document analysis, were used to “substantiate” findings (Merriam, 1998, p. 96).

Member checks required the researcher to share raw data, as well as early data interpretation, with the participants from whom it was gathered. This procedure was used to enlist participants’ input as to the plausibility of the results (Merriam, 1998). In this study member checks were used throughout the data collection process in order to gain insight about the data from the participants’ perspectives. Similarly, tentative and definitive findings were also shared at the conclusion of the data analysis process.

Merriam (1998) suggested the use of peer examination as a procedure for increasing validity, which involves “asking colleagues to comment on the findings as they emerge” (p. 204). Throughout this study, the researcher involved three colleagues in
the examination of findings as data were collected and analyzed. These colleagues were either graduate students or university faculty with expertise in literacy education.

Reliability

Reliability has been defined as “the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Often used within experimental research, it is “based on the assumption that there is a single reality and that studying it repeatedly will yield the same results” (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). However, achieving reliability in this sense within educational research is impossible. Merriam described quantitative studies in education as “flux, multifaceted, and highly contextual” (p. 206). The data gathered vary depending on who provides it and the skills of the researcher gathering it; therefore, replication of the study would not yield the same results each time.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the word “consistency” be used instead of reliability within qualitative research (p. 288). The researcher should strive for results that are consistent with the data collected. Several techniques can be used to ensure consistent results. This researcher explained the assumptions behind the study (see “Assumptions” in Chapter I), described her position within the group (see “Role of Researcher” in this chapter), and described the participants and social context from which the data were derived (see “Research Setting,” “Participant Selection,” and “Participants” in this chapter).

Triangulation and the use of an audit trail were two other techniques used to ensure consistent results (Merriam, 1998). In this study, multiple methods of data collection were used to increase reliability as well as validity. An audit trail has also been
included by the researcher, which describes how data was collected and analyzed as well as how decisions were made throughout the study.

Timeline for Study

End of February: Dissertation committee approved the study. IRB paperwork was submitted and approved.

March: Gatekeepers of research site were contacted for permission to conduct the study. Approval was received.

March: A meeting was held at the research site. At this meeting a consent form was provided which explained the purpose of the study as well as details about participation (see Appendix A). At this meeting, classroom teachers completed the survey that included demographics questions and the self-efficacy scale.

March: Data gathered on surveys was analyzed in order to find suitable participants. These participants then agreed to participate in the full study. Initial one-on-one interviews were scheduled and conducted, lasting approximately one hour each.

Late March: Classroom observations were conducted for each participant.

Early April: Follow-up interviews occurred as needed.

April: Data were reported to participants in order to get feedback. Gift cards were given to participants along with a note thanking them for their participation.

May–June: Data were written in a descriptive format for Chapter IV and results, summary, and implications were reported in Chapter V. These chapters were sent to committee members for feedback and final editing occurred as a result of feedback gained.
June: Advisor-approved chapters were presented to the committee for final defense.
July: Final edited version of dissertation was presented to the graduate school for approval (with signatures).

Limitations of the Study

Creswell (2003) defined limitations as possible threats to the internal and external validity of a study. One limitation of this study is the sample size of four primary teachers. Hopkins (2006) suggested that a sample size that is too small may not produce a clear outcome; however Merriam (1998) contended that the interest of a case study is in the process, not the outcomes.

Not surprisingly, in the use of humans as instruments, personal biases can sometimes interfere because, as Merriam (1998) noted, “All observations and analyses are filtered through that human being’s worldview, values, and perspective” (p. 22). Hence a second limitation to this study was the fact that the researcher worked at the research site. As a literacy coach working in the primary building of study, for example, the researcher may have already established rapport with potential participants. The researcher recognized the possibility that this could impact the data collection in both positive and negative ways. Participants may have felt uncomfortable sharing personal information with the researcher due to the fact that they had an ongoing work-related or personal relationship. On the other hand, there is also the possibility that participants felt more comfortable sharing information that may not otherwise have been shared with a researcher who was unfamiliar with the staff. In order to minimize this possibility of researcher bias, data was triangulated (see “Validity” section).
The last limitation of this study was the relatively small amount of time spent interviewing and observing the participants. The data collection portion of this study lasted a total of one month. Ideally, long-term observation of behaviors and more time spent gathering interview data would produce a larger set of data from which to draw conclusions, however time and funding restraints limited this study.

Summary

This study used an explanatory, multi-case research design (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Yin, 2003) to compare the instructional practices, as well as the sociocultural and experiential factors, that may have influenced the efficacy levels of primary teachers who reported low and high self-efficacy in regard to writing instruction. Using non-random and purposeful sampling, the researcher identified two teachers who reported low efficacy and two who reported high efficacy in the area of writing instruction to serve as participants. Interviews, observations, and documents all served as sources of data for this study and data collection spanned approximately four weeks. A constant comparative method of data analysis was used to analyze data, and subsequently grounded theory emerged. In order to increase validity, the researcher utilized triangulation, member checks, and peer examination. The results and conclusions have been reported in a descriptive, narrative format.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The purposes of this study were to explore factors that may impact the development of writing instruction efficacy of kindergarten and first grade teachers, and also to investigate their writing instructional practices. The results presented in this chapter come from analysis of data collected in relation to the two guiding research questions:

1. What similarities or differences occur within the writing instructional practices of four primary-grade teachers of writing, two of whom report high self-efficacy and two of whom report low self-efficacy?

2. What, if any, sociocultural or experiential factors influenced these primary teachers’ development of self-efficacy as writing instructors?

Data sources included interviews, observations, and various documents related to writing instruction. Upon completion of data collection, qualitative analysis procedures were used to identify common themes. In this chapter, each research question will be addressed separately. For each question, common themes that emerged across cases will be presented, illustrated by pertinent examples drawn from the data. These will be followed by a summary analysis of findings. Ultimately, a cross-case analysis of results for both research questions will be shared. The goal of this discussion will be generation of a grounded theory.
Writing Instructional Practices

In order to answer the first research question, “What similarities or differences occur within the writing instructional practices of four primary-grade teachers of writing, two of whom report high self-efficacy and two of whom report low self-efficacy?”, data from documents, interviews, and classroom observations was collected and analyzed. Through analysis of this data, seven themes emerged as features of instructional practices shared by all participants. These themes included three planning issues: time management, consistency of lesson format, and instructional objectives. In addition, four instructional practices emerged as common to all participants: teacher modeling, student sharing opportunities, differentiation, and integration of reading and writing. In this section, rich description is used to report data related to these themes (Merriam, 1998).

**Time management.** Three of the teachers prepared detailed lesson plans which indicated they set aside approximately 30 minutes per day, three to four days each week for writing. However, field notes indicated a significant difference in the actual instructional time spent on writing: the two high efficacy teachers’ lessons lasted approximately 30 minutes, while the lessons of one of the low efficacy teachers went much longer, approximately one hour each time. The other low efficacy participant did not keep detailed lesson plans of writing instruction, noting in an email correspondence that she preferred to “just wait for a teaching moment” (Ms. Lippy, personal communication, April 12, 2010).

The four teachers’ use of time varied considerably from participant to participant. In both first grade classrooms, a considerable amount of time was allotted for actual
student writing. In these classrooms, students spent about 15-20 minutes writing. During this time, however, students in the high efficacy teacher’s classroom worked together in pairs to complete a graphic organizer for prewriting, while students in the low efficacy teacher’s classroom worked in isolation, composing a list of topics to write about and an organizer for a story. Moreover, students in this classroom spent a considerable amount of this independent writing time waiting in line for the teacher to read their paper and give them feedback.

In the kindergarten classrooms, most of the writing instructional time was spent in whole group activities, which included such instructional practices as reading literature to build background knowledge, teacher modeling, and shared writing. Very little time was set aside in the classroom for independent writing with paper and pencil. Students in the high efficacy kindergarten classroom spent extensive time individually constructing oral sentences in preparation for the actual writing that the teacher stated would happen during the subsequent lesson. In the low-efficacy teacher’s classroom, however, students spent approximately two minutes copying a sentence the teacher had printed on the board and another two minutes composing their own sentence.

**Consistency of lesson format.** The two high efficacy participants had predictable and consistent routines for writing instruction. For example, Ms. Jessica’s weekly plans followed the same pattern each week.

I always try to get at least four days in [for writing instruction]. On Mondays we always read a good story and tell them this is what we are going to be writing about this week, so think about this while I read. Tuesday we always reread it and make a chart of some kind…usually Thursday in the morning we draw and get everything in order. Sometimes we start writing and I have drawn an example and they can write. And then Friday, if we have time, we share (interview, March 17, 2010).
While Ms. Rose’s instruction did not necessarily stay the same each day of each week, a consistent routine was evident within her lesson plans. Her lesson plans always included use of explicit teacher modeling of new skills, followed by guided practice, then independent practice.

For the two low efficacy participants, instruction varied day by day, with no evidence of consistent routines. Ms. Roz’s lesson plans listed a variety of purposes and materials. Although Ms. Lippy did not have traditional lesson plans to analyze, data analysis of her comments to the class from each observed lesson suggested that her writing instruction was continually changing and lacked a clear focus or predictable routine. Once she stated, “I am going to change things up a little…because a teacher’s job is to change what they are doing if they don’t think things are working out well” (field notes, March 19, 2010).

Instructional objectives. Data analysis indicated that the high efficacy teachers clearly stated their instructional goals to the students at the beginning of their lessons, and thereafter, all instructional activities were designed to support the stated objective. As she showed the class a big book, for example, Ms. Jessica started one of her lessons with the statement, “This book gives us information about what we can write about a farm, so keep your ears open” (field notes, March 23, 2010). She then used various interactive and shared writing activities to help students organize this new information into cohesive ideas. The majority of students were aware of the goal of the lesson. During one lesson in Ms. Rose’s classroom, a student called out, “What are we supposed to be doing?” only to have a classmate quickly answer, “How-to writing!” (field notes, March 23, 2010).
For the two low efficacy teachers, however, instructional activities did not always match their lesson objective. In fact, data analysis suggested that during some lessons, the target goal of the instruction was not made clear. One teacher, Ms. Roz, started her lesson by posing the question, “What have we been working on in writing lately?” Students responded with confusion and several incorrect guesses (field notes, March 19, 2010). She then proceeded to present a large number of writing goals, none of which seemed to stand out as the main objective.

**Teacher modeling.** Data analysis indicated that modeling did occur to some degree in all four participants’ classrooms. Three of the teachers, including both high efficacy teachers, consistently used modeling to support students before they started independent writing activities. Furthermore, for both high efficacy teachers, analysis indicated the modeling that occurred mirrored what was expected of the students when they wrote independently. By contrast, one low efficacy teacher did not model the skill (writing a story) she expected the students to eventually accomplish. Rather, she used modeling to demonstrate for students how to list topics to write about only after she observed students struggling to come up with topics on their own. During another lesson, Ms. Roz did not do any modeling before sending students off to write on their own.

Both high efficacy teachers used heavy teacher modeling to support developmentally appropriate writing skills, such as spelling phonetically and using the literature, which was read aloud, as a resource, and organizing thoughts orally before putting them on paper. During one lesson, for example, Ms. Jessica modeled for students how to compose a list of animals from the story in the big book on the front easel. After students suggested an animal for her to write, she slowly segmented the words out loud
so that she could then write the corresponding letters on the board. When completed, her list contained only phonetically spelled words. By contrast, low efficacy participants’ modeling did not always include age-appropriate skills. In one lesson, Ms. Lippy modeled composing a list of words that were all written using correct spelling and once modeled how to use a dictionary to check on the spelling of a word.

**Student sharing time.** In each of the four participants’ classrooms, a specific time was designated for students to share their writing work. In the high efficacy classrooms, this sharing time was designed to allow other students to hear and benefit from the work of their peers. The main focus was not on the teacher as evaluator, but instead on the comments and attentiveness of the audience. In one high efficacy teacher’s classroom, for example, the teacher did not even participate in the sharing. Instead, as students finished their work, they were instructed to find other students with whom they could share. Furthermore, within the high efficacy teachers’ classrooms, students were expected to share the specific skill that was the focus of the day’s lesson. In Ms. Jessica’s room, time was also set aside to have students share a specific skill they had used at the independent writing center during stations.

For the two low efficacy teachers, student sharing time focused on the teacher as evaluator. In one instance, for example, the teacher allowed students to share while other students continued to work at their seats. During both classrooms’ sharing times, the teacher was the only person to make comments about the writing, and most of the comments were either restatements of the student’s words, designed to correct a student’s mistake, or were positive, but vague, comments, such as “Nice job.” In one of the low
efficacy rooms, the students did all sit attentively listening to peers share, but once the teacher made her comments, the rest of the students simply applauded.

**Differentiation.** Differentiation was evidenced in three of the participants’ classrooms. Both high efficacy teachers found ways to assist struggling writers in accomplishing the focused writing task. This included deliberately matching students with partners who could assist them, working with struggling students in a small group while other students worked independently, or providing accommodations during whole group time or independent writing time. During one lesson, Ms. Rose asked a student who had finished early to help guide some struggling students through their task.

Of the low efficacy teachers, only one, Ms. Roz, demonstrated differentiation in her teaching. She spent almost the whole time working with a small group of struggling writers. In an interview, she stated that she felt most confident working with struggling writers. The other low efficacy teacher, Ms. Lippy, excluded her two most struggling writers for more than half of the writing lesson. After the initial portion of the lesson, these students were sent to the carpet area with boxes that contained various educational toys with which they were allowed to play.

**Integration of reading and writing.** All four participants integrated reading and writing instruction. Both high efficacy teachers used literature as a means of gathering information to guide student writing. In the first grade classroom, students had access to developmentally appropriate leveled books, which they used with a partner. Students in kindergarten classrooms listened to the teacher read the literature aloud, and then were guided through the process of gathering relevant information from the books in order to compose text. Both high efficacy teachers modeled how to take the information gained
from the reading materials and organize it into categories onto graphic organizers before writing.

Although both low efficacy teachers’ lesson plans suggested the use of literature as models or sources of information, field notes indicated that only Ms. Lippy actually used literature during observed writing lessons. However, Ms. Lippy expected students to find information in the technical, non-fiction books while working with partners and without teacher assistance. During the modeling that followed, she failed to show students how to take the information from the book and subsequently use it in their writing.

Summary of Instructional Practices

Data revealed distinct similarities between the classroom practices of the high and low efficacy teachers. First, the amount of time set aside, both weekly and daily, for teaching writing was very similar for both high and low efficacy teachers. Second, lesson plans and instructional objectives developed and implemented by the participants contained similar components, such as teacher modeling, independent student writing time, and a time for sharing of student work. Third, integration of reading and writing, especially the use of literature to support writing, was also evidenced in the classroom practices of all four participants.

Two significant differences were found in the classroom practices of these high and low efficacy participants. Although all participants’ classrooms contained the same instructional components, the actual planning and implementation of instruction in the high efficacy teachers’ classrooms was more systematic. The writing lessons of the high
efficacy teachers were more consistent and coherent from week to week, day to day, and from minute to minute. The lessons systematically targeted appropriate writing skills that were needed in order for students to construct writing in various genres. These skills were introduced using explicit instruction that first modeled, then guided the students, and finally allowed for students to write independently. Moreover, because all the activities served a distinct purpose and matched the instructional objectives identified, time allotted for writing was used in an efficient way. Students in the high efficacy classroom were aware of the instructional focus. In addition, the teacher not only provided explicit preparation for a task but also ample opportunity to complete it.

The second major difference between the classroom practices of high and low efficacy teachers involved the approach that the participants took to teaching and learning. Comparatively, the high efficacy teachers’ instruction was more student-centered while the low efficacy teachers’ instruction was more teacher-centered. In the high efficacy teachers’ classrooms, instructional practices were observed which aligned with Huba and Freed’s (2000) description of student-centered instruction. In these classrooms the focus was on both the students and teachers. An illustration of this occurred when Ms. Jessica conducted shared writing, which included heavy student involvement in composing a list during whole group time. Although the students were involved in listening to teacher instruction, students were also given opportunities to work in pairs in the first grade classroom, and with heavy teacher guidance in the kindergarten classroom.

The teachers guided learners in ways that met the needs of each learner, including struggling writers, such as when Ms. Rose provided additional guidance and modeling for
the handful of struggling writers while other students worked independently. In these classrooms, interactions occurred between students and teachers in a variety of grouping formats including pairs, small groups, and individually. During these interactions, students were both allowed and encouraged to answer each other’s questions, such as when the student in Ms. Rose’s room replied to the other student, “How-to writing!”

Finally, the teachers used language that mirrored the way that students would use language. An illustration of this occurred when Ms. Jessica modeled the process of phonetic spelling while composing a list on the board with students.

According to Huba and Freed (2000) a teacher-centered approach contains a focus on the instructor as monitor, evaluator, and one who corrects student work. Ms. Roz’s classroom practice of students waiting in line to get teacher approval is one example of this type of focus. The way that both low efficacy teachers used student sharing time also illustrates this point. In these classrooms that were more teacher-centered, students often quietly worked alone, allowing no contact with peers.

Within a more teacher-centered classroom, the teacher also focuses more on the way that she, rather than the student, uses language (Huba & Freed, 2000). In Ms. Lippy’s classroom this occurred when she composed a list of correctly spelled words that students might use in their writing, rather than using phonetically spelled words. Within the more teacher-centered classrooms, students received instruction designed to meet the needs of the teacher, and little differentiation was observed.
Factors That Influence Development of Self-Efficacy

A large body of research, synthesized in Chapter II, has indicated that the development of professional self-efficacy is deeply influenced by both an individual’s personal experiences and external sociocultural factors that alter or mediate the meaning of those experiences. The second research question, “What, if any, sociocultural or experiential factors influenced these primary teachers’ development of self-efficacy as writing instructors?”, probed the pertinence of these influences on participants’ writing self-efficacy through analysis of interview and field observation. Consequently, interview questions were deliberately guided by factors identified by current scholarly research as influential in the development of one’s self-efficacy.

Through analysis of the data, two themes emerged as influential in the development of participants’ writing self-efficacy: (1) their experiences as writers and (2) their experiences as teachers of writing. Moreover, results of data analysis are presented as composite findings that emerged from the synergy of experiential and sociocultural factors, rather than as discreet entities attributable to one factor or the other.

**Experiences as a writer.** Data analysis revealed that two main features of their home experiences and two broad factors within formal schooling were influential in the development of participants’ self-efficacy. Specifically, (1) opportunities to write and (2) availability of writing materials within the home greatly influenced the participants’ self-efficacy in the area of writing. Similarly, writing experiences in formal schooling, such as (1) the types and quantity of writing assignments and (2) the kind of feedback they received from teachers significantly impacted the development of participants’ efficacy.
Writing in the home. Data analysis revealed that while all participants attributed some of their efficacy development to home writing experiences, only two participants, both high efficacy, grew up in homes that included a focus on academics and literacy-rich experiences, and where writing materials were abundant. These participants both reported frequent opportunities to write. Ms. Jessica reported that these opportunities were abundant and driven by her mother, who was heavily involved in promoting activities that would launch her education. While Ms. Rose did not refer specifically to anyone at home initiating her activities, she recalled participating in writing-related tasks, and materials were available so that she could write often and for enjoyment. In contrast, the low-efficacy teachers, Ms. Roz and Ms. Lippy, reported that writing activities did not occur frequently, either due to a lack of parental attention to educational activities or a lack of materials available with which to write.

Two participants stated that the opportunities, or lack of opportunities, to participate in these types of writing activities directly impacted their development of efficacy. Ms. Jessica stated that an abundance of positive writing experiences at home had the biggest impact on her development of high efficacy in relation to writing before becoming a teacher. She stated, “It [writing] wasn’t seen as something you had to do, it was something you wanted to do” (interview, March 17, 2010). Ms. Roz also reported strong feelings about the impact of her home experiences on her development of low self-efficacy in writing. In her case, however, it was a lack of such experiences that impacted her negatively: “If I would have just had more experiences, exposure as a child…if it was important in my family…but writing was never…school was never…an important piece in my family growing up” (interview, March 19, 2010).
Writing in formal schooling. Across all cases, participants reported a heavier focus on reading than on writing while they were in school. Ms. Jessica stated, “I remember reading, reading, reading, but I don’t remember a lot of writing” (interview, March 17, 2010). Yet as they moved from kindergarten through college, all participants reported encountering a wide range of writing opportunities. Moreover, they recalled receiving various types of feedback from both peers and teachers, feedback that influenced the development of their writing self-efficacy.

Writing activities. With the exception of Ms. Roz, participants recalled some writing activities during elementary school. Data analysis revealed that the two high efficacy participants were regularly assigned both creative and technical types of writing. These participants recalled composing informational reports, responses to literature, journals, and fictional books. Ms. Jessica recalled, “I remember writing fifth grade informational reports. I picked seashells to write about. It was a science report we had to do for science class” (interview, March 17, 2010). She also reported participation in writing opportunities in her fifth grade language arts class. She recalled:

…[the teacher] had us do a lot of journaling…read this and write about it. We had to buy a composition notebook to write in. Sometimes she had some guidelines…sometimes she just had us read for 15 minutes and you could then just write three sentences about what you read, anything you wanted to write (interview, March 17, 2010).

In addition, Ms. Rose recalled writing an informational report about The Horn Book, “I did research and had to present on that.” In upper elementary school she recalled participating in an annual Young Author event during which she reported, “We actually created the book…bound up the side of the book…everyone wrote it from scratch” (interview, March 23, 2010).
While Ms. Roz did not recall any specific writing tasks from elementary school, Ms. Lippy, the other low efficacy writing teacher, did not have writing assignments that represented a range of genres. Data analysis revealed that her school writing assignments focused mostly on grammar, conventions, spelling, penmanship, and diagramming sentences. She stated, “Catholic schools at that time were very strict with grammar, we had to learn a lot of punctuation, capitals, lowercases, the formal part of writing a sentence.” Writing poetry even consisted of learning “rules” that had to be followed. She reported having anxiety about writing poetry because she believed that she “did not know the rules” of it. In addition to receiving “poor” grades at this time, she reported receiving negative feedback about her penmanship: “If it [her writing product] wasn’t written nice and neat, it went into the trashcan and I had to write it all over again” (interview, March 18, 2010).

In fact, Ms. Lippy reported that writing in school was sometimes used as a form of punishment. She described experiences she had over the course of one school year, in which she stayed in for recess many times because she “liked to talk a lot.” During this time, she was assigned the task of writing sentences one hundred times. As a result of this emphasis on correctness and the fact that she regularly received “poor grades,” she reported that even as an adult she frequently experiences anxiety over her use of grammar and proper English. Looking back, she stated that at that point in her life, she “never really felt like a writer” (interview, March 18, 2010).

As the participants progressed through junior high and into high school, data analysis revealed that the amount and types of writing experiences in which they were involved differed, possibly because the two high efficacy participants were enrolled in
college preparatory classes and the two low efficacy teachers were not. Within the college preparatory courses, both high efficacy teachers encountered a broad range of writing experiences and assignments. They had many courses that required writing across genres, including informational reports, responses to literature, and creative writing such as poetry. Moreover, both participants received frequent positive feedback about their writing; each completed her high school education with the belief that she was a “good writer.” Ms. Rose noted, “It [writing] was always just easy for me” (interview, March 23, 2010).

Neither of the low efficacy participants recalled having writing experiences in high school. Ms. Lippy reported, “I don’t remember any writing in high school…when I went to high school I was not in college prep and I wonder if that’s why” (interview, March 18, 2010). Ms. Roz reported, “I do not remember anything in writing…I was in OWE [school-work program]…sure, we did some everyday writing like [completing] applications and [writing in a] checkbook” (interview, March 19, 2010).

As the four participants attended college, data analysis revealed that their writing experiences and assignments were all very similar. Participants were enrolled in courses that exposed them to a variety of types of writing such as responses to literature and informational reports. Ms. Jessica reported writing responses to literature in many of her literature classes. She recalled writing a “lot of huge papers that we wrote in response to novels.” In addition, she reported experiences in composition classes where she learned “how to write an essay-type paper” (interview, March 17, 2010). Ms. Roz recalled researching her family genealogy for an expository report assigned in a freshman composition class.
Similarly, both low efficacy participants reported participating in writing experiences such as responses to literature and informational reports. Ms. Lippy reported, “We did a lot of writing at [her college], lot of writing.” She reported composing responses to literature in many courses such as one summer course about women authors in which, “We read first and then wrote.” She also reported participating in composition classes in which she learned to write stories, “revisited grammar,” and wrote “an essay on special education…something I picked…where I had to research and do a paper on it” (interview, March 18, 2010). Ms. Roz recalled an experience in a Children’s Literature class in which she had to “research a book and write a response to it” (interview, March 19, 2010).

**Instructional approach.** Based on nearly two decades they had spent as students, each participant recalled a variety of memories related specifically to the kind of writing instruction they had experienced. From the time they entered elementary school through college, high efficacy teachers recalled participation in activities that focused on the process of generating ideas, as well as on mechanical skills (e.g., grammar and conventions) critical to the written product. They reported that their teachers required them to write informational reports about topics, as well as responses to literature and creative writing pieces. Ms. Jessica reported that in her college literature classes, “professors were very much involved in the ideas on your paper” but that she also had courses in which she was “given a topic” and had to “write so many pages with this amount of indentation and this many spaces, and double spaced and the rules” (interview, March 17, 2010).
Similarly, both low efficacy participants reported participating in activities that focused on both process and product, but this only occurred once they entered college. Ms. Lippy reported taking an English course in which the focus was on “revisiting grammar and stuff like that.” She also reported taking a literature class in which she had to “critique” books the class had read. She observed that she “had to do a lot of thinking and writing together” for the assignments in this class. However, Ms. Lippy recalled a heavy emphasis on “correctness,” including grammar, spelling, and conventions while she attended both elementary and junior high (interview, March 18, 2010). Ms. Roz did not recall writing activities during elementary and secondary school.

Both high efficacy participants also reported being positively influenced by past teachers of writing. When asked about past teachers who had influenced her, Ms. Rose recalled a teacher of her creative writing class. Although Ms. Rose reported that she did not really remember this teacher’s instruction, she still made a lasting impression. Ms. Rose described her as “very quiet, and calming, and expressive” (interview, March 23, 2010). Ms. Jessica reported she had been inspired to start a diary by her fifth grade language arts teacher who had required students to purchase a composition notebook for class assignments, and also had students “do a lot of journaling” (interview, March 17, 2010).

Neither of the low efficacy participants recalled a past teacher of writing by whom they were positively influenced. When asked whether any past teachers of writing may have been influential, both low efficacy participants were blunt in their responses. Ms. Lippy reported, “No, Not at all” (interview, March 18, 2010).
Feedback. Both high efficacy teachers reported receiving only positive feedback from teachers who contributed significantly to their feeling that they were good writers. Ms. Rose stated, “I thought I was a pretty good writer…I did” (interview, March 23, 2010). They both also commented that they still kept writing pieces that they had completed when in elementary school, including informational reports they were proud of, and journals, diaries, or books they had written. Ms. Rose, for example, reported that she actually kept all of the Young Authors books that she created, and even gave a poetry-themed one to a relative as a gift.

In addition, the positive feedback the high efficacy participants continuously received from teachers led them to believe they were good writers. Ms. Rose reported that while she was in secondary school, “I always got good feedback” and stated, “I thought I was a pretty good writer” (interview, March 23, 2010).

As far as the low efficacy participants, Ms. Roz reported that she did not recall any feedback on her writing that would have led her to believe she was a good or bad writer. In Ms. Lippy’s case, she reported that feedback she received made her more aware of the fact that she was a poor writer who was not successful at spelling or grammar. During one college composition class she stated that after doing well on composition writing at the beginning of the semester, she found herself getting “Fs” on the spelling lists that she was required to memorize. She stated that as a result of this, her final grade for this class “was the only C I pulled in all of college” (interview, March 18, 2010).

Generally, the feedback high efficacy participants received during their college experiences continued to confirm the beliefs they held about themselves as writers when they entered college. Both high efficacy participants reported that they continued to
almost exclusively receive positive feedback in regard to their writing. During her college experience, Ms. Jessica reported that she had classes in literature in which the professors focused more on the “content of the papers,” yet also had professors of other courses who focused on the more “technical aspects of writing” such as conventions and grammar. She reported that she did not feel that her course work influenced her efficacy much, “because it never bothered me to write” (interview, March 17, 2010).

Although the majority of feedback Ms. Rose received was positive during college, she reported that, in one instance, she did receive negative feedback in regard to her writing. The professor in her freshman composition class “attacked” her grammar and some major ideas she had included within her family genealogy report (interview, March 23, 2010). Ms. Rose, however, disagreed with the professor’s feedback and even confronted him with her concerns. This negative feedback was not influential enough to change Ms. Rose’s positive view of herself as a writer.

One low efficacy participant, Ms. Roz, reported no specific recollection of positive or negative feedback received in writing during college. So her efficacy was not impacted by teacher feedback. Ms. Lippy, the other low efficacy participant reported being greatly influenced by the feedback she received. She also recalled the struggles she encountered with writing during this time period. She stated that in one of her first composition classes, for example, she discovered that she was not writing “correctly.” As a result of being corrected in a variety of grammatical errors, she reported becoming more “conscientious” about what she wrote. Ms. Lippy observed, at this point she became aware that “writing speaks really highly about your intelligence.” Although she reported getting good feedback when writing stories, this feedback was not enough to
influence her efficacy in positive ways. Instead, she spoke of being “scared” about writing, and reported questioning whether she could successfully write the types of genres required. She recalled how long it took her to compose, and how she would often correct and change draft after draft. Ms. Lippy reported that writing was not an easy task for her (interview, March 18, 2010).

**Summary of experiences as a writer.** Ultimately, the participants’ personal experiences as writers most influenced their self-efficacy through (1) their opportunities to write within the home, (2) the diversity and quantity of their writing assignments in elementary and secondary school, and (3) feedback they received from teachers. Furthermore, these experiences influenced not only their self-confidence but also what they came to understand as important in written text. The low efficacy participants not only had fewer and less diverse writing assignments, but their instructional models and the feedback they received emphasized surface mechanics over content. Conversely, the high efficacy participants frequently participated in many diverse writing assignments and almost exclusively received complimentary teacher feedback about their writing.

By college, participants’ confidence, or lack of confidence, in themselves as writers appeared to be established. Furthermore, all participants noted that today their personal writing experiences, and their views of themselves as writers, are reflections of views of themselves, which were established before entering college, implicit evidence that these influences are life-long.

**Experiences as a teacher of writing.** In addition to their home and elementary through high school writing experiences, data analysis revealed two main professional
factors that influenced each participant’s self-efficacy as a teacher of writing: (1) a professional development experience and (2) colleagues.

*Teacher preparatory coursework.* Data analysis revealed that all participants reported an absence of coursework in their teacher preparation programs specifically designed to prepare pre-service teachers for teaching writing. Ms. Roz stated that she did not leave her teacher preparatory program “even thinking that I would someday have to teach students to write” (interview, March 19, 2010).

Ms. Lippy reported leaving her program with the same feeling. She stated, “I never even gave it a thought that I would have to teach my preschoolers writing. That thought didn’t even cross my mind at the time” (interview, March 18, 2010).

All participants reported that any writing pedagogy presented was integrated into content-area education classes, where the primary focus was on its role in the teaching of mathematics, science, or social studies. They reported the focus at the time was on “whole-language” and that writing was “integrated” across the curriculum. Ms. Roz reported that in her education courses, “we were all whole language” (interview, March 19, 2010) and Ms. Jessica stated, “I think a lot of the writing piece was just incorporated in my other classes” (interview, March 17, 2010).

Ms. Rose stated that she left undergrad “not thinking of writing as a separate subject” (interview, March 23, 2010). Consequently, the influence of teacher preparation coursework on the participants’ self-efficacy as writers or writing teachers was negligible. Moreover, all participants except for Ms. Lippy reported enrolling in graduate degree programs once they became practicing teachers. However, none of the participants cited these programs as influential in their writing self-efficacy.
Influence of professional development. All the participants reported a similar amount of professional development in the area of writing. They all reported involvement in a district-sponsored, long-term professional development literacy training program. Over the course of one school year, this program focused on a variety of literacy topics. Within these topics, a half-day training session specifically targeted best practices in writing instruction, including the use of literature models, the craft of writing, and how to implement a writer’s workshop. For all participants except Ms. Lippy, this program also included three weeks of post-training follow-up during which a literacy expert observed participants’ use of the instructional practices they had studied. Within this three-week period, the specialist would observe one writing lesson per week and provide both written and oral feedback about the lesson.

All four participants reported that this professional development program had impacted their knowledge base and instructional practices. For the high efficacy participants, the new instructional ideas and long-term support were reported as the most helpful components of this training. Ms. Jessica reported that as a result of this training, “I feel more confidence. You think you know what you are doing then you go to these trainings and you think…I could do more and even better” (interview, March 17, 2010).

The low efficacy teachers reported that the training had impacted them in different ways. Ms. Roz stated that this training was “probably the first and last best thing I did,” taking from it lessons on how to “hook a reader” and how to use “transition words” (interview, March 19, 2010).

Ms. Lippy did not report any specific instructional changes to her writing program as a result of the training. Rather, she felt that through this training, the district was
sending a message to teachers that “this [writing] is really important and we need to do this” (interview, March 18, 2010).

Outside of this district-mandated professional development training, only Ms. Rose reported attendance at any other writing-focused training. She reported attending a week-long training at an area college that focused on the use of writers’ workshops and student conferencing.

*Influence of colleagues.* All four participants similarly reported that once they became professionals, their experiences with colleagues had the biggest impact on their feelings about themselves as teachers of writing. All reported that their self-efficacy had increased as a result of interactions with teacher colleagues, either at the time of the study or previously.

All four participants reported having similar interactions with colleagues, including meeting as a grade-level team, viewing another teacher’s classroom projects or student work, or going to each other for assistance with teaching dilemmas. However, data revealed that the high efficacy teachers approached these interactions with colleagues in a manner unlike that of the low efficacy teachers. The high efficacy teachers were very strategic about when, why, and how they approached colleagues. For example, Ms. Rose reported that although colleagues were very supportive and helpful to her, she was always the one who initiated the conversation. She was aware of what she needed and when she needed it, as well as to whom to go for assistance. Conversely, the low efficacy teachers most often reported having random conversations, or overhearing something that a colleague was doing which then piqued their interest. Data revealed that
they did not go in search of specific help, but rather took advantage of opportunities that came up randomly.

All participants, except for Ms. Lippy, reported opportunities to have a literacy specialist in their room to model or assist them in their writing instruction. Only Ms. Lippy reported the opportunity to watch a fellow teacher within her own classroom over a long period of time. She stated that this opportunity “changed my whole idea of writing and that implanted in my mind that this is important…look how successful they are at this” (interview, March 18, 2010).

The high efficacy participants did not report having any negative experiences with colleagues that affected their self-efficacy. However, both of the low efficacy participants reported having negative interactions with colleagues almost immediately after they entered the teaching profession. Both experiences involved a teachers’ assistant in their rooms who challenged their writing instructional practices. On her very first day of teaching, Ms. Roz reported that she was “so excited” until a teachers’ assistant chastised her because she had neatly written out the directions for the morning work on the board. The teachers’ assistant reportedly stated in a derogatory way, “What’s that? You think they are going to be able to read that?” She then laughed and stated, “They aren’t going to be able to read that…just wait, just wait” (interview, March 19, 2010).

Ms. Lippy’s negative experience also happened early in her teaching career. She had taken over mid-year for a preschool teacher who retired early. The teachers’ assistant in this room challenged Ms. Lippy’s use of unlined paper for journal writing. Ms. Lippy reported, “This aide went to the principal and I had to defend myself…the OT
[occupational therapist] went to the principal and I had to defend myself again. But I did what I thought was right…I didn’t get any support” (interview, March 18, 2010).

**Summary of experiences as a teacher of writing.** The participants’ levels of self-efficacy as a teacher of writing were influenced by (1) their experiences with colleagues and (2) their professional development opportunities. High efficacy participants were more likely to consult with colleagues in order to get specific instructional advice, while low efficacy participants reported having been positively influenced by colleagues in random, day-to-day opportunities. Low efficacy participants were the only participants to report negative experiences in the classroom that were derogatory in nature, which only exacerbated their low self-efficacy in the area of writing.

Data analysis also revealed that experiences in teacher preparatory programs, including both undergraduate and graduate work, had no influence on the participants’ self-efficacy in teaching writing. However, professional development had some influence on efficacy levels, either due to the content being delivered, or through the use of colleagues who came into their classrooms to provide feedback. Each participant reported benefiting in unique ways after participating in a similar district professional development opportunity.

**Cross-case analysis of factors that influenced self-efficacy.** Comparison of results across cases revealed a number of significant influences on participants’ self-efficacy, either as a writer or as a teacher of writing.

**Self-efficacy as a writer.** Three broad factors appeared to influence all participants’ feelings of self-efficacy as a writer: (1) their home writing experiences, (2)
the range and instructional focus of writing activities in elementary and high school, and
(3) feedback on their written texts from teachers.

One critical influence on the development of writing self-efficacy was the
participants’ access to writing materials and opportunity for writing activities at home.
High efficacy teachers had access to materials and writing activities that were done for
both enjoyment and for their educational value. Data revealed that low efficacy
participants lacked these types of materials and opportunities. In fact, the low efficacy
teachers believed their lack of home writing experiences had made a difference in their
view of themselves as writers.

Both high and low efficacy participants reported exposure to a variety of types of
writing activities across multiple genres and for various purposes throughout elementary
and middle school. The high efficacy teachers recalled an overall instructional emphasis
on both the generative process (e.g., content, organization) and the editing skills needed
for a grammatically acceptable product. Low efficacy teachers, however, recalled more
emphasis on writing mechanics than on the generative process. Moreover, both low
efficacy participants lacked exposure to a variety of writing genres and types of
assignments in high school. College writing experiences, whether negative or positive,
did not appear to influence the participants’ writing self-efficacy. Rather, data analysis
reveals participants’ beliefs about themselves as writers seemed to be established by the
time they entered college.

Finally, data analysis revealed that throughout elementary and middle school, the
feedback which participants received as writers had significantly affected the impression
they had of themselves as writers. The high efficacy teachers reported frequent receipt of
positive feedback from teachers, and generally experienced success as writers. The low efficacy teachers reported frequent receipt of negative feedback. Furthermore, this feedback was most often specifically focused on the mechanics of writing (e.g., grammar, spelling) rather than on the content (e.g., concepts, organization). This left them feeling that they were “not writers.”

**Self-efficacy as a teacher of writing.** Comparison of data across all cases indicated that none of the participants recalled instructional activities from their teacher preparatory programs as having effectively prepared them to teach the craft of writing to their future students. Similarly, none of them reported leaving college feeling confident, knowledgeable, or prepared to teach writing as a curricular subject. Instead, they completed these programs knowing how to integrate writing within and across content areas, including within reading.

While participation in a mandated district-sponsored writing training program had positively impacted three participants’ practices and knowledge base, it had not significantly impacted any participant’s self-efficacy as a teacher of writing.

Only one factor, the influence of colleagues, was common across all four cases as contributing positively to feelings of self-efficacy as teachers of writing. Participants reported that their sense of self-efficacy had increased when they had the opportunity to work collaboratively with colleagues who were considered experts in writing instruction, and when they had the opportunity to observe a literacy expert model instruction for them or share her knowledge and resources.
Toward a Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a specific research methodology meant to derive meaning from the data, which then results in an emerging theory (Merriam, 1998). This emerging theory is described by Merriam as “substantive,” a theory with “specificity and hence usefulness to practice often lacking in theories that cover more global concerns” (p. 17). This theory also consists of “categories, properties, and hypotheses” (p. 18). The hypotheses, which emerged from the categories and properties of this study, are described below.

Analysis of the data identified similarities and differences in the classroom instructional practices of low and high efficacy teachers, which resulted in three findings about the relationship between instructional practices and efficacy among these four participants. First, self-efficacy did not appear to impact the amount of classroom instructional time devoted to writing, nor the specific instructional components of a lesson.

Second, although the instructional components were the same for both high and low efficacy participants, the instructional focus differed greatly. The instructional focus of high efficacy teachers was student-centered and process-oriented. The instructional focus of low efficacy teachers, however, was teacher-centered and product-oriented. In addition, the high efficacy teachers’ instructional delivery was more systematic, consistent, and concise than that of the low efficacy teachers.

Analysis of patterns further identified sociocultural and experiential factors that influenced development of a teacher’s self-efficacy in writing. First, home and school opportunities to write, for a variety of purposes and within a variety of genres, have a
significant impact on self-efficacy. Even more, the frequency and nature of feedback has a deep impact on writing self-efficacy. Frequent opportunities to write, coupled with consistent positive feedback, enhance development of writing self-efficacy. Moreover, beliefs about one’s efficacy appear to be solidified by the time students enter college.

Second, self-efficacy as a teacher of writing appears to be directly related to self-efficacy as a writer. If a person has high self-efficacy as a writer, which is a result of a variety of positive experiences with and feedback about writing, then his or her chances of having a high self-efficacy as a teacher of writing are increased.

Third, while teacher preparation programs and professional development experiences appear to have a limited impact on self-efficacy as a teacher of writing, positive interactions with colleagues directly tied to the instructional wants and needs of a writing teacher seem to increase a teacher’s self-efficacy in the area of teaching of writing.

Overall, findings of this study demonstrate that the high efficacy teachers were consistently supported with oral and written feedback that focused on their ideas and skill as writers. In turn, these high efficacy teachers became confident and student-centered writing instructors with a similar focus; the converse was true for the low efficacy teachers. Findings of this study further demonstrate that personal interactions with professional colleagues, which initially shape teachers’ view of themselves as a writer or as a teacher of writing, can also later have a positive influence on self-efficacy as a teacher of writing. Ultimately, then, the findings from this study support the theory that the interactions and responses humans get from other human beings are a critical factor in the development of writing self-efficacy.
Summary of Chapter

The purposes of this study were to explore factors that may impact the development of writing instruction efficacy of kindergarten and first grade teachers, and also to investigate their writing instructional practices. Interviews, classroom observation, field notes, and documents were used as data sources to answer two guiding research questions.

For the first research question, “What similarities or differences occur within the writing instructional practices of four primary-grade teachers of writing, two of whom report high self-efficacy and two of whom report low self-efficacy?”, data analysis revealed three major similarities and two major differences. Similarly, all participants planned for approximately the same amount of writing instructional time weekly, their lessons contained similar instructional components, and they integrated reading and writing. High efficacy participants’ instruction differed from that of the low efficacy participants in that the high efficacy participants’ instruction was more systematic and student-centered than that of the low efficacy participants.

For the second research question, “What, if any, sociocultural or experiential factors influenced these primary teachers’ development of self-efficacy as writing instructors?”, data analysis revealed that home and school experiences, including having access to materials, as well as participation in a variety of writing opportunities, contributed to participants’ development of efficacy. Participants’ efficacy was further influenced by feedback that was received while participating in these writing opportunities. Participation in writing within teacher preparatory or general college coursework did not seem to influence the participants’ feelings of efficacy, as these
feelings appeared to be already established at this point. Participants who had positive views of themselves as writers as a result of the experiences and feedback throughout schooling then went on to become self-confident teachers of writing. Data analysis revealed that experiences participants had either in teacher preparatory coursework or later in professional development did not influence their efficacy in major ways. Instead, findings of this study indicated that the most significant contribution to efficacy came through interactions with colleagues.

Through inductive analysis of these findings, results of this study generated the following insights that contributed to the building of a grounded theory about the development of self-efficacy as a teacher of writing: (1) from elementary through high school, the personal interactions, through oral and written feedback, that students have with a teacher can make a deep impact on their view of themselves as a writer; (2) high efficacy teachers who were consistently provided with frequent opportunities to write and to receive positive feedback about their writing became confident, student-centered writing instructors. Later these same types of personal interactions with professional colleagues who provide instructional feedback and support can also impact teachers’ views of themselves as teachers of writing. Ultimately, then, the findings from this study support the theory that the interactions and responses humans get from other human beings are a critical factor in the development of writing self-efficacy.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter is composed of four major sections. First, a summary of the study includes the purpose of the study, research questions, and the research methods used. Second, the findings of this study are presented and are subsequently followed by the major conclusions in regard to the research questions. Next, implications are discussed, including implications for parents, writing instruction in K-12, administrators, writing instruction within higher education, teacher preparatory programs, professional development, literacy coaches, and policy makers. Lastly, recommendations for further research are shared including recommendations for research in three broad areas: writing instruction, writing teachers, and teacher beliefs.

Summary of the Study

**Purpose.** Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as “belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 2). Although often overlooked, teachers’ beliefs about their abilities to teach students are very important and deserve the attention of kindergarten through grade twelve school systems, teacher education programs, and those individuals and committees in charge of planning or implementing professional development for practicing teachers. Ultimately, teachers’ beliefs, including their perceived self-efficacy, influence teaching effectiveness (Guskey, 1987) and consequently impact students’ instruction (Fang, 1996; Harste & Burke, 1977).
Within current research, studies have found that many teachers do not report high self-efficacy in the area of writing instruction (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Graham et al., 2001; Yates, 2004). Currently, there is a lack of research that has investigated the development of and major influences on teachers’ self-efficacy. Therefore, the purposes of this study were to explore the similarities and differences within the instructional practices of both high and low efficacy writing teachers, and also to build grounded theory in regard to the influences on the development of each of the participants’ self-efficacy in the area of writing instruction.

**Research questions.** The guiding questions for this study were:

1. What similarities or differences occur within the writing instructional practices of four primary-grade teachers of writing, two of whom report high self-efficacy and two of whom report low self-efficacy?

2. What, if any, sociocultural or experiential factors influenced these primary teachers’ development of self-efficacy as writing instructors?

**Methods used.** In order to answer the research questions, this study used an explanatory, multi-case research design (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Yin, 2003). The study took place in a demographically diverse school district located in a large Midwestern state. The study was conducted within a kindergarten and first grade building, and included a total of four teachers, each of whom represented a separate case. In order to find suitable participants, the researcher administered a simple writing Self-Efficacy Scale to all classroom teachers in the building. After compiling the results, the researcher used nonrandom, purposeful sampling techniques (Merriam, 1998) to choose two high efficacy teachers and two low efficacy teachers. In order to gather data for the
study, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with all participants, observed two writing lessons of each, and gathered relevant documents. Triangulation of data using multiple data sources was used to establish validity, as were member checks and peer examination.

A “discovery-focused” procedure for analyzing data was used to establish patterns and connections among elements of data. Ultimately, through this analysis of data, new theory was generated as to how specific sociocultural and experiential factors contribute to the development of high and low efficacy of teachers in the area of writing instruction, and how instructional practices differ among teachers with these varying levels of efficacy. After analysis of the data was complete, patterns emerged. These patterns, or themes, are discussed in the next section.

Discussion of Results of the Study

The following is a discussion of the findings of this study related to both research questions. In relation to the first research question, similarities and differences found between participants’ instruction are reported. For the second research question, findings related to various influences on the development of self-efficacy are reported.

**Similarities in writing instruction.** Upon analysis of observational field notes and documents collected, three similarities emerged in regard to the instruction of both high and low efficacy teachers. These similarities include the time set aside for instruction, components of the lessons, and evidence of integration of reading and writing.
**Time for writing.** Results of this study indicated that none of the participants set aside daily time for writing as suggested by Graves (1994). Rather, lesson plans collected from participants revealed that three participants set aside approximately one half hour, three to four days per week in order to teach writing. Instead of promoting daily writing time, Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) stated that time set aside for writing needs to be both frequent and predictable. This study found that three of the participants provided lesson plans that reflected this type of writing instruction. For these three participants, time for writing usually happened on the same days at the same time each week. Findings of this study showed high and low efficacy participants planned for approximately the same amount of writing time which contradicted findings from other studies (Graham et al., 2001; Schmidt & Buchman, 1983) that showed high efficacy teachers devote more instructional time to that instructional area in which they are confident.

**Components of lessons.** This study found that lessons of both high and low efficacy participants contained similar components. All of the teachers included modeling within their instruction, either written in their lesson plans or when being observed. This is contrary to a study by Ada and Campoy (2004), which reported that teachers failed to use modeling, despite evidence in research that states it is effective. In fact Lapp et al. (2005) described modeling as one of the most supportive of instructional approaches, and stated that it should be used to show every aspect of the process of writing. Ms. Jessica used modeling to show how to write words that described where farm animals live and what sounds they make, as well as how to think of ideas that match pictures her students created, and lastly modeled for students how to take ideas and turn them into oral sentences before attempting to write them.
All participants included time for students to write independently. Independent writing time is just one component within the writer’s workshop framework (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). Within this framework, teachers first present a mini-lesson to the whole class, and then either include students in guided practice or allow them to independently write. Within this study, independent writing time usually occurred after the teachers had either modeled for the students, or given some directions about what they expected of the students. Sometimes observed lessons included a large quantity of independent writing time, especially in the two first grade classrooms. In the kindergarten classrooms, much less time was spent independently writing.

This study found that all participants set aside time for students to share their work, either in written or oral form. Time to share is also a component of the writer’s workshop framework (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). Within their classrooms, participants used sharing time similar to the workshop model described by Fletcher and Portalupi in that students were given opportunities to publicly share their work as the lessons were concluding.

*Integration of reading and writing.* Langer and Flihan (2000) described reading and writing as “intertwined and inseparable language tools” (p. 127). Other research has confirmed that integration of reading and writing can lead to growth in both areas and that children learn to read while writing and vice versa (Clay, 1975; Gavelek et al., 2000). Within this study, integration of reading and writing was evident in the rooms of all participants. Participants used literature to build background knowledge before writing, and also used it as a model so that students could see the similarities within the framework and concepts of their own writing (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006).
**Differences in writing instruction.** Interestingly, although the participants’ instruction contained several similarities, upon further analysis of the data, two major differences emerged: use of instructional time and quality of components found within instruction. Many of the themes which served as similarities, also served as differences. Interestingly, although the participants set aside similar amounts of time for writing, many differences in their use of this time emerged. In addition, although all participants included similar components within their instruction, the manner in which these components were used differed.

**Use of instructional time.** Although three of the participants set aside approximately the same amount of time to teach writing daily and weekly within their lesson plans, each of the observed lessons of the two low efficacy participants lasted at least one hour. This is in stark contrast to the lessons of the high efficacy participants who usually taught lessons using approximately a half hour or less.

While many studies have either confirmed or inferred that more time spent writing equates to higher quality writing instruction (Applebee, 1981, 1984; Donahue et al., 2001; National Commission on Writing in America’s Schools and Colleges, 2003; National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006), this study showed the contrary. The high efficacy participants used their shorter writing lessons more efficiently than the low efficacy participants. During lessons in the high efficacy classrooms, students were engaged in writing tasks relevant to the lesson objectives throughout the lessons, with minimal time used for any other reason.

In contrast, during one of Ms. Roz’s lessons, most students spent anywhere from one to three minutes at a time standing in line to gain approval from the teacher that their
paper was indeed complete. Oftentimes, the line of students was as many as six students deep. During one of Ms. Lippy’s lessons students spent more than fifteen minutes looking at books about horses and then never used any of this information in their writing.

**Instructional components.** Although all four participants included teacher modeling during their observed lessons or within their lesson plans, the high and low efficacy participants used modeling at different times throughout the course of the lessons. The high efficacy teachers consistently planned their lessons so that heavy modeling occurred when a new skill was introduced. Before students were expected to write, they had observed the teacher performing the same task that they would later be asked to do independently. In contrast, in one low efficacy classroom, modeling occurred only after the students had begun to independently write and students came to the teacher with misunderstandings, questions, or concerns, at which point the teacher realized that modeling needed to occur so that students could successfully continue to work independently.

Differences were also found in the types of skills that were modeled by high and low participants. The high efficacy participants modeled the skills and tasks exactly in the way that their students would go about accomplishing the task. Ms. Rose spent an entire writing lesson modeling how to complete the writing organizer that students would complete the next day. The next day, students worked with little teacher assistance, and most successfully accomplished the task without asking any questions. In contrast, Ms. Roz’s students encountered difficulties when asked to complete their organizer, as they
had not had the opportunity to see the teacher model how to complete the organizer. This resulted in confusion and uncertainty among a large portion of her students.

Ms. Jessica modeled for her kindergarteners how to compose a list of animals that included sounds and places where the animals lived. As she did this, she orally sounded out each word, segmenting it so that she could hear each phoneme, and then wrote the letter that correlated with the sound. She demonstrated phonemic spelling, which is exactly the process that each of her young students would go through when they attempted to write. Although Ms. Lippy also composed a list of words on her board in front of students, the manner in which she composed words on the white board did not mirror the process that her students would go through. She wrote almost every word using correct spelling, and even used the dictionary twice to look up words with which she needed help. When she asked a student to help her spell a word by sounding it out, she initially wrote the letters that the student suggested, but then added the correct spelling afterwards in parentheses.

Sharing time, sometimes referred to as author’s chair, also differed among high and low efficacy participants. Although all participants provided students the opportunity to share their writing, the high efficacy teachers used this time just as Atwell (1987) described it in her research. Atwell’s objective of sharing time was to allow students to get feedback from their peers, rather than getting approval from their teacher. As Calkins (1983) found, effective writing instruction provides authentic opportunities for students to write for real audiences, not the teacher.

Ms. Jessica’s students were inexperienced writers, who were not likely to possess the skills and knowledge required in order to provide feedback to peers independently. In
light of this, Ms. Jessica provided the necessary guidance as she led the students to conclusions about their peers’ work. She asked questions or made comments that were not intended to evaluate what was shared, but instead to promote critical thinking by the rest of the class in examining what their peers had accomplished.

Consequently, Mrs. Rose’s students were given the opportunity to share in a way similar to Grave’s (1994) concept of student-student conferences. During her sharing time, the teacher was not directly involved. As pairs of students finished, they were instructed to share their work with other sets of partners who had also completed their work.

The use of sharing time within instruction provided by the low efficacy teachers did not corroborate Atwell’s (1987) use of the concept. During the low efficacy teachers’ sharing times, the teacher was the focus. The students directed their sharing at the teacher, as if they were sharing in order to gain approval for what they had written. The only comments during this time were made by the teacher, and either the comments were a generic approval such as “Good job,” or the teacher would correct something the student had done and in some instances sent the student away to fix it.

**Influences on self-efficacy.** Results of this study provide evidence that experiences teachers had as writers and also as writing teachers influenced their development of self-efficacy in varying degrees, which supports the work of Sigel (1985) who found that an array of personal experiences of which individuals partake throughout their lives leads to the development of personal beliefs. As a writer, opportunities in the home and in elementary and high school influenced the participants, as did the feedback they received from teachers. From the time participants graduated, entered teacher
preparatory programs, and eventually joined the work force, various influential experiences impacted their development of self-efficacy.

**Opportunities to write.** Results of this study provided evidence that high efficacy participants were afforded an abundance of writing opportunities both at home and throughout school. Clay (1966) found that a child’s contacts and experiences with print at home and prior to any formal literacy instruction contribute to the future development of her literacy abilities. This study seems to support this finding, while additionally finding that limited literacy abilities, which result from the lack of experiences at home, can then contribute to a belief that one cannot effectively teach writing. The high efficacy participants both grew up in homes where writing materials were provided and writing was either accepted or encouraged. They also reported writing for enjoyment outside of school. Additionally, as these participants moved through elementary and high school they participated in a variety of types of writing assignments. Participation in these writing activities afforded them the opportunity to receive an abundance of teacher feedback, which was most often positive and provided them with the impression that they were successful writers.

The low efficacy participants did not grow up in homes where writing materials were made available, and in one participant’s case, where literacy activities were valued. Data analysis revealed that only one of the low efficacy participants recalled participation in writing activities in elementary school. For her, the focus of most of these activities was on correctness in the written product and feedback she received did not make her feel as though she was a successful writer. This finding supports the work of Cohen and
Weiner (2003) who found that one of the reasons teachers lack confidence in teaching writing is due to negative experiences they had with writing in school.

Neither of the low efficacy participants experienced a wide variety of writing opportunities in high school, and therefore received little feedback that might influence their views of themselves as writers. According to Bandura (1977), one way that efficacy can be positively influenced is if individuals receive positive verbal messages from others, which did not happen for the low efficacy participants during this time period.

Once the participants entered college, data revealed that all four participants had very similar writing opportunities including writing for a variety of purposes and activities that focused on both the product and process of writing. Both high and low efficacy participants reported receiving a combination of positive and negative feedback.

**Teacher preparatory programs.** Cohen and Weiner (2003) also attributed a lack of confidence in teachers of writing to the fact that most teachers perceived their teacher education programs as ineffective. Similarly, results of this study indicate that these participants believed that their experiences in teacher preparatory programs did little to prepare them to become teachers of writing. In fact, all of the participants reported that their teacher preparatory programs did not teach them how to teach the craft of writing; rather the focus was on integrating writing within other curricula. These results provide support for other research, such as the work of Spandel (2005) and Thomas (2000), which concluded that most practicing teachers were never formally educated to teach writing. In fact, in this study both low efficacy teachers reported that the thought of teaching writing never even entered their minds as they finished their teacher preparatory programs.
**Work-related experiences.** Of the teachers that Mathers et al. (2009) surveyed, most reported that their positive experiences with learning to teach writing came during professional development opportunities and collaboration with colleagues. Similarly, participants within this study reported these two main influences on efficacy within the work place. All participants had been involved in a similar professional development experience within their building. Although all participants reported benefits they had received as a result of the training, it did not appear that this training was as influential in contributing to their views of themselves as writing teachers as was collaboration with colleagues.

This study found that experiences with colleagues significantly influenced the participants’ self-efficacy. All participants reported that they had the opportunities to see colleagues such as literacy specialists model lessons, had planned collaboratively with other teachers, or had informal and formal conversations with colleagues about writing instruction. High efficacy participants reported initiating contact with colleagues in order to meet their needs, while low efficacy participants reported more unplanned, incidental interactions with colleagues. Of all the participants, only the low efficacy participants reported having negative interactions with colleagues early in their teaching careers.

Conclusions

**Impact of self-efficacy on classroom instruction.** Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) reported that self-efficacy in teachers is linked to quality and type of classroom practices. Similarly, Rubeck and Enochs (1991) found that high efficacy teachers tend to have higher quality instruction. Results of this study indicated that self-efficacy does indeed
affect classroom instruction. The instruction of the high efficacy participants was more systematic, process-oriented, and student centered.

According to Cambourne (2002) systematic instruction is based on effective planning which takes place ahead of time, and well-developed and organized lessons and activities. According to Dictionary.com’s online thesaurus, the word “systematic” is a synonym of “precise, logical, ordered, complete, and efficient” (www.thesaurus.com). All of these descriptors apply to the instruction of the high efficacy participants within this study. The high efficacy participants prepared lesson plans and had organizational systems in place that ensured systematic processes that were followed within weekly lessons. Ms. Jessica kept the same format each week for writing, which included introduction of a story, oral discussions about the information, completion of graphic organizers with the students to organize the new information gained, modeling, and then student practice. Similarly, Ms. Rose’s detailed lessons included explicit instruction that included the systematic use of modeling, guided practice, and then independent student writing time. This type of explicit instruction has been recognized as beneficial to students in past research (Hillocks, 1995; Honeycutt, 2002). In contrast, Ms. Lippy did not record detailed, preplanned lesson plans. Her lessons, like those of Ms. Roz, were sporadic and disconnected, and neither low efficacy participant used explicit instruction to better prepare students for independent writing.

Past research on writing instruction has focused on comparing two teaching orientations, the process approach and the product approach, also referred to as the traditional approach. This research has shown that the process approach is more effective (Goldstein & Carr, 1996; Robinson, 1986; Scannella, 1982). However, most teachers do
not teach using just one of the two approaches; instead Graham et al. (2002) found that most teachers use a combination of the two approaches. Within this study, both high and low efficacy participants used instructional activities that would be considered process-oriented. However, for the low efficacy participants, instructional components considered more traditional, or product-oriented, were also evident.

Within this study, instructional components associated with the process approach, such as teacher modeling and sharing time, were observed in lessons taught by all participants. However, the low efficacy teachers used these components in more product-oriented ways. A focus on correctness, often associated with product-oriented instruction (Graham, 2000) was found within the modeling time and sharing time of low efficacy participants. In the low efficacy teachers’ classrooms, Ms. Lippy only modeled correct spelling in front of her kindergarteners and both teachers used sharing time as a way for students to report to the teacher and receive correction of their work.

In the classrooms of the high efficacy teachers, lessons observed mirrored researchers’ descriptions of process-oriented instruction (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1986; Cramer, 2001). These researchers describe the process approach as a combination of direct strategy instruction, guided practice, theories and activities that emphasize procedures, and strategy instruction focusing on skills that writers need, for specific purposes. In particular, Ms. Jessica’s lessons that involved segmenting words and writing phonetically and the guided practice designed to practice composing sentences orally before writing are both illustrations of this type of process-oriented approach to teaching writing. These aforementioned activities that occurred in Ms. Jessica’s classroom are also considered more learner-centered.
In fact, both high efficacy teachers used instructional practices that were more learner-centered. Learner-centered instructional approaches are favored by researchers over teacher-centered ones (Bruffee, 1984; Hillocks, 1993; Rubin & Herbert, 1998; Edens, 2000; Hansen & Stephens, 2000; Villaume, 2000). Student-centered instruction typically encourages independence, and supports the concept of student ownership of their learning. In this study, Ms. Rose’s use of partners to complete projects and student sharing time done among groups of partners, without teacher intervention, are examples of student-centeredness. The students in her room were self-supportive and did not always look to the teacher for help. For example, when a student asked what they were working on, another student answered the question.

In contrast, the low efficacy participants were more teacher-centered. Within teacher-centered classrooms the focus is on the instructor who monitors, provides feedback, and usually corrects students (Huba & Freed, 2000). Within this study, an illustration of this approach was when Ms. Roz had a line of students waiting for her approval on their written work. When it was their turn, she either approved of the work and students turned it in, or she directed that corrections needed to be made and students went back to their seats to continue working.

**Influences on development of self-efficacy.** Results of this study indicated that major influences on participants’ development of self-efficacy included the types and amount of writing experiences they had before entering college and the feedback they received during these experiences. Additionally, colleagues had the greatest impact on self-efficacy after participants entered the work force.

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This study supported Cohen and Weiner’s (2003) research that found the development of low self-efficacy can be a result of negative experiences with writing in school and a lack of confidence in oneself as a writer. Although one low efficacy participant did not recall any writing activities in school, the majority of experiences and feedback the other low efficacy participant received were negative, and led her to believe that she “was not a writer.” On the contrary, the high efficacy participants in this study participated in a variety of writing activities in elementary and high school, and received positive feedback from their teachers that contributed to the belief that they were “good writers.”

However, this study also appears to show that, in addition to having negative experiences, a lack of experiences can also lead to low self-efficacy in writing. For instance, Ms. Roz did not recall many writing opportunities throughout grade school and into high school, and in Ms. Lippy’s case she lacked writing opportunities in high school.

The results of this study also suggest that although three of the participants participated in similar writing opportunities within their respective undergraduate programs, the high efficacy participants continued to get feedback that reinforced their view of themselves as successful and competent writers. For another participant, her low self-efficacy as a writer continued despite similar exposure to a variety of writing opportunities and a combination of both positive and negative feedback in her college coursework. The receipt of some positive feedback and a variety of experiences were not enough to change her negative view of herself as a writer. This finding supports Munby’s (1982) research, which found that the earlier a belief is incorporated into a belief structure, the more difficult it is to alter.
Once participants entered the teaching profession, colleagues had the greatest impact on their self-efficacy in teaching writing. Similar to the findings of Mathers et al. (2009), participants reported primarily positive experiences with colleagues, including regularly turning to colleagues for guidance in matters related to writing instruction. Although both high and low efficacy participants reported that collaborating with colleagues helped them to feel more confident, the experiences were not enough to raise the low efficacy participants’ efficacy levels out of the “low confidence” range on the self-efficacy scale. For these participants, simply having informal conversations and hearing about the lessons and activities that other teachers were using was not enough. Bandura (1977) contended that the successful completion of a desired behavior is the most potent source of self-efficacy. However, the low efficacy participants in this study did not report instances where they felt they were indeed successful at teaching writing. Instead, both low efficacy participants reported that as they entered the teaching profession they were almost immediately met with negative feedback in regard to their instruction.

Implications

Results of this study offer implications for parents, writing instruction in K-12, administrators, writing instruction within higher education, teacher preparatory programs, professional development, literacy coaches, and policy makers.

Parents. Results of this study suggest parents and caregivers can contribute to a child’s development of self efficacy in regard to writing. Parental attitudes and values in regard to schooling and literacy activities can leave lasting impressions on their children
well into adulthood. This study suggested that children indeed notice and internalize which family members were writers, and what types of writing they participate in. Writing in the presence of children is one activity that implicitly implies the importance and necessity of writing in our lives.

Writing instruction in K-12. This study brought to light just how crucial quality writing instruction can be both in the short term and the long term. For these participants, writing opportunities that they participated in from grade school and into high school shaped their views of themselves as writers for the rest of their lives, and later shaped their own writing instruction. Although school employees have little control over what happens in the homes of students, they have the responsibility of making sure that quality writing instruction occurs within each classroom for each child.

This study revealed that simply adding writing time throughout the day or week was not the answer. More time does not equate to more learning, and it certainly does not guarantee better instruction. It seems from the results of this study that evaluating the time already spent teaching writing, and reflecting about its efficiency would be a better starting point toward quality instruction.

This study also revealed that even though teachers may have the same instructional components, ones that research has identified as “best practice,” the way that these practices are implemented varies. Within this study all participants had research-based, process-oriented practices, but across participants, the implementation of these practices played out very differently. It is of utmost importance that teachers understand the theories that support instructional approaches considered best practice. Knowledge of theories related to writing instruction may help teachers understand why
they should be implementing these instructional practices. In summary, the findings from this study support a systematic, student-centered, process-oriented approach to writing instruction.

Administrators. This study revealed the potential impact collaboration can have on both high and low efficacy teachers. Collaboration among teachers is certainly not a new idea and needs to be supported and promoted by administrators who should find ways to give teachers what they need in order to improve instruction. Teachers’ days should be enriched with quality time devoted to professional learning and growth involving interaction with colleagues. One participant in this study could not name another successful teacher of writing within the school where she had taught for almost thirteen years. She stated, “It’s been so long since I have seen anyone else teach writing, I don’t get to see their lessons. I’m sure there are good writing teachers” (Ms. Rose, interview, March 23, 2010).

School administrators can do their part by identifying teachers who are not only confident but also quality instructors. Subsequently, teachers who are struggling need to be given opportunities to observe lessons within these successful teachers’ classrooms, and also need to be given time to collaborate with these teachers in order to gain knowledge about the processes and planning that go into creating successful, student-oriented writing lessons. This supports Bandura’s (1977) early work in the area of teacher efficacy emphasizing that administrators can assist teachers by providing ample opportunities to observe expert teachers in their field, allowing opportunities for teachers to practice new instructional strategies and to then receive positive feedback from colleagues, students, parents, and administrators.
Writing instruction within higher education. This study revealed that for students entering college as successful writers, their experiences continued to help them feel confident. However, for students who may arrive at institutions of higher learning with negative views of themselves as a writer, faculty members must put forth maximum efforts to try to change this. It is not too late to attempt to immerse these students in an abundance of writing opportunities, nor is it too late to try to build their confidence levels through the use of positive feedback. An abundance of quality writing instruction that allows opportunities for a deep understanding of the writing process combined with positive human interactions may just be enough to change their views of themselves as writers and in turn, ultimately lead to a life-time spent teaching writing in a more confident and effective manner.

Teacher preparatory programs. This study and past research draw attention to the need for more effective preparation of writing teachers. Bartlett (2003) concluded that teacher education programs, even those found at the nation’s best colleges, treated writing as an afterthought instead of a high priority, which resulted in low-quality writing programs and writers. Although participants in this study may have come away from their teacher preparatory programs feeling comfortable about their abilities to integrate writing, these teachers have not come away with confidence that they can actually teach their students how to write. As teachers leave teacher preparatory programs feeling ill-prepared, they often “revert to teaching in the manner in which they have been taught” (Stover, 1986, p. 21), which in some cases leads to the continuation of traditional, product-oriented writing instruction, which has proven ineffective.
In addition, many researchers agree that understanding the belief structure of teachers and teacher candidates is essential to improving both teacher preparatory programs and teaching practices (Ashton, 1990; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Brookhart & Freeman, 1992). Acknowledging and reflecting on what one believes about writing instruction and on how one observed writing instruction throughout schooling is imperative. Once a belief system is in place, then it acts as a filter for all new information to go through and it affects one’s perception of new ideas and information (Munby, 1982). If pre-service teachers are simply provided with new information without exploring their current beliefs about the construct, then these new ideas will either be discarded or assimilated into their current beliefs, but beliefs will not be altered (Posner et al., 1982).

Professional development. This study supports the idea of professional development that is designed to help teachers become more confident writers in order that they can become more confident teachers of writing. If thoughtfully designed, this professional development could have the potential to change a teachers’ view of themselves as writers. It could be one more ‘safety-net’ that might catch some low efficacy writers who have the potential to impact the writing of many students in positive ways.

The focus of such professional development should also be on writing theories that can lead to the exploration and use of writing instruction best practices described in the literature review of this study and beyond. Teachers must understand what instructional practices could lead to better writing achievement in their students, as well as how to implement them correctly for maximum results.
**Literacy coaches.** This researcher, who was also the literacy coach in the building at the time of the study, concluded that ongoing professional development is a necessity for a demanding, complex teaching construct such as writing. Literacy coaching, which is considered a long-term, embedded professional development opportunity, could serve as time for teachers to observe an expert, who is also a colleague, effectively teach writing. It would also provide teachers with an opportunity to receive positive human feedback on how they are teaching. In recognizing the power of colleagues who are ‘in the trenches,’ literacy coaches could also provided guided, structured opportunities for high efficacy teachers to share their writing instruction lessons, practices, and knowledge, all within a safe environment during school hours.

**Policy makers.** For policy makers, this study serves to enlighten them concerning the idea that good writing cannot be evaluated simply by looking at the product. Best practices in writing have shown that the process of writing is just as important, if not more important than a flawless product. Yet, currently most formal writing assessments across the nation continue to use product-based assessments and scoring methods in order to determine the skill-levels of students and in turn, the effectiveness of classroom writing instruction. Teachers are getting the message that they simply need to find ways to get their students to produce writing products that are ‘correct.’

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The present study provided a comparison of classroom instruction of both low and high efficacy teachers, and explored the influences on development of self-efficacy in
writing teachers. This study provides direction for future research on writing instruction, writing teachers, and teacher beliefs.

**Recommendations for research on writing instruction.** Due to the design and nature of this study, it included only four participants, in one school building, and took place over a short period of time. Research is needed which focuses on observation of classroom writing instruction over a longer period of time so that more data can be collected and analyzed in relation to the degree of coherency and effectiveness.

Additionally, future research on writing instruction could include an analysis of student work to support the description of effective instruction. Whether students actually became better writers within the high efficacy teachers’ classrooms was not explored within the parameters of this study, but is something that could be explored in further research.

**Recommendations for research on writing teachers.** This study included only primary teachers of writing. As students progress through school and writing activities become more complex, the amount of knowledge and skill required of teachers of writing increases exponentially. Research that focuses on teachers of upper grades would be useful in determining the impact of this efficacy on instruction at these levels. Studies similar to the present study could be replicated across grade levels and content areas.

Within this study, all participants recognized the extent to which colleagues influenced their self-efficacy. However, future research could be designed to explore which interactions were found most helpful in boosting teachers’ instructional effectiveness as well as self-efficacy levels. Therefore, research is needed in the area of
teacher collaboration and self-efficacy, as well as effectiveness in regard to student achievement.

**Recommendations for research on teacher beliefs.** Current research in the area of self-efficacy fails to contain a substantive number of studies devoted to writing teachers. Although this study can contribute to the database of information regarding confidence of writing teachers, more studies are needed that can contribute to theories about writing teachers’ development of self-efficacy over time.

In the present study, participants’ memories about past events were tested, and while it is assumed that these memories were accurate, research that is designed to measure levels of efficacy at various points throughout teachers’ lives could be useful.

Summary of Chapter

This study had two purposes. First, it compared instructional practices of high- and low-efficacy teachers of writing in kindergarten and first grade. Findings suggest that the writing instruction of high efficacy teachers was more student-centered, process-oriented, and systematic. Secondly, this study was designed to investigate the impact of various sociocultural and experiential influences on the development of self-efficacy in regard to these teachers as writers and also as writing instructors. Results suggest that the impact that other human beings had on these teachers within the home, in school, and eventually within the workplace influenced the development of teachers’ efficacy in writing. Lastly, this study found that if teachers are confident in themselves as writers, then they are likely to be confident teachers of writing.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

March 9, 2010

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in research I am conducting related to the self-confidence of classroom teachers who teach writing to primary students.

For the first part of this study I will need to identify potential participants. In order to accomplish this, I will be asking you to complete the attached Demographics Survey and Self-efficacy Scale. This should only take a few minutes. After I have analyzed the information given by all participating classroom teachers, then I may ask you to participate in the next phase of the study. This subsequent stage of data collection involves at least one interview, at least two observations of your classroom writing instruction, and the collection of pertinent documents such as lesson plans.

This research will benefit educators and policy makers, as well as the participants personally. Because I appreciate and value your time, each participant will receive a $25.00 gift card to a local business at the conclusion of the study. Educationally, this research intends to shed light on what influences the development of teachers’ self-confidence in the area of writing instruction. The hope of the researcher is that conclusions of this study can result in enhancing the literature in the area of self-confidence of teachers, which could impact policies and procedures at schools in our area and across the nation.

There are no known risks to you or your students as a result of participating in this research project. Please understand that your participation in this research project is completely voluntary. No penalty to you will occur if you choose not to participate or choose to withdraw at any time during the study.

The data collected will be coded so that your identity will be kept confidential in all reports and presentations. All data will be kept in a secure location that will only be accessible to the researcher.

This study is one requirement necessary to complete my doctoral degree in Elementary Education at the University of Akron. If you have any questions about this study, you may call me at 330-224-5562 or my advisor, Dr. Ruth Oswald at 330-972-5483. This project has been reviewed and approved by The University of Akron Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the IRB at (330) 972-7666 or 1-888-232-8790.
By checking the box below, you will be acknowledging that you

1) have read the information provided above and all of your questions have been answered,
2) agree to participate in this study, and
3) have been given a copy of this consent form for future reference.

- I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Thank you so much for your time,

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The University of Akron
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APPENDIX B

TEACHER SURVEY

Demographics Information

Name__________________________  Current Position__________________________

Please list other teaching positions held: (grade levels and years taught)

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

Total years experience:_____

Degrees/Institutions:___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

Ethnicity (circle one):
Caucasian  African-American  Hispanic  Multiracial  Other:_______

Self-Efficacy Scale

Please rate your current self-confidence level of teaching writing by circling the appropriate number below:

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
“Very Low Confidence”  “Some Confidence”  “High Confidence”
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Writing experiences at home/school K-12:

1. Describe what you remember in regard to writing experiences in your home as you were growing up.

2. What types of writing experiences did you have in school (K-12)?

3. Did you have any teacher(s) who influenced your view of writing? If so, what do you remember about these teachers?

4. During your K-12 school experience, how would you describe your view of yourself as a writer?

Writing experiences/education - teacher prep program:

5. What types of writing experiences did you have within your undergraduate course work?

6. Did you have any writing classes in college? What do you remember about these classes?

7. How would you describe your confidence level in regard to teaching writing at the time that you graduated from your teacher prep program?

Writing experiences/education post undergrad:

8. Have you taken any writing courses or been involved in any types of professional development workshops since graduating with your undergraduate degree?

9. In what ways do you feel that these trainings/courses have influenced your writing instruction?
10. How have they affected your confidence in teaching writing?
State, district, building-wide influences:

11. Have any state-, district- or building-wide policies or mandates influenced your writing instruction?

12. Does your district provide you with any curricular materials, programs or assessments to use for writing instruction?

13. Have your colleagues influenced your writing instruction? If so, in what ways?

14. Within your teaching environment, has anything else impacted your writing instruction and your feelings toward teaching writing?

15. Do you teach with anyone you would regard as an excellent teacher of writing? What do you believe makes them a great writing teacher?

Writing Instruction:

16. What are your major beliefs about teaching and learning in general?

17. What do you believe are the most important goals of an effective writing program?

18. Describe a typical week of writing instruction in your classroom?

19. What do you enjoy about teaching writing?

20. What struggles do you encounter as you teach writing?

21. What do you feel has influenced your instruction the most?

Teacher as Writer:

22. Do you consider yourself a good writer? Why or why not?

23. What types of writing activities do you do on a regular basis?

24. What do you consider one of the best pieces of writing you have ever done? What makes it your best piece?

25. What do you consider one of the worst pieces of writing you have ever done? What makes it your worst piece?
APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL LETTER
March 9, 2018

Grand L. Noe, Ph.D.
9597 Eastwood Road
Wayne State, OH 44688

FROM: Sharon A. Thaxton, IRB Administrator

RE: IRB Number 24100310 "The Influence of Experiential and Socio-cultural Factors on Efficiency and Instructional Effectiveness: Case Studies of Primary Teachers of Writing"

March 9, 2018. The protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following federal category for exemption:

☐ Exemption 1 - Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.

☐ Exemption 2 - Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior.

☐ Exemption 3 - Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior not exempt under category 2, but subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.

☐ Exemption 4 - Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, anthropological specimens, or diagnostic measurements.

☐ Exemption 5 - Research and demonstration projects conducted by or subject to the approval of departmental or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine public programs or benefits.

☐ Exemption 6 - Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies.

Annual reauthorization applications are not required for exempt projects. If you make changes to the study's design or procedures that increase the risk to subjects or include activities that do not fall within the approved operation category, please contact me to discuss whether or not a new application must be submitted. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please retain this letter for your files. If the research is being conducted for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

To: Ruth Oswald - Advisor
To: Stephanie Morris - IRB Chair

Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
Phone: 313-577-3410
Email: rcohen@wayne.edu
HUB 41105-3410

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