Improving Students' Writing Skills:

Strategies and Practices of a Georgia Elementary School

A Dissertation submitted
to the Graduate School
Valdosta State University

in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in Curriculum and Instruction

in the Department of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology
of the Dewar College of Education and Human Services

March 2019

MICHAEL R. TODD

Ed.D., Valdosta State University, 2019
M.Ed., University of Georgia, 2008
B.S., University of West Georgia, 2007

This dissertation, "Improving Students' Writing Skills: Strategies and Practices of a Georgia Elementary School," by Michael Robert Todd, is approved by:

Dissertation Committee Chair

William F. Truby, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Curriculum, Leadership, & Technology

Dissertation Research Member

Rudo E. Tsemunhu, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Curriculum, Leadership, & Technology

Committee Members

Robert B. Green, Ph.D.
Professor of Curriculum, Leadership, & Technology

John D. Lairsey, Ed.D.
Adjunct Professor of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology

Associate Provost for Graduate Studies and Research

Becky K. da Cruz, PhD., JD
Professor of Criminal Justice

Defense Date March 26, 2019

FAIR USE

DUPLICATION

I authorize the Head of Interlibrary Loan or the Head of Archives at the Odum Library at Valdosta State University to arrange for duplication of this thesis for educational or scholarly purposes when so requested by a library user. The duplication shall be at the user's expense.

Signature 

I refuse permission for this thesis to be duplicated in whole or in part.

Signature _____

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my amazing wife Erin and my son Bennett. Thank you for both for allowing me to pursue my dream of obtaining this degree. I could not have completed this arduous task without your full support. I know that you are excited that we are moving forward with our lives. Thank you for always believing in me!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Personal Support With the Dissertation

Dr. Chad Galloway – You have been a dear friend to me throughout this journey. You have been extremely helpful to me throughout the dissertation process. Thank you for always allowing me to work at your apartment. I will always be in your debt for your guidance and amazing editing skills. The best dissertation is a done dissertation.

Dr. Pat Waldrip – Pat, thank you for your willingness to help me through my course work and for keeping my mind focused on the task at hand. I am so glad that you always encouraged me to keep working in the area of elementary writing.

Valdosta State University Support with the Dissertation

Dr. Bill Truby – Thank you for chairing my dissertation! I am so thankful for your guidance throughout this process. You have been an encouragement to me during the highs and lows of completing the dissertation and have reminded me how this challenging experience was leading to a greater goal!

Dr. Rudo Tsemunhu – Thank you for your willingness to ask difficult questions and your guidance in making sure that my research methods were sound. Your expert advice made my study stronger and clearer.

Dr. Robert Green – Thank you for your guidance with my research questions, which framed the rest of the dissertation.

Dr. John Lairsay – I appreciate all of your help with my dissertation and for agreeing to be a part of my committee.

School Support with the Dissertation

Dr. Susan Stancil – Thank you for allowing me the freedom to capture my data.

Mrs. Laura Prescott – Thank you for covering my class countless times! You did it with a smile on your face, though it may have been a sarcastic smile.

My old 4th grade team – Tracy, Cassie, and Stacy, thank you for always believing in me and believing that I would finish this journey. I simply loved working with each one of you.

Family Support with the Dissertation

Mr. Randy and Mrs. Linda Todd – Thank you, Mom and Dad, for instilling in me a very strong work ethic and for always telling me how proud you are of me and my pursuit of this degree. I know that I never excelled in K-12 education, but I went further in my education than any of my brothers. Thank you for the countless times you drove to Athens so I could work on the dissertation without worrying about Bennett.

Mr. Ken McCrary and Mrs. Jane McCrary – Thank you for your support and encouragement throughout this process. Thank you for making all those trips to Athens so I could work knowing that Bennett was having the time of his life. Thank you, Mr. Ken, for allowing me to work on the dissertation at your office.

Mr. Brian Todd – Brian, thank you for always being a good big brother and teaching me to show up and work hard. Thank you for always allowing me to follow you around when I was little. You were a great role model and example.

Mr. David Todd – I have a random memory of you giving me the first writing lesson that I remember. You said, "I keep my writing clear and to the point." Thank you for always being a good big brother and teaching me to show up and work hard. You have always been the definition of intelligent and cool in my eyes.

Cathey Abernathy – Thank you for always being willing to watch Bennett and giving me time to work. You are a blessing to my family, a blessing to Christ Community Church, and a blessing to Athens.

The Garzarek Family – To Michael and Jessi, thank you for your friendship and your help with our massive home renovation. Thank you also for encouraging me to get back to work and finish this degree, as well as for your reassurance to me throughout the process of completing my doctoral degree.

The Woodard Family – To Walt and Alice, thank you for your prayers and encouragement, and for sharing your lives with me over the past decade.

My Church Community Group – I guess I am going to have to come up with a new prayer request, since my dissertation is now complete! Thank you all for your support and encouragement throughout this process. Let's celebrate!

Mr. Matt Adair – Thank you for being my pastor for the last decade. You were the first person to call me Dr. Todd because you said you knew that I was going to finish.

Dr. Eric Houck – This journey was more difficult than I could have ever imagined, and I cannot believe that I was able to finish this degree. Thank you for planting the seed of getting a doctorate in my head way back in 2008.

Georgia – My dog, for always knowing when I needed a break to pet your head and for keeping me relaxed and working.

Ollie – My cat, for always checking on me (especially late at night) to make sure I was awake and working.

ABSTRACT

Writing has been a documented problem in American schools for more than 30 years. The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies and practices teachers in one Georgia elementary school used to significantly improve student writing scores as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test. This qualitative case study examined teachers' life and career experiences, school-wide strategies related to writing, and classroom-based writing practices. Data collection included memos, interviews, teacher observations, and artifacts. Categorical aggregation was used to analyze the data. This study resulted in several major findings. All participants' pedagogical approaches to writing instruction were influenced by their past experiences. All participants reported that the support from their school principals helped them settle on various practices leading to their success in teaching writing. All participants found formulaic writing strategies to be useful in improving students' writing. Participants reported increased student learning when modeling was used as an instructional strategy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1983, "A Nation at Risk," a report on the state of education in the United States, was released (Gardner, 1983). It was a call to transform American schools. This landmark report prompted a call for rigorous academic excellence throughout the nation (Gardner, 1983). The overall directive from this commission, comprised of educators, was to move the United States toward a "Learning Society" (Gardner, 1983). According to "A Nation at Risk," a learning society is a "commitment to a set of values and to a system of education that affords all members the opportunity to stretch their minds to full capacity" (p. 13).

More than 30 years has passed since the original publication of "A Nation at Risk" addressed the needed areas of change in the American educational system, but the country was still struggling to become what Gardner (1983) called a "Learning Society." "A Nation at Risk" stated the U.S. society was not producing better college-educated citizens than it did 40 to 50 years ago (Gardner, 1983), so where does that leave education currently? Despite the fact the United States is producing higher numbers of college-educated adults, college and university graduates often lack certain basic skills (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

One of the major findings of "A Nation at Risk" addressed the basic skill of writing (Bell, 1993; Bracey, 2003; Gardner, 1983). The National Center for Education Statistics (2012) found that 60% of students did not meet writing standards. Currently,

American students are still having great difficulty in writing. Less than a decade ago, the majority of eighth and twelfth graders still did not meet basic writing skills (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

As technology becomes more prominent in American classrooms, students relied on speech-to-text software and word-prediction software to improve their writing; however, these students often scored lower on writing tests (Graham & Sandmel, 2011; Quible & Griffin, 2007). Competent writing takes dedication and time (Brooks, 2007; Calkins, 1994), but often, students were unwilling to go through the revision process, preferring to take a lower grade just to be done with the assignment (Gardner, 1983; Graham & Sandmel, 2011; Kern, Amdre, Schilike, Barton, & McGuire, 2003; Parnell & Procter, 2011; Sams, 2003).

One job of a writing teacher is to instill in students a passion for expressing themselves as writers (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 2004; Wood Ray, 2001). Calkins (1994) emphasized the importance of students having enough life experiences to serve as the basis for written assignments. However, the writing process can become complicated when teachers themselves struggled to teach writing effectively (Algozzine & Diliberto, 2004; Garlid, 2014; Graham & Sandmel, 2011; Tompkins, 2013). The results of numerous surveys indicated that a majority of teachers have felt unprepared in the area of writing instruction (Bifuh-ambe, 2013; Graham, Capizzi, Harris, Hebert, & Morphy, 2014; Mo, Kopke, Hawkins, Troia, & Olinghouse, 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; Wixson, Valencia, Murphy, & Phillips, 2013). When teachers are better prepared to teach writing, it is plausible that they are better able to tap into their students'

passions and desire to share their own thoughts and experiences in writing (Sanders-Reio, Alexander, Reio, & Newman, 2014).

Problem Statement

After years of implementing many reform efforts following the publication of "A Nation at Risk in 1983" sixty percent of all American elementary students do not meet national writing standards.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies and practices used by teachers at an identified Georgia elementary school resulting in students significantly improving their writing skills and meeting national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test.

Research Questions

RQ1. What were the life and career experiences of teachers at an identified Georgia elementary who took responsibility for improving student writing skills resulting in students meeting national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

RQ 2. What strategies did teachers use at an identified Georgia elementary school to significantly improve student writing skills and meet national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

RQ 3. What practices did teachers use at an identified Georgia elementary school use to significantly improve student writing skills and meet national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

Significance

Academic achievement remains a concern in the United States, especially after the landmark findings in "A Nation at Risk." Researchers found that sixty percent of all American elementary students do not meet writing standards (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Poor writing skills might have serious implications for future college students who will be expected to express themselves clearly in written form, as well as for future workers competing globally for high-paying jobs in a world economy that places great importance on writing competence (Porter & Rivkin, 2012). The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies and practices employed by an identified Georgia elementary school that significantly improved student writing skills as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test. The results of this study could inform district policymakers, federal and state departments of education, as well as university and college teacher preparation programs regarding ideas to improve writing programs or practices. Perhaps the greatest use of the findings of this study could be to help classroom teachers with their strategies and practices for teaching writing in order to help students become more competent writers.

Personal Background

Writing has always been difficult for me. I do not remember producing any quality stories throughout my K-12 education. I have had far more failures and frustrations with writing than I ever did successes. No teacher I can remember took the time to show me explicitly how to write a paragraph, or even a sentence. As a classroom teacher I want to instill a passion for writing and for students to understand the importance of learning how to write.

I can only imagine the amount of frustration I caused my teachers. I was a bright student, but I had a low opinion of myself as a student. My lack of confidence with writing had negative effects throughout my education and personal life. As a bright student, I often worked hard to cover up my inability to write, rather than becoming a better writer. We live in an on-demand society wanting everything right now, but the ability to write takes time from emails, reports, and presentations. Writing could be the great equalizer because the recipient of one's writing only had the words on the page to gauge a level of intelligence. Americans can still struggle with how to understand daily writing demands, because it is difficult to understand how much work and effort it took to write coherently. I struggled with mild dyslexia throughout my life. For example, I had an extremely hard time with spelling words correctly. In addition, teachers would often become very frustrated with my inability to identify my mistakes in a piece of writing. I simply chose not to engage in writing tasks.

Throughout my eleven years as a classroom teacher, I have seen more students lack excitement for writing than any other subject taught in schools. There have been many factors that have made writing difficult for students, from story ideas, to spelling, to sentence structure, and basic penmanship. In my classroom, students often asked if what I was teaching was going to be on the Georgia Milestones standardized test. I attempted to communicate clearly to my students why writing was important. In so many words I told them, "We write today so that we can communicate well in our future lives. The ability to write well will open doors to your future and the inability to write will keep them closed."

Current Gap and Purpose

"A Nation at Risk" stated that many writing teachers had difficulty with classroom instruction of writing (Gardner, 1983). Writing instruction has been the subject of numerous research studies since the publication of this report (Graham & Sandmel, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; Shanahan, 2015; Wixson et al., 2013). Students struggle to write proficiently, and teachers often struggle to teach writing. Past research focused on students' life and writing experiences and how students' views affected their ability to write effectively (Troia & Graham, 2016). But much less research focused on how teachers' personal writing experiences and education about writing pedagogy. This study helps to fill that gap.

Causes and Consequences

Many factors have led to teachers' success or failure with writing. Two of these factors were the lack of college courses on writing pedagogy for potential teachers and the lack of continual professional development for teachers (Bifuh-ambe, 2013; Kaplan & Kaplan, 2008; Limbrick, Buchanan, Goodwin, & Schwarcz, 2010; Snyder & Bristol, 2015; Street, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). Writing was a complex task that requires mastery of prerequisite skills (Wolbers, et al., 2015). Student self-efficacy toward writing was also a contributing factor (Graham, Hebert, & Harris, 2015). Teachers often had difficulty pinpointing the exact writing skills their students lacked (Wolbers et al., 2015). For example, spelling was often a problem with written composition; yet, spelling instruction often changed from year-to-year (Pajares, 2003). Since many standardized tests lacked a writing assessment,

writing was not made a focus of classroom instruction throughout the year (van Hartingsveldt, de Groot, Aarts, & Nijhuis-van der Sanden, 2011).

Writing deficiencies often played a major role in job placement and advancement in both school and careers. Many high school students struggled to compose a well-written sentence (Calkins, 1994; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; Pytash, Edmondson, & Tait, 2014). The number of college remedial writing courses has gone up more than 89% over the last ten years (Bodnar & Petrucelli, 2016). Job candidates' inability to communicate effectively in written form often restricted their hiring and advancement. Since high school and college graduates now often compete for jobs on a global scale (Porter & Rivkin, 2012), businesses spend 3.1 billion dollars annually to remediate their employees who do not have proficient writing skills (Pytash et al., 2014).

Conceptual Framework

My original interest in the area of writing was deeply personal, since I have been a struggling writer. As I transitioned into the classroom from a physical education profession, I interviewed many teachers about their instructional practices. The majority of teachers were very confident in how to teach all subjects except writing. Consistently, I got a wide range of answers from teachers about how to effectively teach writing.

Throughout my coursework at Valdosta State University, I pursued each assignment as an opportunity to research and learn more about teaching writing at the elementary level. In my qualitative studies course, I held focus groups and interviews with teachers about writing. The more I asked questions about writing, the wider range of answers I received. This solidified my decision to study the challenges of writing instruction at a deeper level.

Most previous scholarly literature has argued that writing instruction should be taught using a process approach (Graham, McKeown, Kiuhara, & Harris, 2012; Storch, 2005). Many teachers were familiar with the writing process, but the majority struggled to have confidence in the day-to-day instruction of writing in the classroom (Conrad & Stone, 2015; Vitali, 2016).

The theory of constructivism used in this study examined how teachers were supported and guided by the district, the school, and their teaching philosophy. The constructivist approach focused on how learning takes place (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). Talented teachers must be active participants in the teaching of writing, allowing students to be challenged and supported in the writing classroom (Calkins, 1994; Jardine, 2006; Wood Ray, 2001). Focusing on the theory of constructivism allowed the researcher to study how educators approached their learning theories and teaching methods.

According to Piaget (1955), a person constructs or produces knowledge based on his or her experiences. The theory of constructivism includes two important components: assimilation and accommodation (Fosnot & Perry, 2005; Jardine, 2006; Piaget, 1955). Assimilation causes a person to incorporate new learnings into previous learnings, developing new viewpoints and ultimately gaining new perspectives. Through this process, a person creates knowledge by combining new and old experiences to force new learnings to the forefront of the mind (Fosnot & Perry, 2005; Piaget, 1955). Accommodation allowed the new experiences to change previously constructed knowledge, thus creating a new functional understanding of how the world works (Fosnot & Perry, 2005; Jardine, 2006).

The theory of constructivism framed this study by showing the teachers who participated in the study that they understood their instructional decisions deeper when they looked at their lives and career experiences with writing. The personal beliefs they held about writing, knowledge about writing, learning theories impacting writing, writing pedagogy, and writing instruction clearly impacted their instructional choices in the classroom.

Methodology

For this study, an instrumental Case Study design was used to collect data from one school in Georgia that showed significant gains of remediate writers on the Georgia Milestones. Purposeful sampling was used in the study to select teachers who taught third-grade, fourth-grade, or fifth-grade from 2015-2017 and who were still employed at the research site. The data was analyzed by coding them into emerging themes. A qualitative research design was chosen for this study because it explored the lived experiences of people. The ability to teach writing required the ability to access the lived experiences around individuals and to locate a good story in people's everyday lives. This research was conducted as a case study to allow teachers and the researcher to explore the growth of remediate writers as measured by the Georgia Milestones. The selection of the school was based on the Georgia Milestones standardized test for 2016 and 2017. Specifically, I looked at the subset domain of writing for students at a school in Georgia that showed significant growth of remediate writers from 2015-2017. This case study incorporated a multitude of data collection methods: memoing, conducting interviews, observing teachers, and collecting artifacts (Stake, 1995). Teachers were recruited to participate in the study. Data analysis was conducted using a deductive data

analysis approach (Creswell, 2014; Stake, 1995). The deductive approach involved looking back at the data collected throughout the study and analyzing them for emerging themes (Creswell, 2014; Stake, 1995).

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. One limitation was that the participants for this study all came from one elementary school in Georgia. Consequently, the conclusions made from the data in this study may or may not be transferable to other schools. An additional limitation of the study was that students were not interviewed. Interviewing students could have provided additional insight into why their writing scores improved over the course of one school year.

Teacher selection was another potential limitation of this study. My goal was to conduct interviews and focus groups with teachers who taught writing during the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years. However, this could have been problematic, as teachers changed grade levels, were assigned different content areas to teach, moved to different schools or districts, and retired.

When conducting interviews and focus groups, researchers must be concerned about participants being less than completely honest for various reasons or about comments from some focus group members being influenced by the comments of others. I tried to minimize this concern by assuring participants that their identities would be protected.

Researcher bias is an inherent concern in qualitative research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Earlier in this chapter, I explained the struggles in writing I had experienced as a learner. These struggles no doubt shaped how I viewed the data gathered in this study.

However, they also provided me with an interesting lens through which to view these data.

Definition of Terms

The following list of terms provides further clarification for this study. In many cases, there are multiple meanings for terms, and various sources in the literature often define some terms differently. The following definitions are listed here to provide a clear understanding of how the terms are being used in this current study.

Advanced Reading is when a student is reading above grade level or reading books with difficult reading concepts.

College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) is a comprehensive school improvement, accountability, and communication platform for all educational stakeholders that promotes college and career readiness for all Georgia public school students (College and Career Ready Performance Index, n.d.).

Common Core State Standards are a clear set of shared goals and expectations for the knowledge and skills students need in English language arts and mathematics at each grade level so they can be prepared to succeed in college, career, and life (Sundeen, 2015; Troia & Olinghouse, 2013).

Conferencing is the portion of the writer's workshop during which the teacher meets individually with students as they engage in the writing process. Utilizing conferencing, the teacher can meet the individual needs of students and guide them in their writing development (Calkins, 1994).

Constructed response item is a non-multiple-choice item requiring some type of written or oral response (The NAEP Glossary of Terms, n.d.).

Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) is designed to measure how well students acquire the skills and knowledge described in the state mandated content standards in reading, English/language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. The assessments yield information on academic achievement at the student, class, school, system, and state levels (Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT), n.d.).

Feedback is a teacher giving a student positive or negative guidance on a piece of writing (Baker, 2014).

Georgia Milestones Assessment System (Georgia Milestones) measures how well students have learned the knowledge and skills outlined in the state-adopted content standards in English Language Arts, mathematics, science, and social studies (Georgia Milestones Assessment System, n.d.).

Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE) defines what students should understand and be able to do by the end of each grade. According to the Georgia Department of Education, "Fundamentally, the focus for students in grades K through 5 is on developing comprehension strategies that will enable them to manipulate grade-level texts of appropriate complexity, and communicate effectively both in writing and in speaking" (English Language Arts Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE) K-5, 2017).

Institute of Educational Sciences (IES) provides national leadership in expanding fundamental knowledge and understanding of education from early childhood through postsecondary study, in order to provide parents, educators, students, researchers, policymakers, and the general public with reliable information about educational practices that support learning and improve academic achievement and access to educational opportunities for all students; the condition and progress of education in the

United States; and the effectiveness of Federal and other education programs (The Institute of Education Sciences, 2012).

Instructional Framework is a shared incoherent belief system, mission, and understanding of the set of instructional principles, based on their inquiry, and their visible imitation within and across classrooms which all members of the school and community are committed and accountable (Schwarz & Gwekwerere, 2007).

International reading Association (IRA) is a global advocacy and membership organization of more than 300,000 literacy educators, researchers, and experts across 86 countries. With more than 60 years of experience, ILA has set the standard for how literacy is defined, taught, and evaluated.

Mini-lesson is a component during a Writer's Workshop session, the teacher provides a brief whole-class lesson involving an explanation or demonstration of a technique for engaging in the writing process (Calkins, 1994). The focus of the mini-lesson varies depending on the component of the process being taught and the needs of the students within the class.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is also known as "the nation's report card," NAEP is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what American students know and can do in various subject areas. Since 1969, assessments have been conducted periodically in mathematics, reading, science, writing, U.S. history, geography, civics, the arts, and other subjects (The NAEP Glossary of Terms, n.d.).

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) is defined as, "the Council promotes the development of literacy, the use of language to construct personal and

public worlds and to achieve full participation in society, to the learning and teaching of English in the related arts and sciences" (Mission Statement, n.d.).

National Writing Project (NWP) is to improve the teaching of writing and improve learning in the nation's schools. Through its professional development model, the National Writing Project recognizes the primary importance of teacher knowledge, expertise, and leadership (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007) (A. Gallagher, Woodworth, McCaffrey, Park, & Wang, 2014).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was a law in effect from 2002-2015. It was a version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Practice is defined as the carrying out of exercises of instruction.

Process approach is an approach to writing instruction emphasizing teaching of the process writers use when composing. It is based on the work of researchers who have examined the composing process (Emig, 1972; Graves, 1975). Within this instructional approach, students are involved in writing activities. The process approach often utilizes the following steps: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing (Emig, 1972; Murray, 1972).

R.A.C.E. Strategy is a method used to thoroughly answer a constructed response question (Boyles, 2013).

Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) is an agency in which the state of Georgia is divided into 16 RESA agencies equipped to help schools implement their school improvement plans.

School-Improvement Plan (SIP) is a plan created to organize a district or school improvement effort.

Sharing is the portion of the Writer's Workshop session in which one or more students read their writing aloud to fellow classmates (Calkins, 1994; Snyders, 2014; Wood Ray, 2001).

Strategy is defined as a set of techniques used to produce an overall aim (Pinnell & Fountas, 1998).

Writing Across the Curriculum is a movement within contemporary composition studies focusing on writing in classes outside of composition, literature, and other English courses (Gallavan, Bowles, & Young, 2007).

Writer's Workshop is a method for teaching the process approach to writing in which students are provided with a daily block of time to engage in the composing process and the teacher guides their learning. The Writer's structure consists of a mini-lesson, independent writing and conferencing, and sharing (Calkins, 1994; Snyders, 2014; Wood Ray, 2001).

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is the difference between what a learner can do without help and what he or she can achieve with guidance and encouragement from a skilled partner (Hutchings, 2015).

Chapter Summary

The primary focus of school is to teach students to be able to read, write, and perform arithmetic (Cohen, 1976; Gardner, 1983; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). The purpose of this study was to explore why writing scores improved significantly at one elementary school in Georgia as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test. The theory of constructivism was used to frame this study and the researcher utilized qualitative methods. A case study was used to explore this study's

research questions. This study raised serious implications for elementary school teachers, because educators need to know how to effectively teach students writing. The consequences of the results of this study will impact students as many of them are future college students who will be expected to express themselves clearly in written form. Many will be workers competing globally for high-paying jobs in a world economy that needs good writing (Porter & Rivkin, 2012).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Problem Statement

After years of implementing many reform efforts following the publication of "A Nation at Risk in 1983" sixty percent of all American elementary students do not meet national writing standards.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies and practices used by teachers at an identified Georgia elementary school resulting in students significantly improving their writing skills and meeting national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test.

Research Questions

RQ1. What were the life and career experiences of teachers at an identified Georgia elementary who took responsibility for improving student writing skills resulting in students meeting national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

RQ 2. What strategies did teachers use at an identified Georgia elementary school to significantly improve student writing skills and meet national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

RQ 3. What practices did teachers use at an identified Georgia elementary school to significantly improve student writing skills and meet national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

Significance

Academic achievement remains a concern in the United States, especially after the landmark findings in "A Nation at Risk." Researchers have found that 60 percent of all American elementary students do not meet writing standards (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Poor writing skills have serious implications for future college students who will be expected to express themselves clearly in written form, as well as for future workers competing globally for high-paying jobs in a world economy that places great importance on writing competence (Porter & Rivkin, 2012). The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies and practices employed by an identified Georgia elementary school that significantly improved student writing skills as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test. The results of this study could inform district policymakers, federal and state departments of education, and university and college teacher preparation programs regarding ideas to improve writing programs or practices. Perhaps the greatest use of the findings of this study could be to help classroom teachers with their strategies and practices for teaching writing and help students become more competent writers.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study was the theory of constructivism. According to Piaget (1955), a student constructs or produces knowledge based on his or her experiences. This theory included two important components: assimilation and

accommodation (Fosnot & Perry, 2005; Jardine, 2006; Piaget, 1955). Assimilation causes a student to incorporate new learnings into previous learnings, developing new viewpoints, and ultimately gaining new perspectives. Through this process, a student creates knowledge by combining new and old experiences to force new learnings to the forefront of the mind (see figure 2.1) (Fosnot & Perry, 2005; Piaget, 1955). Accommodation is allowing the new experiences to change previously constructed knowledge, thus creating a new functional understanding of how the world works (Fosnot & Perry, 2005; Jardine, 2006).

The theory of constructivism was used in this study to look at how teachers were supported and guided by the district, the school, and their teaching philosophy. Talented teachers must be active participants in the teaching of writing, allowing students to be challenged and supported in the writing classroom (Calkins, 1994; Jardine, 2006; Wood Ray, 2001). Focusing on the theory of constructivism influenced the researcher's interpretations of how educators approached their learning theories and teaching methods. The constructivist approach focused on how learning takes place (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). The classroom environment must become more engaging for students because teachers need to actively challenge their students' current knowledge in order to foster new learning in the classroom.

Methodology

For this study, qualitative methods were used to collect data from one school in Georgia that has shown significant gains in writing on the Georgia Milestones. A qualitative research design was chosen for this study because it allowed for the exploration of the lived experiences of people. Teaching writing requires the ability to

access the lived experiences around us and to locate a good story in people's everyday lives. This research was conducted as a case study in order to allow teachers and the researcher to explore the growth in writing of students on the Georgia Milestones. The selection of the school was based on the Georgia Milestones standardized test for 2016 and 2017. Specifically, I looked at the subset domain of writing for students at a school in Georgia that showed over twenty percent growth on students' writing scores. This case study incorporated a multitude of data collection methods: memoing, conducting interviews, observing teachers, and collecting artifacts (Stake, 1995). Administrators, teachers, and support staff were recruited to participate in the study. Data analysis was conducted using a deductive data analysis approach termed categorical aggregation (Creswell, 2014; Stake, 1995). The deductive approach involved looking back at the data collected throughout the study and exploring them for emerging themes (Creswell, 2014; Stake, 1995).

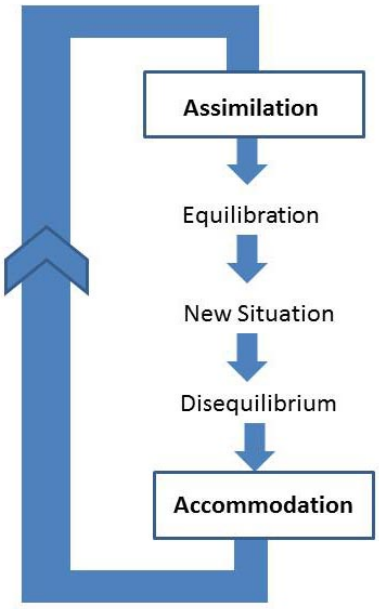


Figure 2.1. Equilibrium graphic. (McLeod, 2015).

Description of the Problem

"A Nation at Risk" pointed to a multitude of problems facing American education, and one of those problems was in the area of writing. According to this report, over 23 million people in the United States were functionally illiterate (Gardner, 1983). In 1983, businesses and military were spending millions on remedial education for their employees and service personnel (Gardner, 1983).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assesses students in various subject areas using a random sample. Below is a table 2.1 showing the percentage of students who did not meet proficient writing levels during the years 1998-2011 (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2012). Over a thirteen-year span, the NAEP test confirmed that students were making little progress in becoming proficient writers.

Table 2.1

NAEP Writing Scores of Below Proficient from 1998 to 2011

Year	Twelfth Grade	Eighth Grade	Fourth Grade
2011	73%	74%	Not Tested
2007	82%	88%	Not Tested
2002	74%	85%	86%
1998	78%	84%	84%

Note. Data are from National Center for Education Statistics, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2012)

The National Commission on Writing (NCW) issued a report in the spring of 2003 which referred to writing as being widely neglected in American schools. The report referenced "A Nation at Risk," the report which urged the United State to take

action, but unfortunately, the United States has not reached its goals of becoming a learning society, where all citizens can reach their full potential. This report by NCW called for a holistic change-not just among educators, students, but also from policymakers and the general public (Magrath et al., 2003). Students must practice the art of writing in order to improve, yet one of the biggest hindrances students faced was not having enough time to write in class (Magrath et al., 2003; Powell, 2013; Totten, 2005; Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012). Without writing, the American culture would decline significantly. For example, Americans would not even understand instructional manuals, songs, comic books, or the next great American novel (Magrath et al., 2003). In almost every facet of American employment, writing has been of great importance (Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Graham & Perin, 2007; The Institute of Education Sciences, 2012; Kovach, Miley, & Ramos, 2012). Writing prepares the mind to think critically; therefore, writing is an essential skill for the majority of Americans.

Writing gives students opportunities to think critically about their learning; thus writing should be at the forefront of classroom instruction (Jonassen, 1999; Magrath et al., 2003; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010; Yan, 2005). However, one hindrance to teaching writing was that to do it well could require significant chunks of classroom time (Graham & Sandmel, 2011; Simmerman et al., 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). The inability of educators to find consistent time within their day to teach writing can hinder students' writing progress. Without utilizing writing, students missed out on the opportunities to connect the dots of their learning (Simmerman et al., 2012).

Teachers faced many problems when teaching writing in addition to time: being underprepared to teach writing, the inconsistencies to provide timely feedback, and not having enough computers for students. Several researchers believed writing instruction improved when teacher candidates were taught writing theory and the pedagogy of writing instruction (Fisher & Fisher, 2012; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Smart, Hicks, & Melton, 2013). College preparation programs needed to do a more complete job of preparing teachers in the pedagogy of writing instruction (Gallagher et al., 2014). Current teachers need continued professional development in writing instruction, which was more expansive than simply a writing curriculum they were told to teach (Bifuh-ambe, 2013; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Gallagher et al., 2014; Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). Pre-service teachers were not trained to teach writing, so it was understandable that teachers were unprepared to teach writing (Oleson & Hora, 2014).

Teachers needed to experience what it was like to be a writer in today's classroom. The more teachers identified themselves as writers, the more likely they were to understand the difficulties students faced with classroom writing. The only way for teachers to understand what their students experienced during writing was to experience the writing process for themselves (Fisher, 2006; Sperling, Appleman, Gilyard, & Freedman, 2011; Street, 2003; Street & Stang, 2009). Time spent writing could be a waste of classroom time and resources, or it could be a gateway allowing students to gain deeper understanding of classroom content (Brooks, 2007; Snyders, 2014).

Providing quality feedback to students in a writing class was difficult at all educational levels (Baker, 2014). Providing any type of feedback to a piece of writing required time and dedication from the teacher (Baker, 2014). The majority of teachers

had little to no training on how to assess or provide feedback on students' writing (Cox, 2014; Garlid, 2014). The assessment of writing was a unique challenge because a piece of writing could be scored quite differently depending on the rater (Garlid, 2014). Students may have struggled with one genre of writing (e.g., narrative) but exceled in another (e.g., informational) because the required skills could be very different from genre to genre (Zuidema & Fredricksen, 2016). Teachers needed to find ways to assess writing, which led to many teachers shortening the length of writing assignments (Wiebe Berry, 2006). Shorter writing assessments meant teachers had less to comment on, but also that students were writing less frequently. So, while teachers might be commenting frequently their comments did not make as much of an impact on student learning because they were practicing fewer styles and genres of writing. Providing quality feedback was important as student progressed through the writing process (Bifuh-ambe, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Lowry & Berry, 2008; Mo et al., 2014).

Many policymakers believed technology would help improve education, even in writing (Kumpulainen, Mikkola, & Jaatinen, 2014; Magrath et al., 2003). Technology was often viewed as a positive addition to the classroom. However, technology was not a panacea for writing difficulties, as the ability to write clearly takes time, regardless of the mode being used (Morgan & Pytash, 2014). An additional problem with technology use in writing was that there were often not enough computers available in a classroom for all students to be engaged at the same time (Graham et al., 2014). This was made more pedagogically troublesome because students were coming into class familiar with technology-driven writing. Students were used writing with technology at younger ages-

communicating through emails, using search engines, and posting to social media. Teachers needed to tap into this ambition to write at an early age (Magrath et al., 2003).

Writing Standards

The educational standards movement in America began to gain traction in the 1980s, but the initial standards tended to focus on straightforward learning (Hatch, 2002). Writing is a deeply complex task that is difficult for students to accomplish well at any level (Calkins, 1994; Emig, 1972; Graves, 2004). As individual states began to develop standards to be addressed in classrooms, writing instruction was given an inconsistent direction (Magrath et al., 2003).

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) bill became federal law (Strauss, 2015). This reform effort required states to create state-wide assessments to determine student learning. NCLB placed a huge emphasis on reading and math (Cawelti, 2006). Its goal was that 100% of students would pass the high-stakes state exams by 2011 (Klein & Camera, 2015).

These exams required schools to measure the effectiveness of students' learning. School administrators worried about their students performing poorly and being labeled low-performing; the law had negative consequences attached to that label (Cawelti, 2006; Klein & Camera, 2015). Students were expected to be proficient in reading and mathematics; thus, teachers focused their efforts on these subjects due to the nature of high-stakes testing (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Conrad & Stone, 2015). A majority of states did assess writing, but it was infrequent at best (Hillocks, 2002; Troia & Graham, 2016). The state writing assessments results were not linked to students' grades, and

parents received little information about how their children performed on the state assessment (Hillocks, 2002; Troia & Graham, 2016).

Standardized Tests

Reading and mathematics were the main focus of learning due to the NCLB and thereby relegated writing to a non-priority subject in many classrooms (Cawelti, 2006; Magrath et al., 2003). Entire school systems and states pushed writing to the side in order to focus on raising reading and math scores (Cawelti, 2006). According to Aydin and Yildiz (2014), teacher's time in the classroom was a precious commodity that needed to be used wisely. With time limitations, and by NCLB highlighting reading and mathematics, writing was something the majority of teachers just did not focus on in their classrooms (Cawelti, 2006). Instead of writing being a driving force in the classroom, it became expendable and not something students did every day in their classrooms (Cawelti, 2006).

Writing Assessments

Writing assessments did not prove which students had the ability to write well (Hillocks, 2002). The majority of writing assessments fell into the on-demand category, which did not follow the NCTE-supported process approach to writing (Sundeen, 2015). Typically, students worked on a piece of writing for days or weeks and got feedback and support for their writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981). During a state writing assessment, however, the process was quite different. Students were given a short time frame to complete their writing and had little to no teacher support. On-demand writing ability was what the state writing assessments actually measured (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Sundeen, 2015). The majority of teachers received training on the "process writing

approach," which allowed the teacher flexibility in supporting students in their writing. On-demand writing was now changing classroom instruction because teachers needed to prepare students for this new genre of on-demand writing (Gallagher, Arshan, & Woodworth, 2016).

Work Implications for Future College Students

Writing skills are essentially life skills. According to NAEP, 60% of students did not meet writing standards in 2011 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). There was a renewed focus on writing, and the widespread adoption of the Common Core State Standards raised expectations of students' ability to communicate, particularly in writing (Sundeen, 2015). Writing was one of the most essential skills for students, and it affected both the short-term and long-term learning of students (Sundeen, 2015). Students often needed assistance building writing skills and maintaining their confidence in their ability as writers (Bodnar & Petrucelli, 2016). Writing was an integral part for the majority of American jobs. Ninety percent of white-collar jobs required proficient writing skills, while 80% of blue-collar jobs did (Graham et al., 2014). Educators wanted to provide the necessary skills to allow students to pursue their passions later in life (National Commission on Writing, 2006).

Writing in College and Workplace

Eighty-one percent of employers reported that high school graduates were deficient in communication skills (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). For the last 40 years, communication skills have been in high-demand, and with the majority of students struggling to communicate effectively, communication skills will become even more important (Kovach et al., 2012; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

At the collegiate level, schools created additional supports for struggling writers, such as having all first-year students visit and use the campus writing center. These additional provisions were established in order for students to develop strong academic writing skills. Students usually completed a writing sample in order to be placed in their first English course (Bodnar & Petrucelli, 2016; Hillocks, 1981). Research has shown that when students utilized these supports, their writing ability improved (Bodnar & Petrucelli, 2016). In recent years, there had been a rise in the number of remedial courses taken at the collegiate level (Bodnar & Petrucelli, 2016; Graham & Sandmel, 2011; Grisham & Wolsey, 2011). Colleges have struggled to understand the needs of students who must take remedial coursework (Feldman & Zimbler, 2012; Graham & Sandmel, 2011; Hillocks, 2017a; Quible & Griffin, 2007). Having students understand the need for having authentic writing tasks was thought to be one way to improve their writing. Writing instructors at one university utilized problem-based scenarios to teach writing effectively. The university shortened the length of assignments, which allowed students to focus on word choice and ideas (Smart et al., 2013). Another reason colleges and universities emphasized writing, was because the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) ranked writing as the third best job skill to have, behind leadership and teamwork (NACE, 2014). Problematic writing did not just occur before a student received an undergraduate diploma; even in graduate school many researchers argued that students had problems communicating clearly. Writing deficiencies have plagued MBA programs according to Gary L. May, a business professor at Clayton State University:

> I'm constantly surprised by the unreadable memos and e-mails I receive from employees with MBA degrees. They may be great with spreadsheets, but some of them can't write even a simple paragraph that is clear, concise, and grammatically [sic] correct. You can have the greatest ideas in the world, but you're no good to your company if you can't express them clearly and persuasively. (May, Thompson, & Hebblethwaite, 2012, p. 253)

The process of improving the writing of MBA students had some similarities to pedagogical strategies used in elementary writing instruction. For example, MBA students learned best through assignments mimicking workplace tasks, while similarly, elementary students learned through authentic writing tasks. Providing various templates to MBA students helped them to understand the purpose of what they were writing, their intended goals, and the context in which it needed to be communicated (May et al., 2012). Professors should have clear view of their students' writing quality and should not be apologetic for demanding improvement in this area. Graduate students needed clear expectations about the level of writing required for graduate school success (May et al., 2012).

Having high-quality communication increased productivity, decreased absenteeism, increased job satisfaction, and increased job performance and organizational commitment (Byrne & LeMay, 2006; Schunk & Mullen, 2012). Consequently, businesses were currently spending over 3 billion dollars a year remediating their employees' writing skills (Morgan & Pytash, 2014).

Reasons for Poor Writing Scores

There are many factors for the stagnation of writing scores over the past thirty years. Teachers feel unprepared to teach writing, lack time to teach and assess writing, prioritize other subjects, and lack resources for writing instruction (Cawelti, 2006; Graham, et al., 2012).

Colleges and universities had not prepared pre-service teachers to teach writing effectively. Many universities required one course in writing pedagogy (Grisham & Wolsey, 2011; Myers et al., 2016), whereas in other subject areas, such as reading and mathematics, pre-service teachers took three to four courses in these content areas (Grisham & Wolsey, 2011). Teachers who had confidence in teaching writing were much more likely to teach it effectively (Morgan & Pytash, 2014). Teachers who did not see themselves as writers had difficulty valuing writing, which carried over into their writing instruction. Therefore, teachers who were not confident writers did not feel comfortable modeling writing techniques in front of their students (Shanahan, 2015). Another factor impacting writing instruction is the time it requires. Teachers who did not value writing struggled to see value in devoting large amounts of class time to it. NCLB placed most importance on raising reading and mathematics test scores; thus, teachers often fit in writing where they could (Cawelti, 2006). Assessing writing could also be difficult for trained or untrained teachers because writing is subjective (De Leeuw, 2016). Some people loved a certain author or genre to read, but unfortunately the next reader may not find the same value in the same text (Adler & Van Doren, 2014). Providing feedback on writing was an essential skill needed for students to improve in their abilities as writers (Snyders, 2014). Reading a writing assignment took a significant amount of a

teacher's time and energy (Baker, 2014). A lack of resources to teach writing is an additional reason for poor writing scores. There were a few national curricula for writing, but the majority of school systems did not purchase writing curricula (Graham & MacArthur, 2013). If a school district did purchase a national curriculum, the system rarely provided professional development to train teachers properly in how to implement it effectively (Ray, Graham, Houston, & Harris, 2016).

Teachers are Unprepared to Teach Writing

Universities have done a poor job of preparing teacher candidates to teach writing (Calkins, 2011; Mackenzie, 2011; Snyders, 2014). Teacher candidates left college and entered the teaching field lacking the theoretical perspective and practical interaction strategies associated with writing to produce effective writers in their classrooms (Mackenzie, 2011). Teaching is a difficult profession (Cooper & Travers, 2012) and many new teachers left the profession within the first five years (Schwartz, 1996). Many pre-service teachers were placed in high performing schools with teachers who had been successful in that setting. As a result, many new teachers were unprepared to teach writing in the classroom, because their own classroom presented them with different challenges then what they were prepared for in their student teaching (Calkins, 2011; Graves, 2004).

Many teachers struggled with classroom management and lacked proper instructional strategies (Hutchings, 2015). Throughout the nation most college graduates in many states could have gained initial certification in teaching (Freiberg, 2002). Teachers were given a classroom without the proper background in pedagogical knowledge (Freiberg, 2002). Research studies found the vast majority of practicing

teachers perceived their student teaching to be a valuable training experience (Goodlad, 1990). As teacher candidates left college without instructional interaction with writing, they often reverted to how they were taught to write (Freiberg, 2002; Snyders, 2014). Unfortunately, many of those high-performing schools did not hire inexperienced teachers and these candidates were forced to teach in less desirable schools (Meister & Melnick, 2003; Schwartz, 1996). Therein lies the problem: new teachers were faced with different problems than they were exposed to in their student teaching (Al-Awidi & Alghazo, 2012; Schwartz, 1996). The standards based movement aided classroom instruction, yet teachers continued to be unprepared in classroom teaching practices (Gewertz, 2013). Building-level administrators were looking for positive classroom environments focusing specifically on higher order thinking skills, such as writing (Freiberg, 2002). Teachers then fell back to teaching writing the way they were taught as students or they simply did not teach it at all (Freiberg, 2002). This did not set up most teachers to be successful in the classroom. As a result, the cycle of poor writing skills was repeated for a new generation of students.

Teacher Efficacy

Teacher self-efficacy referred to "teachers' confidence in their ability to promote students' learning" (Bandura, 1977; Hoy, 2000). It could also be described as teachers' beliefs about their ability to teach any subject effectively (Schunk & Mullen, 2012). The way teachers viewed their own writing ability had a major impact on their ability to teach writing effectively to their students. Teachers were not blank slates; when it comes to writing, each person had a story about his or her experiences with writing (see figure 2.2) (Pajares, 2007; Street & Stang, 2009). Often, higher education treated teachers as if they

had no prior experiences with writing, but professors recognized that not all teacher candidates had positive experiences with writing in their education. Teachers brought a lifetime of good and bad experiences with them into the classroom.

Figure 2.2: Self-Efficacy. Retrieved from www.transformingeducation.com

There were five major influences on someone's view of their self-efficacy: performance experience (past experiences), vicarious experience (observed experiences or modeling by others), social persuasion (coaching and feedback), imaginal experience (visualization of future success), and physical and emotional states (experience of physical and emotional sensations). All five major influences build a comprehensive self-efficacy and teacher preparation programs failed to look at all five influences as barriers for teachers to be successful at writing instruction. The overall stagnation in writing scores suggests teachers do not excel in teaching writing. A contributing factor is teachers' efficacy towards their ability to teach writing.

Time to Teach Writing

Time was a precious commodity for all teachers, and teaching writing effectively was a time-consuming task (Harris, Graham, Friedlander, & Laud, 2013; Jensen, 1984; Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). Teachers often lacked an instructional framework to teach writing (Graham & MacArthur, 2013). A lack of instructional time had the potential for creating a frustrating classroom environment for both teachers and students, because they both needed clear expectations with respect to student writing. Teachers needed the time to explicitly model writing so students could see firsthand the process of writing, as well as the difficulties related to writing. Effective writing instruction required a teacher who was willing to explicitly model writing to his or her students and understand that writing is a time-consuming process (Harris et al., 2013). Allowing students to see the effort and work a published piece of writing required was an important step in turning students into writers. This allowed students to not feel isolated and alone during the writing process, but rather connected to the classroom community (Regan et al., 2018).

A national survey noted that students spent about 27% of their school year participating in the writing process (Troja & Graham, 2016). The Common Core State Standards (CCSS), has given a rising importance to writing instruction; students should be writing more than 27% of the school year (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010). Teachers wanted and needed additional professional development in how to teach writing because the school day was often rushed, lacking the time for writing (Troja & Graham, 2016). Having additional professional development would

help teachers better utilize their time in the classroom (Koster, Bouwer, & van den Bergh, 2017).

Teachers lacked the appropriate instructional planning to utilize the time in the classroom effectively. If teachers were not prepared for teaching writing, the time on task became very difficult to apply. Having additional effective instructional strategies assisted teachers in having more engaging classroom instruction (Koster et al., 2017). Rogers and Graham (2008) even suggested doubling the amount of time students spent on writing.

NCLB's Lack of Emphasis on Writing

NCLB had a perhaps unintended result of causing teachers to neglect writing, and its effects may still be noticed in the classrooms today (Camera, 2015; Cawelti, 2006; Graham & Harris, 2005; Klein & Camera, 2015). With the increased focus on reading and mathematics test scores, teachers who worked in low socioeconomic status schools often understood the pressure to prepare students for the high-stakes tests at the end of the year. This caused teachers to place their focus solely on instruction that prepared their students for the exam; other topics became almost irrelevant (McCarthey, 2008). The NCLB was law from 2001 until 2015, and its focus on high-stakes testing caused a narrowing in curricula (Cawelti, 2006). Teachers, particularly those at low-SES schools, knew their school performance was largely based on how students performed on the end-of-year tests (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; McCarthey, 2008; Menken, 2006). With the NCLB, there was a strong focus on raising reading and mathematics scores. Teachers fit in writing where and when openings were found. The pressure that states, counties,

districts, and schools face for every child to pass these high-stakes tests was a tremendous burden (Cawelti, 2006; Ladd, 2017).

The Challenge of Grading Writing

The assessment of writing could be an additional barrier to effective writing instruction. Researchers found that teachers would change their instruction to best fit the components of a high-stakes test (Hillocks, 2002; McCarthey, 2008). Writing assessment was most often done using rubrics for scoring purposes (Andrade, Wang, Du, & Akawi, 2009; De Silva, 2014). The rubrics contained benchmarks of examples that should be found throughout the paper (Andrade et al., 2009). Teachers used these rubrics with students so much that students sometimes adjusted their writing to best fit the writing test (Saddler, Saddler, Befoorhooz, & Cuccio-Slichko, 2014). The assessment of writing could be subjective and often teachers struggled to assess their own students' work and provide proper feedback (Fisher, 2006). Evaluating students work took time and the assessment of writing took considerably more time than evaluating comparable subjects (Andrade et al., 2009; Strohl, Schmertzing, & Schmertzing, 2014). Students were being measured on their writing ability on state-mandated assessments (Gallagher et al., 2016). This was considerably different type of writing than the traditional writing process that had been modeled in schools.

The writing workshop model aided teachers in the assessment of writing because the teacher had seen the students' writing many times before the writing was turned in for a formal grade (Snyders, 2014; Wood Ray, 2001). Rather than the teacher being inactive during the students work session, the teacher was active and engaged with looking at

students' writing (Calkins, 1994). As the teacher interacted with students writing on a daily basis it serves as an informal assessment of writing (Garlid, 2014).

Lack of Resources to Teach Writing

College courses have given teachers few academic resources to help them teach writing, leaving them unprepared to teach writing effectively (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; Zuidema & Fredricksen, 2016). In addition to feeling unprepared to teach from a theoretical perspective, teachers often lacked the physical resources to teach writing in the modern age, such as computers and additional support staff (Simmerman et al., 2012; Tobin & Tippett, 2014). Limited support during writing instruction made it very difficult for teachers to conference with students on an individual basis about their writing (Bifuh-ambe, 2013; Graham, Capizzi, Harris, Hebert, & Morphy, 2014). Students were often left feeling isolated and unsupported in their writing (Persky, Daane, & Jin, 2003; Schunk & Mullen, 2012).

In the current age of education with unfunded mandates many teachers are apathetic towards developing resources internally and would prefer to purchase a program already developed by a publisher or university (Wilcox, Jeffery, & Gardner-Bixler, 2016). Without developing the proper buy-in for purchased resources and a continued professional development to ensure that resources are implemented with fidelity, these programs will struggle to be successful (Oleson & Hora, 2014). Therefore, purchased resources are often placed on teachers' bookshelves, never to be fully used.

Efforts to Improve Writing

There has been a major shift in writing instruction over the past 100 years—from penmanship, to product, and finally, process (Hawkins & Razali, 2012; Thornton, 1998).

From 1800s to 1935 writing instruction consisted of proper penmanship and rote memorization of the rules of grammar (Hawkins & Razali, 2012; Thornton, 1998). It was believed that if students could construct the forming of their letters correctly and understood the rules of grammar, it would create in them the ability to write well (Hawkins & Razali, 2012; Thornton, 1998).

The second major shift in writing instruction dealt with the product (or traditional) approach to writing (Graham et al., 2012a; Storch, 2005). The product approach to writing often took the form of viewing and copying a good model from the board (Hawkins & Razali, 2012; Storch, 2005). Students had little input in this approach, with teachers assigning writing prompts of their choosing (Hawkins & Razali, 2012). Teachers using this approach to writing viewed writing as an art form that cannot be taught (Street, 2003). These teachers tended to believe that some students had the ability to write proficiently, while others did not (Hawkins & Razali, 2012; Street, 2003). The rules of grammar would often be recited orally by the class (Hawkins & Razali, 2012). Grammar lessons were repeated each day to ensure that students understood the content (Jensen, 1984). The instructional focus was on the final writing product, and very little support was given to students during the writing assignment. The focus was on a micro-level of sentence construction, and little attention was given holistically to a piece of writing (Storch, 2005).

The final shift—to the process approach to writing—began in the late 1970s. For many students, the main goal of writing was to compose an assignment that would earn them an A grade (Calkins, 2011; Emig, 1972; Farnan & Dahl, 2003; Graves, 2004). The process approach utilized many techniques that authors used to construct their writing.

One such technique was making the task authentic and providing an audience for the piece of writing. The theoretical framework behind writing moved beyond the desire to earn an A and towards the goal of providing students with real-world writing skills. As both researchers and practitioners started moving away from the product-based writing approach and moving writing instruction toward a process approach, the direction of writing in American classrooms changed (Farnan & Dahl, 2003; Murray, 1972; Myers et al., 2016). In 1992, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA) endorsed the process approach to writing (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006), thus creating a new standard for teaching writing.

As researchers began studying writing classrooms around the country, they witnessed teachers facilitating the process approach, but not directly teaching students the such as needed skills to write (Hillocks, 1982). In 1982, teachers still needed more training in the process approach to writing (Hillocks, 1982). Thus, students were not taught how to write, but simply left to write for themselves (Hillocks, 1982). Research has shown, teachers have begun utilizing direct instruction with the process approach, along with a focus on the needed skills (i.e. idea creation) to write well (Brimi, 2012; Cox, 2014). This latter focus has led to positive results regarding the quality of writing and has helped students to better understand the writing process (Graham & Harris, 2005; Harris et al., 2013; Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). This increase in the quality of student writing has led students to make the connection that they were, in fact, writers (Calkins, 2011).

The process approach included such a broad range of strategies that teachers often had difficultly defining "the process approach" (Hawkins & Razali, 2012). These

strategies were taught to students that used the process approach which included pre-writing activities, defining the intended audience, using resources (e.g., dictionaries or a thesaurus), outlining the writing plan, drafting, and revising (Fisher, 2006; Graham & Sandmel, 2011). A teacher should model for their students a variety of writing strategies and procedural techniques that will aid students in understanding the complexities of writing (Myers et al., 2016; Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006; Warren, Dondlinger, & Barab, 2008). Using these procedural techniques along with the direct teaching of strategies positively impacted student writing (Parr & Limbrick, 2010).

Writing and Common Core State Standards

During the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act era from 2002-2015, states began to be hyper-focused on mathematics and reading, which did not allow writing to have a proper place in the classrooms (Cawelti, 2006). The change to Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has allowed writing to be at the forefront of the classroom, with a comprehensive plan for all students to be proficient at writing when they depart the K-12 educational system (Graham & Harris, 2015; Sundeen, 2015)

For the first time, school systems had a road map to developing writers in every grade. CCSS had not only brought writing back into the language arts block, but it also created a way for writing to be an integral part of all subjects (Graham & Harris, 2015; Magrath et al., 2003). This created opportunities for other content teachers to integrate writing in their subjects and this movement became known as the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC). If students are writing in various settings helps to develop critical thinking skills and reinforces their rationale for their answers. One goal of CCSS was to ensure that students were ready to compete for jobs in a global market by taking into

account keyboarding and other technological skills (Friedman, 2007; Graham & Harris, 2015).

Best Writing Practices

Graham and Perin (2007a), outlined 11 recommendations for effective writing instruction. The following recommendations came from a meta-analysis of writing research and did not constitute a complete writing program. However, Graham and Perin did suggest that teachers use these strategies to take advantage of available data:

1. Teach writing strategies: planning, revising, and editing their drafts.
2. Teach students how to summarize texts effectively.
3. Teach students to write collaboratively.
4. Teach students to set specific goals for their writing.
5. Teach students how to use word-processing to support their writing.
6. Teach students sentence combining or how to vary sentences and sentence structure.
7. Teach students ways of collecting ideas for writing stories.
8. Teach students to inquire about the ways in which information is put together in mentor texts.
9. Utilize the process approach: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing.
10. Utilize models of writing to influence students' development of writing ideas.
11. Utilize writing to incorporate content material.

Many of these eleven strategies were incorporated into the process writing approach (Graham & Perin, 2007b). Educators must understand the importance of using

all types of strategies for making effective writers (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983). In another meta-analysis, Rogers and Graham (2008) made similar recommendations as those made by Graham and Perin (2007a):

1. For narrative and expository text, teach students planning and drafting strategies.
2. Be hypervigilant in explicitly teaching grammar skills to writers that struggle.
3. Set writing goals for individual students who lack productivity in writing.
4. Model and teach editing strategies.
5. Utilize word processing as a writing tool.
6. Continue to support individuals with writing productivity.
7. Have students be active participants in prewriting strategies.
8. Show and model how to form different types of sentences.
9. Show and model different types of paragraphs.

Many of these recommendations can be utilized in the process-based writing approach.

In 2012, the Institute of Educational Sciences published a practical guide entitled Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers. This institute started gathering data on writing in kindergarten and suggested several teaching strategies that were similar to those of Graham and Perin (2007a) and Rogers and Graham (2008):

1. Allot a block of time each day for students to write.
2. Teach students that writing can be for a variety of purposes.
3. Teach students writing fundamentals, such as sentence construction, spelling, typing, and word processing skills.
4. Engage the class as a community.

The meta-analyses above identified a number of writing practices and strategies that teachers could utilize in their classrooms. While this list was not exhaustive, employing any of these practices has proven to result in better writing instruction (Graham & Perin, 2007a; Rogers & Graham, 2008).

Teachers' Experiences as Writers

Teachers had a broad range of experiences as writers, but most teachers did not view themselves as writers (Morgan & Pytash, 2014). Many teachers lacked positive experiences with their writing throughout their K-12 education (Morgan & Pytash, 2014). Teachers who wrote for personal reasons, such as journaling and as a hobby, had more positive views of writing than did teachers who only wrote for job purposes (Ray et al., 2016). If teachers self-identified as writers, they were more likely to understand some of the same writing struggles that their students faced (Ray et al., 2016).

How Teachers Were Taught as Writers

NAPE data indicated that writing scores did not consistently increase from 1988 to 2011. Many current elementary school teachers were learning to write themselves during 1988-2011, when national writing scores flattened out. Their less-than-positive writing experiences carried over into their classrooms and their writing instruction. One popular instructional strategy for teaching writing required the teacher to place a writing prompt on the board and they told students to write about that topic for a specific amount of time (Hawkins & Razali, 2012; Thornton, 1998). Even some teachers viewed writing time as an opportunity to accomplish other needed tasks while students wrote quietly at their desks (Ballard & Glynn, 1975). Students were offered very little support with their

writing (Seow, 2002). These poor teaching strategies are still reflected in classrooms today (Cawelti, 2006).

The premise that writing was an art that could not be taught is still a belief that some teachers accept as true (Graham & Harris, 1997). A small sub-set of students today have an innate ability to write well beyond their years, but the majority of students are not being pushed academically due to the lack of growth in the area of writing (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Therefore, teachers should not use the trope that "writing cannot be taught" as an excuse for not providing quality instruction for all students (Graham & Harris, 1997).

Many teachers lacked the confidence to teach writing well (Morgan & Pytash, 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Teachers were not blank slates when it came to writing; each person had at least one story about his or her experiences with writing (Pajares, 2007; Street & Stang, 2009). Each teacher candidate had a history with writing, and not all of them had positive writing experiences in school. Traditionally, higher education has done a poor job preparing teachers for the requirements of teaching writing effectively (Campbell, Voelkl, & Donahue, 1997; Green, 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). As teachers entered the classroom, they were prepared by their universities to teach a plethora of subjects, but often they had only taken one course in writing instruction (Troia & Graham, 2016). Teachers are not being trained properly by their pre-service programs and without proper training, teachers reverted back to their own experiences with writing or simply did not teach it at all (Freiberg, 2002).

Teachers' Writing for Personal Use

Teachers who value writing for personal use often utilized it more as an instructional strategy in the classroom (Parr & Limbrick, 2010). Teachers who did not enjoy writing did not choose writing as an instructional model in the classroom, while teachers who were willing to write in their free time enjoyed writing and were more likely to share that passion with their students (Brooks, 2007). Teachers who viewed themselves as writers had an understanding of the struggles that writers faced in their classroom. These teachers were better able to connect with their students about the struggles, successes, and failures of being a writer (Brooks, 2007).

School-wide Strategies to Improve Student Writing

One major struggle for students was the vastly different types of writing instruction that students received from year-to-year (Powell, 2013). The consistency of instructional framework was very different from classroom to classroom within a grade level and vastly different from grade-to-grade (Kennedy, 2006). As students' progressed through the elementary grades, they encountered a wide variety of instructional practices for writing. Some teachers had a passion for teaching writing selected writing as an instructional practice (Kaplan, 2008). Unfortunately, the following year, the student may receive writing instruction that could be vastly different from the year before, perhaps because the current teacher did not like to teach writing or explicitly model writing for his or her students (Kaplan, 2008). An additional strategy was having students write for a real audience, which could be accomplished by allowing students to share their writing with another grade level (Limbrick et al., 2010). A school could also implement the use of a common terminology that students understood from year-to-year (Kennedy, 2006).

Perhaps the most important school-wide strategy was allowing for continued professional development for teachers in the area of writing (Limbrick et al., 2010). Graham and Perin (2007b) opined that professional development was the most effective intervention for improving the quality of teaching writing within a school.

Classroom-Based Writing Strategies

Providing opportunities for students to write consistently and frequently throughout their elementary day was important to improve their writing ability (The Institute of Education Sciences, 2012). Creating assignments that were authentic writing activities increased student engagement towards that writing task (Hall & Axelrod, 2014). Students would struggle to learn how to write effectively without having frequent and consistent practice with these writing skills (Ritter, 2012). Writing allowed students to construct knowledge by weaving together their learning into coherent thoughts that were justified by their words (Harris & Alexander, 1998).

With an absence of time, training, and resources to teach writing, teachers also lacked effective classroom strategies to improve writing. The above paragraph stated some of the most common strategies that teachers used to improve writing in the classroom. Universities were starting to recognize that one writing course on how to teach writing was not producing effective teachers of writing. Teachers were desperate to help students to become effective communicators of writing.

Students Writing Competence

Self-efficacy towards writing competency allowed for a better writing product and process (Bandura, 1977; Pajares, 2003). Writing was a unique challenge for students because it required and applied so many skills to one single task (Wixson et al., 2013).

For example, if a student was not a strong speller, the student would have to stop writing to figure out the word the student was trying to use. If the student was consistently misspelling words, it made it difficult for others to read and understand the writing. Students must build up stamina for writing in order to write for an extended period of time (Boushey & Moser, 2006). Therefore, students must understand that writing was not about penmanship or the prettiness of the final copy, but rather the content of the words on the page (Hawkins & Razali, 2012). A student's perceived efficacy towards the task had huge ramifications on the outcome of that product.

Formulaic Writing

Due to high-stakes testing teachers were placed under enormous pressure to teach grade level content (Kaplan & Kaplan, 2008). One area that was difficult to show growth was writing, so teachers created a framework structure of writing which broke the process down into achievable steps (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). This led student writing to read as strikingly similar products of one another, and just changing a few basic elements throughout the paper (Applebee & Langer, 2009; Ryan & Barton, 2014). Unfortunately, this form of writing did not teach the student how to write successfully in other areas of their life (Ryan & Barton, 2014). Formulaic writing was similar to a paint by numbers approach to writing, where the painter did not learn how to paint void of this approach, and the student did not learn how to write void of this approach (Wilcox et al., 2016).

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a discussion of many factors related to improving classroom instruction of writing. Various researchers have shown the most effective

strategies that should be used in elementary classrooms across the country. The educational reform of Common Core State Standards brought writing instruction to the forefront of classroom teaching by providing appropriate scope and sequencing to each grade level. For this type of writing instruction, teachers needed to be properly trained in writing instruction and needed to have a passion for writing. Two primary goals of this study were to examine writing teachers' strategies and practices in the classroom and to understand how their past experiences as writers affected their ability to teach writing effectively.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Student academic achievement remains a concern in the United States, even after the landmark findings in "A Nation at Risk in 1983." Sixty percent of all American elementary students did not meet writing standards (NAEP, 2012). This has had serious implications for students as future college students will be expected to express themselves clearly in written form, as well as they will become future workers who are competing globally for high paying jobs in a world economy that places great importance on writing competence (Porter & Rivkin, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies and practices used by teachers at an identified Georgia elementary school resulting in students significantly improving their writing skills and meeting national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test. The following research questions will guide this study:

RQ1. What were the life and career experiences of teachers at an identified Georgia elementary who took responsibility for improving student writing skills resulting in students meeting national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

RQ 2. What strategies did teachers use at an identified Georgia elementary school to significantly improve student writing skills and meet national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

RQ 3. What practices did teachers use at an identified Georgia elementary school to significantly improve student writing skills and meet national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

The findings from this study may be used to inform district policy makers, federal and state departments of education, and university and college teacher preparation programs regarding ideas to improve writing programs or practices. Perhaps the greatest use of the findings of this study would be to help classroom teachers with their strategies and practices for teaching writing, ultimately improving test scores in any subject area that requires writing.

Researcher Design and Rationale

The constructivist epistemological framework guided this study. According to Creswell (2014), "the goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied" (p. 8). Constructivism helped the researcher to understand the world in which teachers live and work, and researcher strove to select data-rich cases in order to gain a deeper understanding of their topic of interest (Creswell, 2014; Stake, 1995). Utilizing the constructivist approach allowed for various qualitative methods for collection of data, including interviews, observations, and memoing.

The overall aim of qualitative research should be to develop an in-depth understanding of human behavior (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative methods allow a researcher to better understand the why's and how's of the phenomenon being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), as opposed to quantitative research methods, which focus

more on understanding phenomenon based on statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques (Given, 2008).

Only qualitative research methods were used to answer this study's research questions. These methods offered several important advantages. Participants in the study were studied evaluated in greater detail, which helped to build a fuller understanding of the unique case being analyzed. The research framework was not rigid but could be adapted as needed throughout the study. This aided in the exploration of topics that emerged during the course of the study. Qualitative studies can be conducted with smaller sample sizes than quantitative research, which allowed for developing a more in-depth understanding of the case (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

An instrumental case study model was used for this research study. The setting for the study was one elementary school in Georgia. Stake (1995) suggested using an instrumental case study when the goal is to gain insight on a particular situation. The goal of an qualitative study is to uncover insights that could be applicable to situations outside the particular situation being studied (Stake, 1995; Zainal, 2017). According to Stake (1995), in an instrumental case study, "the researcher selects a small group of subjects in order to examine a certain pattern of behavior" (p. 4). The results from this study could inform policies, programs, and strategies at many schools across the country, but I believe that the largest impact could be on individual classroom teachers.

The focus of this case study was to gain an understanding as to why a particular school's students outperformed the majority of schools in Georgia on the writing assessment. While writing scores have been stagnant for over thirty years (Gardner, 1983; National Center for Education Statistics, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2012), this school was able to

show significant progress in addressing its students' writing skills over the past three years. This research site could help in the exploration of the research questions by being a case worthy of studying (Stake, 1995). Additionally, the research site provided an opportunity to further explore the research questions by examining teachers' past experiences that impacted their instructional choices in the classroom.

Setting

This study was conducted at an elementary school that met the requirements of the study and was located in Georgia. The school which was selected had to have shown significant improvement in reducing the amount of remediate writers as assessed by the Georgia Milestones standardized test. Selecting a school that was worthy of study was the most important factor in school selection (Stake, 1995).

The Georgia Milestones standardized test, first implemented in the 2013-2014 school year, "measures how well students have learned the knowledge and skills outlined in the state-adopted content standards in English Language Arts, mathematics, science, and social studies" (Georgia Milestones Assessment System, 2017). Students in third grade, fourth grade, and fifth grade are required to take the Georgia Milestones standardized test. A component of the ELA test is a writing portion where students are assessed and placed into three categories: remediate learner, monitored learner, and advanced learner. Site selection was driven by the reduction of remediate learners from 2015 to 2017. The first year the state of Georgia released the writing scores was in 2015. The school selected for this study reduction the level of remediate learners over 20 percentage points in one school year of instruction.

A high-performing school for this study was defined as an elementary school which had shown over 20% growth in the number of students who moved out of the remediate category from the 2016 to the 2017 administration of the Georgia Milestones standardized test. For the school selection process, the most important factor in selecting a school was choosing one that would provide rich data and allowed for the most beneficial information to be collected (Stake, 1995).

As I completed an analysis of over 1,200 elementary schools in the state of Georgia, Fairlands Elementary School ranked right outside the top 5% of schools that decreased the number of students in the remediate category. In an analysis of the 426 elementary schools located within the RESA region, eight schools had a change of more than 20% of their students moving out of the remediate category. Fairlands Elementary School met the requirements of the study and allowed permission for the study to take place in the Spring of 2018.

The site for this study was located in a METRO RESA district. The school site received an A in 2017 as measured by its College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) score (The governor's office of student achievement, n.d.). The school's CCPRI scores for the past several years were as follows: A in 2015, A in 2016, and A in 2017 (The governor's office of student achievement, n.d.). This school had consistently received stellar marks in the CCRPI scale and had continued to maintain its CCRPI score. The CCRPI score was made up of the following areas: Achievement, which is based on the Georgia Milestones standardized test (50 points); Progress, which is based on students earning typical or high growth on state assessments (40 points); Achievement Gap, which is based on achievement of the school and the gap of the lowest 25% lowest

performing students and the educational norms of the school (10 points); Challenge Points, which are based on how economically disadvantaged students, English language learners, and students with disabilities performed, and Exceeding the Bar (10 points), which were points for implementing innovative teaching strategies. The highest possible score for a school was 110. The CCRPI was a very broad measurement of schools' progress. Such a broad measurement may not identify nuances in the data for specific subject areas like writing. Fairlands Elementary experienced a significant reduction in the number of students who scored in the remediate category of writing from 2015-2017, but that increase has been reflected in the CCRPI score, because hopefully all growth within a school is reflected by the state measurement scale, so that made this school worthy of studying.

The school site served around 1100 students currently in grades kindergarten through fifth grade, and the free and reduced lunch rate was 28% (The governor's office of student achievement, n.d.). The racial demographics of the research site were: 55% White, 31% Asian/Pacific Islander, 7% Hispanic, 3% Black, 3% Multi-racial, and American Indian 1% (The governor's office of student achievement, n.d.). The student mobility rate was 9.7% (The governor's office of student achievement, n.d.). The then-current student-to-teacher ratio was 18:1, compared to the state of Georgia ratio of 17:1 (Great Schools, n.d.). The faculty consisted of approximately 70 full-time members, and 100% of teachers have had more than three years of teaching experience (Great Schools, n.d.).

Although Fairlands did receive a fairly high CCRPI score, its selection was based on the decline of remediate learners from one year to the next. Student growth for this

study was tracked by looking at the grades of students in third/fourth grades and fourth/fifth grades for the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years. Since second graders do not have any Milestones writing tests and the majority of fifth graders move on to a middle school, students who were second graders during the 2016-2017 school year or fifth graders during the 2016-2017 school year were not included in this study.

Role of Researcher

As an outsider to this school's faculty, I was unable to develop the same type of relationship with the teachers as they had with one another. Having the role of an non-participant observer allowed me to develop trusting relationships with the participants (Adler & Adler, 1987). According to Baker (2006), this role includes more observation than participation. There are two main guidelines to maintain a non-participant observer role. First, the participants would be willing to talk to an attentive stranger (Baker, 2006). Second, I maintained the role of non-participant observer in order for the participants and researcher maintain their distinct roles (Baker, 2006).

Although an outsider, my goal was to develop a trusting relationship with the participants, so they felt comfortable enough to share their experiences with me regarding writing. Developing trust with the participants facilitated honest conversations between themselves and with me in the focus groups and interviews.

Establishing clear and direct communication with administrators and teacher leaders was the first step in building relationships with the larger faculty. I requested that these key members of the faculty introduce me at a faculty-wide event. The researcher maintained the non-participant observer status while engaging in conversations with potential participants.

Methodology

In this section, I will explain the methodological choices which guided this study. I will explain how participants were chosen, justify the sampling strategy, explain the rationale for the number of participants, and explain how participants were contacted and recruited for the study.

Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling was utilized to select participants for this study. According to Patton (1990), purposeful sampling strategies emphasized in-depth understanding which leads to selecting *information-rich cases* for the study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful* sampling (Patton, 1990).

As the Georgia Milestones test is being used as the metric for measuring writing ability, this study will be limited to participants who teach grade levels which take the Georgia Milestones writing test, so only teachers of grades three through five were eligible. At the research site, 21 teachers teach a grade level which administers the Georgia Milestones writing test. The study is limited to finding participants who meet the following criteria:

- were employed at the research site for both the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years;
- taught third-grade, fourth-grade, or fifth-grade;
- taught the same grade in both the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school year; and
- were willing and available to participate in the study.

Purposeful sampling was accomplished by identifying participants who met the

above criteria. The researcher first contacted the teacher identified as a potential gateway to the administration. The researcher then established a relationship with the school's administration. First contact was made through email, with a follow-up phone call. The principal initiated first contact with potential participants for the study.

After the 21 potential participants were made aware of the study, I held a meeting with potential participants, described the possible risks and rewards of participation, explained how confidentiality would be maintained, and related how they could exit the study at any time, for any reason. Following this meeting, participants let the researcher know whether or not they were willing to participate in the study. The 21 prospective participants were asked to fill out an online self-inventory detailing their past experiences with writing and their instructional knowledge of teaching writing. Then, these participants took part in one of two focus groups. Selection of participation in the next phase of the study-individual interviews and observations-was based on information obtained through these self-inventories and focus groups. Participants who had a wide range of knowledge about writing and understood the components of a good writing lesson were more likely to be selected for the study's next phase. Two teachers from each of the three grade levels will be chosen to participate in the study. Data was collected through phenomenological interviewing and observations.

Self-Inventory

A self-inventory was sent to teachers electronically to learn basic demographic information, their feelings about teaching writing, how they utilized writing for personal use, and what professional development they had received regarding writing. The self-inventory was created by the researcher and was based on various meta-analyses that are

referenced in this study's literature review by The Institute of Education Sciences (2012), Graham, Harris, and Santangelo (2015), and Graham and Perin (2007b).

Data Collection

The data collected for this study were from interviews and observations. The questions asked during the interviews were focused on three main topics: teachers' past experiences as writers, how the school supported the teaching of writing, and the instructional choices that teachers made in the classroom. Observations were another source of data collected for the study. Interviews provided an opportunity for both the researcher and participant to gain deeper insight into the normal function of life. They provided an opportunity for both researcher and participants to obtain more understanding about their instructional strategies and how those choices related to their beliefs about writing and their teaching practices (Seidman, Rubin, Rubin, & Dilley, 2004).

Focus Group

The information learned from the self-inventory was used to guide the discussion of the focus groups. The focus group protocol began with questions about participants' use of and feeling about writing from their childhood to the present time. Other question topics included participants' self-efficacy regarding writing instruction throughout their career and how the school and the participants supported writing instruction. If all 21 possible participants were able to participate, the researcher would have conducted two focus groups. Only seven teachers wanted to participate in the study. So, only one focus group took place. This produced the optimal focus group environment, with six to eight participants in each group (Kitzinger, 1994).

I began the only focus group by introducing myself and asking participants to share their names and what grade level they teach. I then explained the purpose of the study and the focus group and asked the teachers if they needed any clarification about the questions on the self-inventory or the requirements of participation in the study (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Participants were thanked for taking time out of their busy schedules to participate in the study. Next, Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent forms were given to the participants, as well as a blank copy of the consent form for any participants who wanted one (see Appendix A). Hopefully, this created a level of transparency between the researcher and the participants. All participants were made aware that the session was recorded and transcribed. I provided a brief overview of the project and goals and offered an explanation as to why this school was selected out of the 426 schools in its RESA region. I provided the goals for the focus group and explained how the self-inventory and the focus group discussion assisted in the selection of two participants per grade level for individual interviews. The participants wore name tags so that I could call on them by their first names.

A focus group protocol adapted from Krueger (1994) was used to help ensure that the focus group ran smoothly (see Appendix B). After introductions, an "ice breaker" type of question was utilized to give all participants an opportunity to speak before the main topics were discussed. The protocol included scripted questions to ask the participants (Barbour, 2005; Patton, 1990). At the end of the discussion for each question, participants were given an opportunity to seek clarification on any matters about the study (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1997). At the conclusion of the focus group, all the participants were thanked for their time and each participant was provided with a

twenty-dollar gift card for his or her participation. At the conclusion of the focus group the participants were made aware of the time frame for selecting participants for the next phase of the study-individual interviews and observations.

Individual Interviews

According to Seidman (2013), "A phenomenological approach to interviewing focuses on the experiences of the participants and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 16). Interviews have the ability to capture the thoughts and opinions about a wide range of topics, and we have the opportunity to study that (see table 3.1) (Glasersfeld, 1987; Jonassen, 2006). Interview questions included a portion of the following question for a full list (see Appendix D):

Table 3.1

A Portion of Interview Questions	
K-12 education	1. Tell me about yourself. 2. Please tell me about your first experiences with writing as a student. a. Was that experience positive or negative? b. Overall, was writing enjoyable or negative. 3. Do any experiences come to mind when you think of writing and your k-12 education? a. Do you have any specific stories of writing at the elementary level that you would like to share? b. Do you have any specific stories of writing at the middle school level that you would like to share? c. Do you have any specific stories of writing at the high school level that you would like to share? 4. Can you remember any specific writing lessons from your days as a student? 5. Do you have any memories of working with a teacher on a piece of writing? 6. As you reflect on your K-12 experiences as a writer, do you have any teachers who stand out as good writing teachers? 7. Why do you believe they were good writing teachers?

For this study, the researcher planned to select two participants per grade level to be interviewed, since there were only three teachers who taught fourth-grade and were willing to participate, I decided to interview all three of them. In addition to the criteria mentioned previously, participant selection was also based on which teachers provide data-rich cases to study (Maxwell, 2013; Stake, 1995). A three-interview model was used in this study to understand participants' history with writing and their self-efficacy towards teaching writing (Seidman, 2013). The interview protocol was developed by the researcher (see Appendix C) in order to collect information applicable to the research questions.

In the first interview, participants discussed their experiences with writing throughout their K-12 education. This helped the researcher to better understand each participant's story (Seidman, 2013). A question that was asked during the first interview was "Please tell me about your first experiences with writing." In the participants' second interview, the focus was on the teacher's current experiences with writing instruction. The focus also centered around what a typical writing block entails in the participant's classroom. A question that was asked during the second interview was "How did your college courses prepare you to teach writing?" During the third and final interview, teachers had opportunities to express their knowledge of writing instruction. Participants were asked to consider their past experiences as writers in school and how those experiences are reflected in their current classrooms (Seidman, 2013). Questions that were asked during the final interview included "Throughout your participation in this study, have your views on writing changed? If so, how?" The protocol that guided individual interviews was based on Seidman's (2013) work on phenomenological

interviewing. The interview protocol was based on various meta-analyses to ensure that questions that guided the interview reflected issues which are considered answers relevant to quality writing.

According to Seidman (2013), an interview is not a normal conversation; in an interview, the researcher strives to listen more and talk less. Seidman explained that interviewing should take place on three different levels. First, the interviewer must listen to what the participant is saying. Second, the interviewer must try to be aware of when a participant speaks with a public voice instead of speaking honestly. Third, the interviewer must have an understanding of the process and the substance of what he or she is trying to accomplish during the interview. The participants in this study had the opportunity to reflect on their instructional choices, and thus were given time for reflecting on these important choices that happened in the classroom. It was important for the interviewer to gauge the energy level of the participant and to remain aware of all topics that need to be covered during the interview (Seidman, 2013). A good interviewer will ask follow-up questions when needed, while maintaining an awareness of the time (Seidman, 2013). Often, an interviewer is interested in certain topics and will ask additional questions about those topics if they come up during the interview. One goal of an interviewer is to create an environment of trust between interviewer and interviewee. Asking exploring questions will aid in developing conversations that are more meaningful.

Most interview questions were open-ended in order to give the participant an opportunity to give thick, rich data. Leading questions were avoided. The researcher allotted time for asking follow-up questions, but he did not interrupt the natural flow of

conversation to do so. The interviewer utilized a notepad during the interview to write down questions to return to later. One way to create a deeper flow of conversation was to ask the participant to tell a story about the topic being discussed. This technique of telling story allowed my participants to give in-depth answers because the participant was doing the majority of the talking. Lastly, being silent during the interview is okay, because some interviewees need additional time to develop an appropriate answer. Occasionally, a participant needed time to process a response to the interview question. This interview protocol led to interesting and useful data from the participants.

The interviews took place in the participants' classrooms in the spring of 2018. A sign was placed on the door to ensure that the interview will not be interrupted. The interviews were recorded on an Evistr L57 as well as an iPhone 5 to ensure a quality recording is captured, and the entirety of the interview took between forty-five minutes to an hour. All audio files were stored on a password-enabled computer, and an additional password was be required to access the folder where the data will be stored. The audio files were transcribed using a transcription service.

Observations

Observations provide researchers with additional data to triangulate with different sources of data for the study (Patton, 2002). The process of triangulation is supposed to support a finding by showing that at least three independent measures agree with it or, at least, do not contradict it (Miles et al., 2014). Incorporating observations into the study allowed reliable data to be collected during a writing lesson. The research questions focused on the school-wide and classroom-based strategies for writing observations. I took notes on classroom activities throughout the observation sessions. As a qualitative

researcher, it is essential to take in as much information as possible to avoid interpretation and judgement of the information before analyzing it in the proper setting (Maxwell, 2013). The observation tool used in this study was based on Zepeda's (2009) *Variety of Instructional Materials* observation form (see Appendix E).

People often speak with two voices, the internal voice that happens inside their head and the public voice that follows societal norms (Seidman, 2013). The difference between these two voices creates a gap between what happens in a teacher's classroom and what he or she believes should happen. This gap creates the space for understanding human behavior, which is the core of qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013). A similar struggle exists in the classroom with what teachers know about quality writing instruction and what happens on a daily basis in that classroom. Often these things are at odds with one another for a variety of reasons.

The researcher used observations as a way to connect the discussed topics during the interview with the practicality of teaching writing in the classroom. Utilizing and combining data collection methods provided for greater depth of understanding to triangulate findings of the study (Maxwell, 2013).

At the conclusion of the interview process, each of the seven participants selected a time when the researcher could observe him or her teaching one complete writing lesson. The observation tool assisted the researcher in noting a variety of instructional practices being used during the writing lesson. When observing participants, it was important that the researcher was aware of his surroundings and be hypervigilant in noticing and recording everything in the vicinity (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). Taking field notes was the first step in recording the observation. Field notes should be

thick, deep, and rich in description (Patton, 2002). Field notes for this study included memoing-a versatile tool that can be used to capture my reflections throughout the study. Memos ranged from brief marginal comments on interview transcripts or theoretical ideas recorded in field journals to full-fledged analytic essays (Miles, et al., 2014).

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of creating meaning out of raw data. Stake (1995) noted, "There is no particular moment when data analysis begins. Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations" (p. 71). Two analytical strategies were utilized to analyze data: categorical aggregation and direct interpretation (Stake, 1995). Categorical aggregation involves seeking a collection of themes from the data in the hopes that these themes will help to create meaning from the data (Stake, 1995). This reoccurrence of repeated themes throughout the data adds to the consistency of the findings (Maxwell, 2013; Stake, 1995). According to Miles et al. (2014), the researcher should stay close to the data, but remain open-minded regarding what is occurring. As the data are initially coded, the researcher goes line by line through the data looking for reoccurring themes that match the initial codes. Researchers typically keep their coding simple and straightforward (Miles et al., 2014). As patterns begin to emerge from the data, the process of coding will enable larger pieces of data to be sorted, allowing major themes to emerge. Organizing information into a large matrix will allow conclusions to be more easily drawn from the data.

At times during the data analysis process, a researcher will find a piece of data that will be used for direct interpretation. Direct interpretation is used when looking at a single piece of data and drawing meaning from it without looking for multiple instances

(Stake, 1995). Some researchers (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985) place a high priority on a direct interpretation of events. This does not involve looking through the data, but rather focusing on a singular piece of data and allowing it to be pulled apart and placed back together in meaningful patterns.

The researcher needs to stay open and honest throughout the data analysis, because the data could point to themes or areas that were previously not considered. Therefore, the conceptual factors that frame the study may need to be re-examined (Maxwell, 2013). An advantage of qualitative research is the ability to change the research design based on the data being collected at the research site.

Data analysis began as soon as data were collected and continued throughout the study. Before coding the data, the researcher generated a preliminary list of potential codes for the data based on the research questions and literature review (Miles et al., 2014; Stake, 1995). Descriptive codes were derived from labels that assigned symbolic meaning to the descriptive or influential information compiled during the study. These codes were comprised of summaries in a word or short phrase-most often as a noun-the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (Saldaña, 2009 p. 70). Next, I developed preliminary codes (Patton, 2002) to determine concepts expected to emerge from the data. These included concepts such as instructional practices, time, enjoyment, fear, conferencing, classroom practices, school-wide practices, life experiences, career experiences, Georgia Milestones, writing process, training, expectations, and professional development. During this first coding cycle, these preliminary data were modified, deleted, or expanded as needed (Miles et al., 2014).

During the second coding cycle the researcher started to organize the data that was originally coded during the first cycle into larger similar data, in hopes of organizing the bits of the data into coherent themes. Within qualitative research, participants' unique perspectives can often result in unexpected themes or data, as the themes are organized into substantive and theoretical categories. According to Maxwell (1996), "Substantive categories are primarily descriptive, in a broad sense that includes description of participants' concepts and beliefs" (p.107). These substantive categories provide patterns and meaning of the lived experiences of the participants. In contrast, theoretical categories allow the data to be placed into a more general framework, often representing the researcher's concepts (Maxwell, 2013).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define credibility as the confidence in the truth of a study's findings. Research credibility was established through various techniques. First, I utilized triangulation by comparing data from different sources: interview transcripts, observations, and self-reflecting memoing. Second, I used member checking by allowing participants to verify interview transcripts to enhance accuracy of my data. Third, I selected sources that provided rich information about the topic being explored (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002). A rich description of the school setting and took copious amounts of notes during observations. According to Patton, "triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods" (p. 247). In this study, data triangulation occurred through the use of a variety of data sources to support the findings (Patton, 2002). Collecting a variety of sources-self-inventory, focus groups, individual interviews, artifacts, and observations-

also added to the credibility of the study. Collecting multiple types of data increased the credibility of the study because they allowed similar data to be seen in various data sources (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002).

Dependability

The dependability of a study refers to the integrity of the study's data (Miles et al., 2014). Dependability is linked to trustworthiness because it establishes the findings as repeatable and consistent (Miles et al., 2014). The research study was carefully conceptualized; the data collection process was clearly laid out; and the findings of the study were triangulated (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Participant selection for the study was logically thought out so that it aligned well with the purposes of the study (Maxwell, 2013). Dependability is also another measure to enhance the study's findings.

In addition, the researcher maintained dependability through audit trails, triangulation, and member checking. I engaged in interpersonal discussions with my dissertation committee members to discuss any potential problems with the methods of the study (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2002).

In this study, I used an online platform called Dedoose to digitally store my data. This allowed the information to be stored online, with only the researcher having access to the data through the Dedoose platform. Dedoose requires two passwords to gain access to the data. The second password is unrecoverable and is only known by the researcher. Every attempt was made to ensure the security of the data. thoroughly describing the procedures being used throughout the study (Miles et al., 2014). Providing an exhaustive description

Transferability

Transferability is the process of applying the results of research to another site or situation that is similar (Merriam, 2002). Transferability was made easier by providing a rich description of the research site, outlining how participants are selected, and

Confirmability

Researcher bias has been recognized as a major threat to qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013). I paid special attention to any issues of bias that could have influenced my study: selection of data that fit into my current theory, goals for the study, or misunderstandings. Reflective memoing was used to expose researcher bias allowed for this information to be entered as data. For example, the researcher in this study has struggled to write well the majority of his life. He was aware of potential biases in evaluating other teacher's writing abilities or challenges and record his perceptions thoroughly. Using memoing throughout the study documented any biases and addressed the potential validity threat. At the conclusion of each interview and observation I noted a memo of my thoughts. Then I analyzed all my memos to see if any of my own biases were affecting my non-participant observer status.

Secondly, I was aware of the pitfalls associated with research reactivity. Reactivity refers to how the presence of a researcher affects the overall pre-established dynamic of a group (Maxwell, 2013). This cannot be avoided and could likely impact the data collection process in various, currently unknown, ways.

Member checking was also used to enhance the credibility of this study. Member checking occurs when participants are given access to interview transcriptions or summaries to confirm the accuracy of the information (Maxwell, 2013). This allowed for

participants to correct any potential errors in summary or transcription. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that member checking is the most crucial step in establishing credibility of the study.

Ethical Procedures

Special precautions were taken to protect human participants in this study. I ensured participants understood the potential risks of participating in this research. Participants were assured that their identities would be protected and the data were accurate in order to maintain the highest levels of confidentiality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) in accordance with the requirements and definitions cited by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Valdosta State University.

Participation in this study was completely voluntary, and participants had the option to drop out of the study at any time for any reason (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). All seven participants complete the requirements of the study. Obtaining informed consent involved explaining the study, allowing participants to ask questions, and allowing them adequate time to decide to participate or not. Before data were initially collected, a consent form was provided to all potential participants. The consent form included an explanation of the overall purpose of the study, the methods that were to be used, the duration of the study, and any possible risks of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Providing a clearly worded document and explanation allowed for the participants to aware of all the requirements of the study, free of any false claims, put the decision to participate solely in the participants' hands.

After giving participants sufficient time to consider their decision to join the study or not, those who chose to do so were given an approved consent form for the study,

following the guidelines provided by Valdosta State University. Working with people can create uncomfortable situations due to the fact that people are recalling past experiences. Interacting with humans and asking them questions can possibly create a feeling of an invasion of privacy (Stake, 1995). Allowing for a full disclosure of the types of instruments used in the study and providing clear protocols for interviews and focus groups allowed participants to have a better understanding of the requirements of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

All data gathered throughout the course of the study were kept under lock and key (Maxwell, 2013) and destroyed one year after completion of this study (Miles et al., 2014). Participants were assigned pseudonyms to help ensure confidentiality. The pseudonym code list will be destroyed upon completion of the dissertation (Miles et al., 2014). The researcher will utilize multiple fail-safes in order to protect the data collected throughout the entirety of the study.

Chapter Summary

This study addresses the significant improvement in remediate students' writing scores at an identified Georgia elementary school. The research design used in this study was an instrumental case study. Teachers at the research site who met certain criteria were considered for inclusion in this study. After a brief self-inventory, teachers were invited to participate in a focus group. Afterwards, purposeful sampling was used to select seven teachers for participation in individual interviews and teaching observations. In addition to these methods of data collection, the researcher also used memoing and artifact collection. Data analysis included descriptive coding to help find themes in the data. Additionally, the researcher addressed the issues of validity by using such strategies

as data triangulation, audit trails, memoing, member checking, and thick description. Utilizing important key elements from case study design and data collection and analysis techniques helped make the researcher's findings credible. Findings from this study will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTION

Educators still struggle to identify and implement pedagogical techniques that could improve their students' writing. This is highlighted by years of implementing many reform efforts, following the publication of "A Nation at Risk in 1983." Sixty percent of all elementary students still do not meet national writing standards.

The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies and practices used by teachers at an identified Georgia elementary school which resulted in a significant improvement in students writing skills. These strategies and techniques helped students to meet national writing standards resulting in students significantly improving their writing skills and meeting national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test.

Participant Requirements

The study was conducted at Fairlands Elementary School and was open to employees who were employed from 2015-2016 to 2016-2017 school years and taught a grade level which administered the Georgia Milestones standardized test. All potential participants were required to fill out a self-inventory. Seven willing participants took part in a focus group interview. The focus group participants were then observed during a writing lesson of their choice. I required two individual interviews, each at a time suitable for the researcher and the participant. Seven participants completed all the requirements for the study.

I used a three-fold research approach comprising of a focus group, one-to-one interviews, and observations. The researcher explored multiple facets of the development of writing teachers at Fairlands Elementary School. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. What were the life and career experiences of teachers at an identified Georgia elementary who took responsibility for improving student writing skills resulting in students meeting national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

RQ 2. What strategies did teachers use at an identified Georgia elementary school to significantly improve student writing skills and meet national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

RQ 3. What practices did teachers use at an identified Georgia elementary school to significantly improve student writing skills and meet national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

This chapter is broken down into seven major segments, which reflects data obtained from all participants. Each segment is further divided into three subparts. In the first section, I provided the participants' life experiences with writing. In the second section, I outlined their personal philosophy of education. In the third section, I provided their personal views of elementary writing instruction. The final section is a summary of the chapter.

Physical Site Description

All interviews took place at Fairlands Elementary School. The school was located in a suburb of a major city in the state of Georgia. The research site opened in

August 2009 with around 800 students who were selected from three other elementary schools in order to ease overcrowding. The school is located off the main road which shares its name with the school. The school's name reflects the scenery that surrounds the building.

After turning off the main road, one saw that the school is located next to several large neighborhoods. Sidewalks are on both sides of the road as well as crosswalks for students to travel safely to and from school. A winding entrance opens up to a large faculty parking lot that sits directly in front of the school building. Due to the relatively young age of the building, the school grounds are in immaculate condition. The school was constructed out of deep red colored bricks with a light sandy tan brick as an accent. The windows and gutters are a silver color. The one-story school building sits on a twenty-five acre campus that is surrounded by woodlands. The school building is surrounded by beautiful landscaping; the plant beds are overflowing with pine straw, and nicely maintained plants and trees. Giant pawprints symbolizing the school's mascot are painted on the sidewalks, welcoming visitors to the school's main entrance.

Every time I visited the school, there was a sheriff's car parked within close proximity of the main entrance to the school. The front doors were always securely locked. Located to the right of the front doors was a call button which signals a secretary in the main rotunda of the school. Upon gaining access to the research site, I approached her desk. The secretary was very leery of my presence as a researcher. She stated, "No one told me that you were coming." Upon reassuring her that I had county approval and IRB approval from Valdosta State University, she relaxed somewhat. Additionally, I was also required to provide my driver's license to her for scanning into the school's visitation

database. Each day, upon arrival I was required to gain a new visitor's badge to walk the halls of Fairlands Elementary School. I noticed that the school was laid out in clearly marked hallways that branched off into individual grade levels. That eased any fears I had about locating my participants' classrooms. The hallways and floors were color-coordinated to represent the school colors and the school mascot.

Participant Narratives

The following profiles were drawn from survey data (see Appendix F), interviews, and observations (see table 4.1). The mean number of years of teaching for these participants was 19.8 years; all but one had a post-secondary degree and four had an educational specialist degree. Their self-reported teaching efficacy at the start of their careers spanned the spectrum from low to high, whereas their rating of their ability to teach writing now was at medium to high (no one rated self-low).

Table 4.1

Basic Demographic Information of Participants for the Study.

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Years of Experience Teaching	Highest Degree Earned	Teaching Efficacy at Start of Career	Teaching Writing Currently
Deborah	Female	White	18	Specialist	High	Medium
Jay	Female	White	18	Specialist	Low	Medium
Linda	Female	White	20	Specialist	High	High
Sally	Female	White	12	Bachelor's	Medium	Medium
Sarah	Female	White	29	Master's	Low	High
Stella	Female	White	22	Specialist	Medium	High
Stephanie	Female	White	20	Master's	Medium	Medium

Deborah

Deborah was born and raised in the South by her parents who had their undergraduate degrees. Her parents set up a college fund, for they were expecting her to go to college, ". . . they discussed [her] college future." Deborah met her parents' expectations and completed her bachelor's degree in elementary education from North Georgia College. She received a master's degree in gifted and creative studies from the University of Georgia and a specialist degree from Piedmont College. Deborah is a teacher with 18 years of experience. She has worked in two metropolitan counties.

For Deborah the job was a calling, something she remembered from adolescence. Deborah is married and has two children. She recalled, "I always knew from a young age that I wanted to be a teacher." Deborah believed that teaching would in her own words, "serve me well as a mom." She stated, "The flexible school work schedule would aid in raising my children." Teaching allowed Deborah to balance her family life and career as she took ". . . a few years off from teaching to be a stay-at-home mother with my two children and have the ability to find another job in teaching." Being a mother gave her insights that allowed her to relate to parents of the children she taught because she understood the struggles and hardships that come with being a parent.

My first correspondence with Deborah was through email. She was leery about participating in the focus group interview, saying that "I don't like to talk in those types of groups [focus groups]." This tentativeness for group conversations caused her to hesitate in deciding to participate in the study. Her self-description was accurate because she only spoke a few times during the hour-long focus group.

I spent a whole day at the research site and observed the participants carrying out their day-to-day roles and responsibilities in the school. Originally, Deborah was not on my interview schedule, but she allowed me to interview her during her lunchtime. As I entered her classroom, she was returning from taking her students to the cafeteria. As I started to set up for the interview, we exchanged pleasantries, and I thanked her for fitting me into her busy schedule at the end of the school year. At the start of the first interview, Deborah quickly settled in and focused on each question, often pausing before giving a response or asking a clarifying question before giving her answer.

I interviewed Deborah in her classroom both times; the first interview took place during her lunchtime and the second interview occurred during her planning time. Her room exemplified a working classroom—desks out of alignment and books and paper scattered across the classroom floor. Twenty-four student desks were arranged in six slightly crooked rows; yet, they all faced toward the Promethean board at the front of the room. A computer cart was tucked just to the left by the classroom door, with student cubbies to the left of the cart in the corner of the room. A classroom library was against one wall of the room. The classroom had one window, through which the main hallway could be seen. A tall wooden bookshelf full of instructional resources was near the teacher workspace; it was jammed so full of instructional materials that during our first interview she was unable to locate some of the writing materials that she used "religiously for like 20 years."

In her particular grade level, the teachers are departmentalized, and students have multiple teachers and change classrooms throughout the day. During the class change overs, she greeted each child who entered her room with "I hope you are doing well

today." She did not manage her classroom with absolute authority but met each student who entered her classroom, with a smile. Deborah had confidence that this environment allowed students to feel safe and comfortable, and she believed students understood she, "wants to build an inclusive community." During my observation her students got excited about her assignments and often yelled out various writing ideas. When she requested that they listen to their classmates, the students were respectful and paid attention to their fellow students.

Life experience with writing. Deborah recalled her experiences as a student with writing throughout her public-school education included spelling words, handwriting, book reports, "silly" weather reports, and poetry. Deborah did not have many other memories of writing in school. She stated, "I feel that writing was not a focus [in elementary education] like it is today in education." However, Deborah recalled more nuanced experiences of writing in high school. She stated, "they [high school teachers] knew that we had college application essays and trying to get us ready for the demands of writing in college." The following anecdote neatly captures some of her highlights with writing:

> I had some fantastic English teachers. What I remember about high school that was— that's kind of amazing considering how long ago it was, in the '90s—is that my high school teachers really truly differentiated [individualized instruction] . . . . I remember her setting up a time after school with each of us to sit down and give us personal feedback.

Deborah's teacher took the time to critique her students' writing. At the start of her career Deborah was only one of two participants who had confidence in her ability to teach

writing. Her enjoyment of teaching writing could be attributed to having the writing process modeled for her as a student.

Personal philosophy of education. Deborah's philosophy of education is based on keeping students driven and pushing them at an appropriate speed and level. She stated that "[keeping] kids motivated and engaged is the key to everything." While she was a firm believer in encouraging her students to keep improving, she was concerned about pushing them too hard that they shut down academically. She noted that once students shut down, "the game is over . . . they just quit learning." She explained that every student brings talents to the classroom, but admitted some students are more academically inclined than others. Deborah believed student engagement in class is achieved by facilitating a community atmosphere. Deborah shared one example of how she attempted to build a classroom community: "at the start of the year I have every student write down one way they want our classroom to function." She had each student share ideas with their peers. Deborah went on to state, "I know it sounds silly, but the students remember how their classmates want the room to function." Finally, Deborah said that "there isn't a more important job for teachers than allowing students to understand how a community should function."

Views of elementary writing instruction. Deborah has been teaching writing the same way for many years, despite her concerns that her approach has not yielded the best results. At the start of her career, she rated her ability to teach writing as high, because of some of her experiences in her undergraduate preparatory program. She has relied on the same writing resource book throughout her entire teaching career. Deborah said, "I believe that the strategies and techniques are good, but I often worry that I lack

the appropriate scope and sequencing to yield the best writing from my students." She lamented the shortage of resources that constrained her from doing the best job. She stated, "with everything that we have to teach, it's difficult to locate new writing resources. At times I do spend my own money to find new teaching materials." Teachers at Fairlands Elementary School were expected to teach a particular writing genre for the entirety of a grading period, as laid out in the Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE). In addition, each county district level leadership created pacing guides to follow the GSE. However, Deborah struggled to keep her students engaged with one genre for nine weeks, stating, "I don't by any means stick to [the writing pacing guide]." To keep students engaged during writing Deborah stated, "I find that they [students] like working on different types of writing, instead of always writing in the same genre." Deborah noted that her biggest challenge in teaching writing was finding the time to conference with students to the degree that she wanted.

Jay

Jay grew up in Ohio until her husband's job was relocated to the south. Jay's parents earned college degrees, with her father earning a master's degree. Growing up in Ohio, her family resided in one home for the duration of her childhood, and her parents continue to maintain that home today. Throughout her adolescence, education was very important to Jay's parents. She stated, "They expected all of us [their kids] to earn all A's and B's in school, that was an expectation that never changed and if we didn't earn good grades in school, we would receive a punishment, most likely being grounded." When she arrived home from school, her parents expected her to, "complete all of my homework before [she] could go and have fun."

She received her bachelor's degree from Akron University, her master's degree from Cleveland State University, and her specialist degree from Piedmont College. At the time of the interview, Jay was entering her 17th year of teaching. She had spent the majority of her teaching career teaching fifth-grade. While she moved to 4th grade just last year, Jay was still allowed to be a participant in the study because she taught fifth grade from 2015-2017.

Jay described herself as a "perfectionist" in school. She preferred learning math and science because they clicked mentally for her over language arts and social studies. This preference for science and math also applied to the subjects that Jay enjoys teaching today, noting, "I'd much rather focus on teaching math because it has always made more sense to me." Jay indicated on the preliminary survey her willingness to participate in the focus group and interviews.

Jay was inspired to be a teacher by neighbors who happened to be teachers. She enjoyed helping them grade papers and set up her classroom each fall. She recalled, "That experience showed me what it was really like to be a teacher and I thought it was an amazing job."

I interviewed Jay in her classroom. The first interviewed her during her planning period and the second one took place after school. Upon entering her room, we exchanged pleasantries as I set up for the interview. Jay gave thoughtful answers to all interview questions, often pausing for a moment before answering a question. Her room was located at the end of the fourth-grade hallway; one window faced the outside. Jay's classroom was filled with cardboard carnival games. Before we started the interview, I asked her what the projects were for, and she explained that "the kindergarten classes

were going to play carnival-type games that my students had created out of cardboard as a STEM challenge." Her classroom had 26 student desks that were arranged into five table groups, comprising four groups of five desks and one group of six desks. Her room had student cubbies in one corner overflowing with student bookbags and old worksheets. Her room was overcrowded with the carnival games and large groupings of desks.

Life experiences with writing. Jay's memories of writing in school were not positive. As a student, she always received low grades in writing. Jay recalled, "I was often criticized by my teachers for my writing and [I was] being constantly corrected for my poor penmanship." To this day, she attempts to type as much as possible when teaching. Jay stated that "my students today still poke fun at me for my poor penmanship." During middle and high school, Jay enjoyed learning new information through research but still did not enjoy the task of writing. She commented that "I actually really enjoyed finding new information but always despised citing my sources. I just didn't understand, and still don't completely understand why everyone harps so much on citing our information in a particular format." Jay detested the technical aspects of writing, which impacted how she saw the entire writing process:

> I just remember having to go back over and over again. I remember doing everything we had to do on note cards. The requirements of citing your sentences and paraphrasing various statements—oh, it was horrible. It was, like, the most dreadful thing, and I struggled with it. I mean, I had to redo it.

She maintains high expectations from her students and "provide[s] the needed support to help my students to be successful with writing." This is a convoluted process for her to

provide the needed writing support that she did not receive from her teachers when she was a student.

Personal philosophy of education. Jay emphasized "That every student can learn and that all students can be successful in my classroom." She reiterated "High expectations for all students who enter my room." She was painfully aware ". . . that not all students start off at the same spot educationally, but I take students where they are in their learning and attempt to move them closer to understanding the fourth-grade content." She expressed that without these high expectations, the students would not expect more of themselves. Jay believed, "As a teacher, you need to find relevant learning opportunities that speaks to each student that [sic] enters your classroom." Jay stated, "That is the way to 'spark them,' that gets them going educationally. And [I believe] eventually it'll happen for every student. It just sometimes takes longer for others." It was Jay's job to help students be successful in the classroom and she understood that not all students develop educationally at the same rate.

Another key component to Jay's teaching philosophy was "flexibility," because ". . . there is always something different happening each day that could throw off your classes' learning." Jay was constantly trying to improve her teaching ability. She recalled, "Sometimes just because you have a great lesson planned does not mean that lesson will be completed." Students often ask excellent questions that provide for what Jay described, "as a genuine learning opportunity and you cannot pass on those opportunities." Jay stated, "I feel that these other learning opportunities are more important than what is written in the lesson plan book." Jay also believed that patience is a virtue in the classroom. In particular, she understood that waiting and giving students

enough time to respond to questions is a good pedagogical strategy. This strategy served Jay well in teaching writing because she believes it takes copious amounts of time for students to write well.

Views on elementary writing instruction. Jay's thoughts on writing education have evolved through various phases. She had no memories of being prepared to teach writing by her college preparatory courses. It was not until her student teaching experience that Jay understood the basics of how to teach writing. Even then she accepted that it was something she did not emphasize during her first years as a teacher:

> It was a "learn as you go" experience in teaching writing for me. I often dreaded teaching writing, mainly because I felt like I wasn't teaching it well at the start of my career. It was the thing that I would put at the end of my lessons, and if we didn't get to writing, it was okay with me.

Jay's opinions towards teaching writing did shift from the start of her career. Instead of avoiding teaching writing, it became a challenge for Jay. She recalled, "after teaching for a few years, I felt that my writing instruction was a major area of weakness, so I decided I would spend my summers reading books on writing instruction." Her ability to teach writing has improved, but she still understood that she "could still get better at teaching writing." Later she went on to note that, "writing still takes a lot of instructional time." Jay regretted that the teaching schedule does not allow enough time for all the subjects to be taught properly. Jay stated, "All the minutes that they've given us, that they're telling us to do this many minutes and it's more than our block, to begin with, so where do we find the time for writing." Jay's focus on improving her ability to teach writing is an

ideal example for her students in order to show that they can improve their ability to write.

Linda

Linda grew up in the Northeast but attended the University of West Florida for her bachelor's degree. She received her master's degree from the University of Phoenix and her specialist degree from Lincoln Memorial University in Harrogate, Tennessee. Before starting her teaching career, Linda spent a memorable summer teaching English in China. This experience impacted her view of education. She stated, "I understood how hard the rest of the world is working towards education." At the time of this study, Linda was completing her 20th year in education and her 18th year of teaching in this county.

As a student, Linda was in gifted classes from the first grade onward and described herself as "a total rule follower." She was studious and ". . . did exactly what was asked of [her]." Other than struggling with math in sixth grade because math became more theoretical rather than computational, she enjoyed school and as she described "I did well throughout the rest of my education."

My interviews with Linda occurred in her classroom. The first interview took place during her grade-level recess time, and the second one during her planning period. Her classroom was at the end of the fifth-grade hallway and had one window that faced the outside, a Promethean board, individual classroom desks, a computer cart, student cubbies, and a teacher work area. Upon entering the room, we exchanged pleasantries as I prepared for the interview.

Linda had a background in teaching gifted students in the area of English language arts and prided herself on being a competent and well-rounded writing teacher.

Linda believed that it was her job "to knock students down a notch so that they become hungry writers . . .willing to try to impress their audience." Multiple times throughout both interviews I had to ask follow-up questions to capture meaningful data for the study. Yet, throughout the study, Linda held very strong opinions about writing education. Often, in the focus group interview, she would talk over her co-workers to make a particular point about writing education. Linda's thoughts on writing education were respected by the group because, as soon as Linda started speaking, the rest of the group would become quiet, even if the other participants were in the middle of making a point about writing education. As a reminder, Linda only taught advanced content students in her classroom, and I believe she benefited greatly from having very talented students who, ". . . need to be challenged to become teachable, and that happens by inspiring students in individual conferences who want to get better at writing." She placed a lot of responsibility on each student to improve their writing.

Life experiences with writing. Linda did not have many memories to draw upon regarding learning to write. She mentioned using her spelling words to write sentences in elementary school. However, she hypothesized one reason that she did not have any positive memories of writing early in her life, saying "Maybe we did not write in elementary school. I am sure that we did, I just don't remember any."

In high school, Linda also recalled writing an AP history paper on Adolf Hitler: "I had to be instructed in writing—someway, somehow—to be able to write at that level, but sadly, I don't remember." She thought that her teacher was not reading the paper, so she placed several lines in it asking if he was indeed reading it. She discovered that her teacher was reading her research paper and responding to her questions. Linda liked to

challenge the status quo and enjoyed asking difficult questions of why she was completing certain assignments.

Personal philosophy of education. A philosophy of education is essential to understanding how an educator approaches his or her particular job as a teacher. Linda explained her style of teaching as follows:

> It's our job to present the information to them, and then let them kinda get there. . . . I believe, like, quick mini-lesson, give 'em the tools, let 'em discover it, and then take it and run with it. You know, it's not my job to stand up here and lecture them for hours. . . . If they want, you give it to them, but then they get the end result however they need to.

The above quote highlights how Linda believed that learning is best accomplished in a decentralized classroom where the teacher facilitates learning but is not the keeper of knowledge. She allowed students to build on their prior knowledge and apply that to the information that she taught to her class. Then students have the opportunity to internalize the learning and run with it and make it their own, adding to their mental schema. Linda further explained, "I find that way, students have the opportunities to learn as the world will teach them." She allowed the learning to be authentic and maintained high expectations for her students. Linda empowered her students to take charge of their writing through conferencing. She stated, "I get students who want my help rather than students who feel that already know everything." This is a unique approach to writing conferences because the students requested them in her classroom, and she allowed them to take ownership of their time together.

Views of elementary writing instruction. According to Rogers and Graham, (2008), teachers' beliefs about teaching writing influences their interaction with students. The first time I asked Linda about writing instruction, her response was, "I initially think of the genres like a narrative, expository, opinion or whatever." Her answers evolved as she discussed writing, "I believe in giving students constant feedback and asking probing questions about their writing." She recalled that, "I shy away from a systematic approach [a formal writing program] and rather approach writing with each student individually through conferencing; this model serves me to make their writing the best it could be." While conferencing with students, she said things like, "Here's what you can do. Where are you going with this lead? Where are you taking me?" This allows for students to take ownership of their writing and she places that responsibility solely on the student.

Linda noted that a one-size-fits-all writing approach does not work. She expressed that if her county moves towards a formal writing program, it would most likely result in "1,000 students who write the same way." She was very confident in her abilities as a writing teacher because she tracked students' growth from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. Linda stated, "As I track student's growth in writing, they see themselves becoming better writers. It is just so hard as a student to know if you are getting better at writing." Linda believed in creating opportunities for students to write every day, such as by responding to literature. She also believed that not every piece of writing needs to be finished. Her students did many ten-minute writes just to get them to enjoy the writing process, and therefore this exercise raised the self-efficacy of the students in her classroom by allowing her students to be successful writers.

Sally

Education was the top priority in Sally's home, and both of Sally's parents earned four-year college degrees. Her family expected her to always do her best. Sally recalled that "earning all A's wasn't the norm, but we were expected to perform to the best of our ability." As Sally entered high school, her parents made their expectations clear: "[They] gave me a car with the understanding that I would help transport my younger siblings if my grades wouldn't slip, or I would lose the car." During her interview, Sally recalled a high school experience that planted the seed of education as a possible career: "I had the opportunity to help tutor students who were struggling in high school, and that really made me consider going into education because I really enjoyed helping teach others." This experience of helping others gain knowledge led Sally to eventually choose education as her major in college.

Sally earned her bachelor's degree from Brenau University. She was in her twelfth year of teaching, and she had been employed at Fairlands Elementary since the school opened in 2009. Sally had taught fourth grade throughout her entire teaching career. Sally stated, "I am an avid reader, but for whatever reason, I never have liked teaching reading and writing." This attitude toward writing caused her not to want to participate in the study originally. The primary reason I wanted Sally to be a part of the study was her perceived lack of growth in the area of teaching writing over her career, that was self-reported in the initial survey. At first, Sally stated,

> I didn't want to be bothered with more things at the end of an exhausting school year. I am just ready to be on summer break. Also, I am a bad writer myself, and I feel I don't teach it [writing] well.

Sally saw herself as being unworthy of participating in a research study on writing education. Additional emails were required to ease her anxiety and assure her that her participation would still be valuable. At various times throughout the study, she reiterated her weakness as a writer: "I was a terrible writer in school and everyone here [Fairlands Elementary School] knows that I keep my emails short and sweet."

Our two interviews took place in Sally's classroom. The first interview was conducted during her planning period, and the second interview occurred after school. Her classroom had 24 student desks arranged into a large array, with each desk facing the Promethean board. Each time I entered her room, I was impressed by the calm environment that I witnessed. The fluorescent lights were turned off, and she had a few lamps around the room to provide enough task lighting to make the room feel cozy. Sally gave long, thoughtful answers to the questions I asked.

Life experience with writing. Sally expressed a few positive experiences with writing as a student. Both of her parents were in the U.S. military. Her family moved almost every three years, which she believed caused gaps in her learning. Sally explained how this impacted her: "Elementary school years were kind of piecemealed together. Middle school and high school got a little better, because we didn't have to move as much during those years." Due to these perceived gaps in her education, Sally took a direct approach to writing in her life: "I hate, like, *hate* to write, personally. It's not something I look forward to doing at all." The only writing that she remembered was a high school assignment comparing Alfred Hitchcock films that was given to her by a male teacher in high school. This writing assignment stood out because "that was his thing." This teacher showed passion for the assignments that students were working on

in his class. Sally had only one recollection of conferencing with a teacher for writing, and it was in college. She noted that even throughout her career as a teacher, writing was very frustrating for her.

> Sally shared one particularly poignant memory of writing in college:
>
> You could turn it in as many times before the deadline as you wanted, and she would provide you with feedback, and I did. I think I turned that thing in six or seven times. I was determined I was going to do well on this paper. . . . I handed it in the final time. I got that final grade, and she writes up at the top, 89. She says, "I'm so sorry. I know you worked so hard, but I could not give you an A. I got an A in the class because I had a 100% average with everything else, but I mean, that just, that tore me to pieces because I don't write well, and I worked really hard.

This experience drove her writing instruction because she understood the struggles and frustration that are often associated with writing. Sally explained why that experience was so meaningful to her: "That experience allows me to relate to all types of writers who come into my classroom." She did not feel comfortable as a writer when she was a student and did not have positive memories of writing, and that had impacted her instruction of writing throughout her entire teaching career.

Personal philosophy of education. She reiterated that "some kids just are not ready academically to move forward in their education." Sally stated, "Instruction must be different for every kid, and it is my job as a teacher to take students as far educationally as I can." She believed that students need to be engaged in the learning process but not all students were ready to take responsibility in their learning. As a

teacher, she believed it was her job "to find things that spark [students'] interest and keep them engaged in learning." She believed in providing explicit instructions to her students. She then allowed her students to take their new learning and build on that foundation.

Views of elementary writing instruction. Research suggested that best practices in writing instruction include showing and modeling writing techniques, supporting struggling students, and setting goals for students' writing (Graham, Hebert, Paige Sandbank, & Harris, 2014; Harris, Graham, et al.2013; Hillocks, 1981). Sally felt strongly about one of those practices, noting that "writing must be modeled for each student." Sally found that her pedagogical instructions need to change depending on what type of writing task she gives students. She stated, "It is my job to find the proper graphic organizers and guide students with their formatting or the formula they are following on their assignments." Sally was also a strong believer in conferencing with each student: "[It] is where the growth of writing takes place. I also feel that I need to conference with every single student because . . . Sue over here can write according to this formula, but she can do so much more, and I can push her in that area." Conferencing allows writing instruction to be differentiated for each student. Without this piece, students struggle to know what they need to improve on in their writing.

Sarah

Sarah was born in Miami, Florida, to immigrant parents from Cuba. Sarah received her undergraduate and master's degrees from Florida International University. She was in her 29th year of teaching. Even though Sarah is in the twilight of her teaching career, she expressed, "I have no plans to retire because I feel that I am still making an impact." Her enthusiasm was evident in every interaction that I had with her. In the

focus group, she asked numerous questions about the study before other participants arrived for our discussion, such as “How long have you been working on your degree?” and “Would you encourage someone to pursue their doctorate?” Before each interview, she met me at the door with a huge smile, and her loud, boisterous voice carried throughout the room.

From 2015 to 2017, Sarah served as a special education teacher at Fairlands Elementary School for third grade through fifth grade. She supported special education students with writing by going into their language arts classes periodically throughout the day to support them. Sarah had the opportunity to “go to different in-service programs” while at Fairlands, several of which she described as helpful. I interviewed Sarah in her classroom, which she shared with other special education teachers. The classroom was divided into several working areas so that all teachers could use the space simultaneously if needed. Instructional materials were housed on various bookshelves along the walls of the room. The classroom had several teacher desks and five tables for students. The first interview took place during Sarah’s planning time, and the second one took place during her lunchtime.

Life experience with writing. As a student, Sarah approached writing as an unenjoyable task that she had to complete. Sarah recalled, “I always looked at writing as something I had to get through at school.” She struggled to remember a specific memory of working on writing as an elementary student, but she mentioned specific positive memories of working with one teacher in middle school and putting together portfolios of her creative writing. Sarah stated, “Mrs. Sparks was a big creative writer . . . I remember doing it [writing] with her in sixth grade and keeping a journal of my creative writing.”

She described this memory as a positive experience with writing in school. When asked why this teacher stood out, Sarah stated, "It was because of the passion that Mrs. Sparks showed towards writing." She encouraged Sarah to always keep a journal with her to capture her creative writing ideas. Sarah recalled, "That's probably the only true positive experience that I had as a student with writing." She reflected on her writing education: "I remembered composing informational papers in college and citing my work." The positive writing experience Sarah had with this teacher caused her to strive to make writing a positive experience for her own students.

Sarah described her evolution as a student: "[I was] not a very good student until I got to college. Even then, I didn't become a great student. I just was interested."

Personal philosophy of education. Sarah believed in creating authentic opportunities for students to practice writing—not just by acquiring knowledge, but also by creating it. Sarah explained her philosophy of education: "I think that any kid—if they put their mind to it—can do anything." Even though she served a special education population, she did not believe that they had limitations. Sarah believed in maintaining high expectations for her students, noting, "If you hold your expectations high, students will rise to meet them." Sarah remembered that her students have unique aptitudes and you get them excited about learning: "Just because learning is difficult for my students, you cannot count them out, because they all have gifts and talents. If you give them the correct opportunity, they will shine." She added, "Once students start to feel that success, they are going to want to feel more of that." This allows students to start connecting various learnings from different subject matter.

Sarah perceived writing education as a twofold process: "First, students must be literate and able to put your ideas down on paper, and it doesn't have to be super creative writing, but you must be able to give a coherent answer to the question." The second part was making writing relevant for them: "If you can spark their interest, they like writing." She made a point to "make writing as positive [an] experience as possible." Sarah was a firm believer in having students create portfolios of their writing:

> The more they write, the better writers they become. I feel the same way, so we write every day—every day something. We put together portfolios from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. I've done this with every class I've ever taught, and at the end of the year, we do some sort of writing celebration.

Creating portfolios gives students an opportunity to see their growth as writers. Sarah had confidence that if students can see their progress, they will start to view themselves as writers.

Views of elementary writing instruction. Sarah's passion for teaching was evident during my observations of her interactions with her students. As I observed Sarah, she was moving around the room using proximity control to keep her students engaged and focused on her lesson about the weather. When a student responded correctly, she enthusiastically encouraged more students to contribute to the classroom discussion. Students were engaged in the lesson of writing descriptive sentences about the weather. Sarah attributed her drive and ambition as a writing teacher to her struggles with writing in school. Sarah recalled, "Writing wasn't enjoyable for me as a student, so I attempt to make writing engaging for my students." Sarah used her past experiences with writing to construct more relevant ways to teach writing to her students. During my

observation, she made real-world connections regarding how writing would aid her students in the future. One way she had made the task of writing relevant for her students was by giving them assignments with a connection to the real world, such as describing the weather. Sarah stated, "I find that students are more willing to try if they see a connection to the world around them."

Stella

Stella was born and raised in the South. I met her for the first time when she arrived at the focus group, but my first correspondence with her was when she completed the initial questionnaire for the study. I persuaded Stella to participate in this study through additional emails. During my first interview with her, she mentioned her initial hesitation about participating in the study: "Writing has never been my favorite subject to teach, so what business do I have helping with a study on writing?" She received her bachelor's degree and her master's degree in education from the University of South Carolina. She earned her specialist degree in curriculum and instruction from Lincoln Memorial University. Stella was celebrating her 21st year in education and had taught fourth-grade, fifth-grade, sixth-grade, and seventh-grade. Teaching was Stella's second career; her first career was in computer programming.

Stella described herself as a late reader in school, which she noted "might have contributed to [her] liking math over writing." Her mother and grandmother were teachers, and Stella swore that she would never become a teacher herself. She commented, "The reason for the change in my career was about making an impact on the world." Education was a top priority in Stella's home. Both of her parents were college graduates, with her mother earning a master's degree. Throughout her K-12 education,

Stella got in trouble for talking a lot; however, regarding her academics, she recalled, "I was a solid performer." She was not at the top of her class, but she did earn average grades.

Regarding her academic strengths and weaknesses, Stella noted, "[I was] always very mathematically inclined. I did really well in mathematics, but not that well in language arts." She recalled, "I just did not excel in ELA like I did in math." Stella transitioned to teaching after seven years as a computer programmer. She initially preferred to teach math at the middle school because she lacked a passion for teaching writing; however, she eventually moved to the elementary level because it was a better fit for her. Stella said that she wanted "to make an even bigger impact with students" and believed that was more likely to happen by teaching children earlier in their school experience. She is married and has three children. Teaching has allowed Stella to make an impact on the world, without the travel requirements required by her former career.

The two interviews with Stella took place in her classroom after school. As I arrived in her classroom, we exchanged pleasantries about the study and got set up for the interview. Her classroom had a Promethean board, a computer cart, individual student desks, no windows, and a teacher workspace. Her room seemed overcrowded because she had large storage cabinets around the perimeter of the classroom. Piles of papers covered her entire workspace.

Life experience with writing. Because of her poor experiences with writing, Stella struggled as a writer. While discussing her experiences as a student, Stella often referred back to negative experiences with writing.

> I don't remember any big, huge writing experiences—K-12. I mean. When I think back to all of that, all I remember is a lot of negative[s], but it was more so about the grammar. It was more so about spelling. I was a horrible speller. I still am a horrible speller. It was more about . . . I remember diagramming sentences in high school.

The creative writing process was particularly difficult for Stella: "Generally, I am just not a creative person, so I would struggle to come up with ideas." However, later in high school, she found some positives with informational writing: "I remember doing a research report and doing research and loving that. I loved writing research."

Personal philosophy of education. Stella described her commitment to building personal, positive relationships with students. She stated, "Relationships matter with kids." Stella was a big proponent of public education and believed that teachers need to make learning hands-on, allowing students to construct knowledge personally for themselves. Stella believed that teachers need to stay up-to-date on what is popular so that they can stay relevant to their students. She stated, "I want my students to think that they are my favorite student." She added, "It would kill me if a student didn't think I liked them." For Stella, developing personal relationships with each of her students was vitally important to her success in the classroom.

Views of elementary writing instruction. Stella said that she was never properly taught how to teach writing; it "was something that was not enjoyable and something that [she] dreaded to teach because [she] thought [she] was never good at teaching it." Stella recalled, "I would always push writing to the back of [the] language arts block, and if I didn't get to it that day, I was OK with it." Even though writing was

not Stella's passion, she said that improving her writing instruction was a personal goal. She said that each summer, she read books on writing instruction with the goal of improving her instructional practices in the classroom.

Stephanie

Stephanie was born and raised in the Northeast before relocating to the South as an adult. She earned her bachelor's degree from the State University of New York at New Paltz and her master's degree from Brenau University. Stephanie had been teaching for 20 years at the time of this study. Stephanie's first job was teaching in the juvenile justice system, which she did for two years. Since then, she has been a public school teacher. She taught middle school before she joined Fairlands Elementary School in 2014 to teach fifth grade. She had worked in three different counties in Georgia. My first interaction with Stephanie was when I sent her the preliminary survey for this study. She was one of only a few teachers at Fairlands who were willing to participate in the study without any further correspondence. During our first interview, she recalled why she was so willing to participate: "I am happy to serve in any way possible, but my reasons are personal." Stephanie even refused the twenty-dollar gift card. She made it clear that she was eager to participate and was happy to help in any way possible.

Stephanie grew up in the same home for the entirety of her childhood. Her parents regarded education as being important: "My parents would often discuss their desire for me to attend college." They expected her to give her best effort on all of her academic work. A grade lower than a C would be met with punishment. Stephanie stated, "If our grades did slip, we were grounded until our grades improved." Her father earned a bachelor's degree, and her mother earned an associate degree. Throughout

Stephanie's life, she knew that education was her calling. As a child, she played school with her friends and thought that completing lesson plans and grading papers were fun. When Stephanie received a desk in her room, she thought that "it was the best gift ever." Stephanie was married with three sons, and her husband was also an educator.

The first interview with Stephanie took place in her classroom during her planning period. The room was large and held 26 student desks, a computer cart, a community printer, and student cubbies in one corner of the classroom. There were no windows in the room. Stephanie kept some of the overhead lights off during our interview and observation. As the school year was coming to an end, some items had already been put away for the summer. The classroom desks faced the Promethean board, where the majority of whole group instruction took place. There was a teacher workspace that consisted of a table and a laptop connected to the Promethean board. Stephanie had various binders and instructional supplies located around the teacher workspace.

Life experience with writing. Stephanie had little to no recollection of doing writing in elementary or middle school. She did, however, have some positive experiences with writing in high school:

> I had to do a lot of term papers, and they were almost like a mathematical formula that really helped me understand. And even though they were a mathematical formula, they still taught us how to include style into it. I feel like my high school teachers, that's where I really learned how to write. I maybe did it in elementary and middle and just don't remember it, but I, I have clear memories of high school, like writing very long-term papers and actually enjoying it, because of the

content that we were writing about.

Stephanie was taught a formulaic type of writing that served her well in writing term papers. This memory highlights her passion for informational writing. Stephanie recalled, "I have clear memories of high school, like, writing very long term papers and actually enjoying it, um, because of the content that we were writing about."

Personal philosophy of education. Stephanie believed in building relationships with her students. She noted that many of her struggling students paid more attention to her instruction because they knew she cared about them. Building relationships with students was the foundation of how her classroom functioned, thus the students would pay more attention to her modeling of writing:

> Modeling is important for all types of learning and not just writing, and students will struggle if you do not model for them. My goal is for them to work independently, so I start off modeling and working together and gradually releasing them towards independent learning.

Stephanie's goal for her students was to make learning relevant by providing authentic classroom activities that relate to the Georgia Standards of Excellence:

> [For example,] like correlative conjunctions . . . I just get goofy with it. Like when I'm reading a book out loud to them, if I come across a pair, I'm like, "Hold on, guys. I feel a correlative conjunction pair coming on." I just want to make it a little bit more meaningful for them, and not, like, worksheets and stuff.

Stephanie was confident that her efforts to make her classroom an authentic learning environment for students had served her well over her 20-year teaching career. Stephanie reported, "I have had students keep in touch with me from the start of my career, and I

believe it comes from the fact that they know I truly cared for them."

Views of elementary writing instruction. A quality elementary education inculcates strong writing skills (Graham et al., 2012a). Stephanie had some thoughtful insights into elementary writing education: "It encompasses everything, even in math. We have to write in everything that we do. . . . We write in social studies. We write in science. We write in language arts. It's not just limited to language arts." She gave her students multiple opportunities to practice writing on a variety of subjects and topics, such as incorporating writing into math and science as a way for students to show mastery of content.

Chapter Summary

This study included seven teachers with life experiences which shaped their views of themselves as writers. The majority of the participants did not have overall positive experiences with writing and could only name a few teachers who impacted their personal lives as writers. This chapter provided an overview of their backgrounds, experiences with writing, personal philosophy of education, experiences with writing instruction, and a few of my observations. The narrative participant descriptions provided the foundation for Chapter 5 and the themes that emerged during the data analysis.

The theory of constructivism suggests allowing each participant to tell his or her story. By listening to teachers at Fairlands Elementary School, I studied how the school successfully reduced the amount of remediate writers from 2016 to 2017 as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). These participant

descriptions, along with interviews, observations, and self-reflecting memos, were used to make meaning of the teaching of writing that occurred at Fairlands Elementary School.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

This chapter provides the overall results from this research study. The researcher explored the strategies and practices used at one Georgia elementary school that significantly improved writing scores as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test, by looking at the life and career experiences of teachers responsible for that improvement. Stake (1995) and Zainal (2017) used an instrumental case study design to provide insight into this particular phenomenon. I employed purposeful sampling to select teachers who were employed at Fairlands Elementary School during the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years, taught the same Milestones-administering grade both years, and were willing and able to participate in the study (Patton, 1990).

I present the findings of this as conceptual themes. The four themes that emerged from the data include: (a) Teachers' Experiences on Classroom Practices, (b) Leadership Attention, (c) Modeling as a Roadmap to Success, and (d) Quieting the Noise with Formulaic Writing.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies and practices used by teachers at an identified Georgia elementary school resulting in students significantly

improving their writing skills and meeting national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test.

Research Questions

RQ1. What were the life and career experiences of teachers at an identified Georgia elementary who took responsibility for improving student writing skills resulting in students meeting national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

RQ 2. What strategies did teachers use at an identified Georgia elementary school to significantly improve student writing skills and meet national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

RQ 3. What practices did teachers use at an identified Georgia elementary school to significantly improve student writing skills and meet national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

Participant Requirements and School Demographics

Twenty-one teachers filled out the preliminary survey that captured their basic demographic information and their self-reported interest in teaching writing throughout their career. Only seven teachers expressed interest in participating in this study. The original study design called for the use of purposeful sampling to recruit six participants from those willing to take part in the study. However, seven teachers at the research site were willing to participate, and I made the decision not to eliminate one participant from those who wanted to be a part of the study.

Each participant was required to fill out a preliminary questionnaire, attend a focus group, participate in two interviews, and be observed during a writing lesson. Data

were collected over a three-week period in which the researcher was granted full access to the research site. I collected data with only a few weeks left in the 2017-2018 school year. The original design of the study was to have two interviews, each of which would last for over an hour. It became difficult to find enough time in the teachers' hectic schedules for lengthy interviews and observations. Each participant was interviewed twice, with each interview lasting approximately 35 minutes. The observations were completed during a 30-minute writing lesson. Each participant received a $20 gift card for taking part in the study. This was a change from the original compensation of $5, as I believed that $20 was more appropriate for the time requirements requested of the participants in the study. I consulted the Valdosta State University's IRB before proceeding with the new compensation plan, and the change was approved.

The research site was built ten years ago, and approximately 1,000 students attend the school. Around 4.5% of the school's population receives free or reduced lunch. The racial breakdown of the school is 55% White, 31% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 7% Hispanic, 3% Black, 3% Multi-racial, and 1% American Indian ("The governor's office of student achievement," n.d.). For a comparison, the racial breakdown of the state of Georgia is 41% White, 4% Asian, 15% Hispanic, 37% African-American, with 3% identified as other races ("The governor's office of student achievement," n.d.).

Data Analysis

In this section, I discuss the data analysis process used for this study, including the process leading to the development of analytical themes. Stake (1995, p. 71) describes data analysis as the "… the deconstruction of data and impressions. It then entails giving meaning to the parts. It is meaning making." I began my data analysis process by using

a transcription service to transcribe each interview (see Figure 5.1). I reviewed each transcript for accuracy as I received it. Upon receipt of all fourteen transcriptions, I listened to each interview several additional times and made further changes to each transcript, as needed. This was done to ensure that the transcripts accurately reflected the original data. Specifically, many words and phrases that may be considered as education jargon were consistently transcribed inaccurately (e.g., Individualized Education Program, accommodations, and references to professional developments).

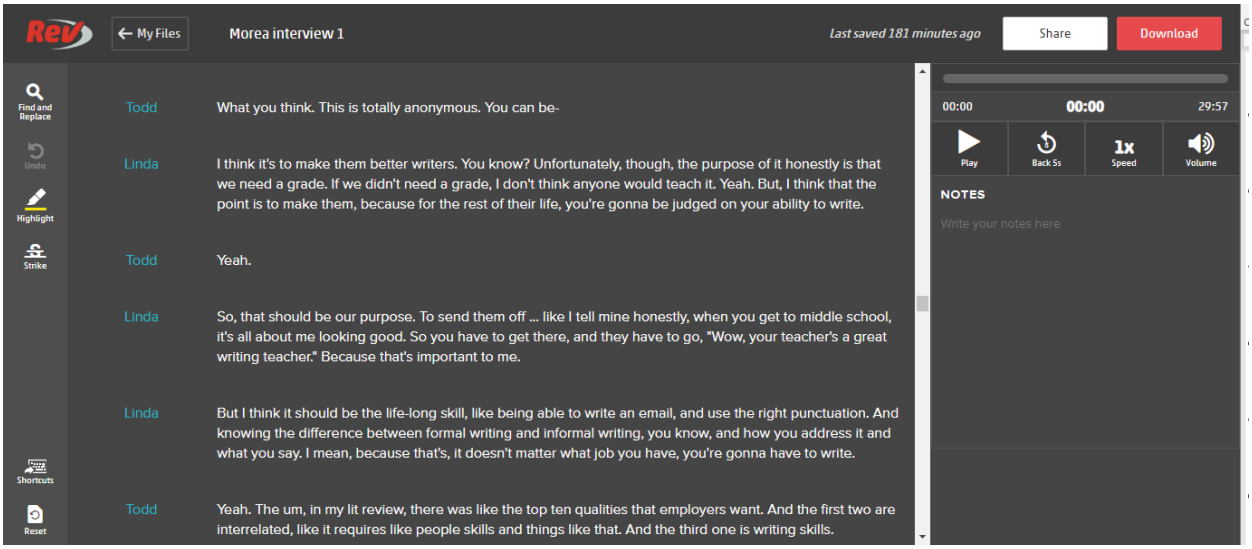


Figure 5.1. Example of a transcript from Rev Services.

In this instrumental case study design, I utilized two major approaches to analyzing the data (Stake, 1995). The first approach was direct interpretation, which Stake defined as the (1995), "direct interpretation of the individual instance" (p.74). The second approach was categorical aggregation, which involves grouping reoccurring themes throughout the data. Stake (1995) notes, "Two strategic ways that researchers reach new meeting about cases are through direct interpretation of individual instances and through aggregation of instances until something can be said about them as a class"

(p. 74). For this instrumental case study, categorical aggregation was most helpful in answering the research questions (Stake, 1995).

After carefully checking the transcripts, I used the categorical aggregation approach to identify reoccurring themes by going through the data line by line and assigning various codes to the data or what Maxwell (2013) referred to as open coding. I also coded the observations and memos that I recorded after each observation and interview. This process of coding the data took place until patterns became common in the coding process. Then I started building the chunks of data looking for commonality in the coded data looking for developing topics/themes (Maxwell, 2013). Finally, I re-analyzed the data looking for major themes that were prevalent throughout the entire study. These following sections discuss each phase of the data analysis section in detail.

Phase 1: Preparing for Coding

All interviews were transcribed per verbatim by Rev Service. I uploaded the fourteen interview transcripts, basic demographic information of each participant, my written observation notes, and my self-reflecting memos to the Web-based application Dedoose, which allowed the coding process to be performed digitally. Below in *Figure 5.2* is a screenshot of various types of data that were uploaded to the Dedoose platform.

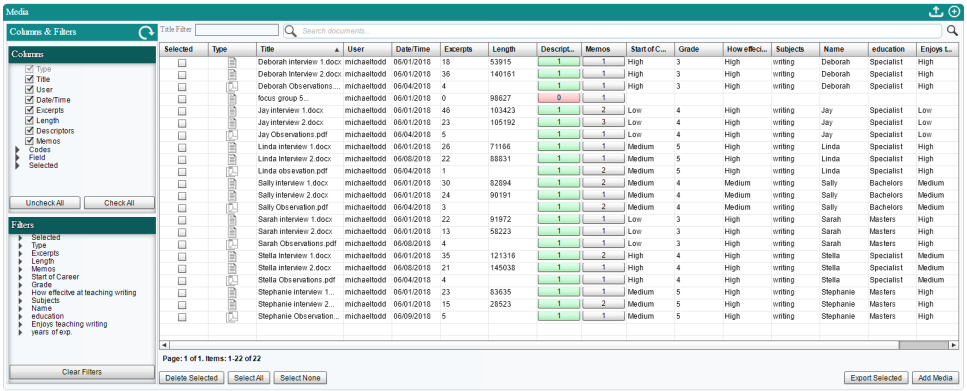


Figure 5.2. Different sources of data uploaded to the Dedoose platform.

Phase 2: Coding the Data

Miles, et al. (2014) recommended developing preliminary codes prior to data collection and analysis (see table 5.1):

> One method of creating codes is developing a provisional 'start list' of codes prior to fieldwork . . . That list comes from the conceptual framework, list of research questions, hypotheses, problem areas, and/or key variables that the researcher brings to the study (p.81).

Table 5.1

Initial Codes Used

Initial Codes Used	
Code	Code Description
BK	Background Knowledge – developing students' background knowledge
BL	Balanced Literacy – a literacy framework
CH	Choice – providing choices to students in their writing
CP	College Preparation – Participants' experiences with how colleges prepared to teach writing
Con	Conferencing – teachers' ability to have a conversation with students about students' writing
ENJ	Enjoyment – finding activities that are enjoyable for students to write about in school
IP	Instructional Practices – the carrying out of exercises of a profession
PD	Professional Development – professional development provided by school or district
WAC	Writing Across the Curriculum – writing in classes outside of composition, literature, and other English courses
WPG	Writing Programs – a purchased writing curriculum

Based on their guidelines, I developed 14 such codes before commencing data collection (see Chapter 2, "Data Analysis"). The data analysis process resulted in an additional 67 codes. Figure 5.3 is a screenshot showing how the data were presented when coded within the Dedoose platform. I began the process of coding by simply rereading and listening to the audio recordings and transcripts of each interview. This process of listening and rereading the transcripts allowed me to become immersed in the data. Upon

my fourth time reviewing the transcripts, I began the process of highlighting and tagging various responses with corresponding codes. Some sections of data were tagged with multiple codes. The Dedoose coding platform allows the user to easily search for codes across all data sources.

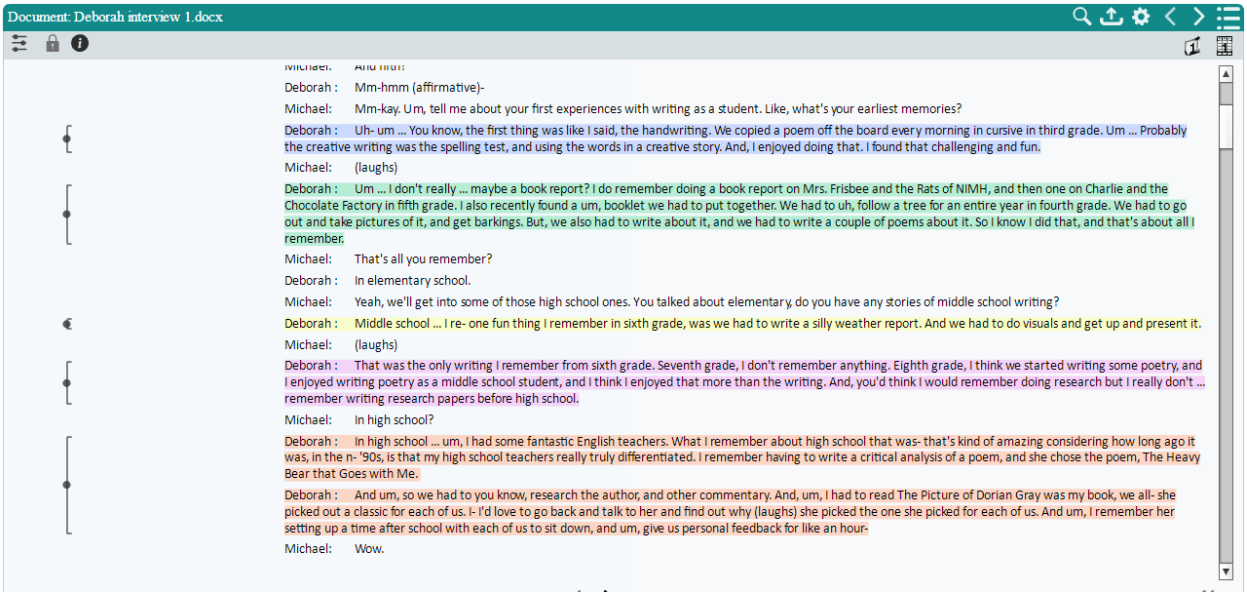


Figure 5.3. Example of assigning codes within the Dedoose online platform.

An example of this phase of data analysis was reflected in a response given by Deborah during her first interview:

Table 5.2
Assigning Multiple Codes

Question	Participant's Response	Code
Describe your philosophy of education?	I believe that keeping kids motivated and engaged is the key to everything. You have to give them the kind of feedback that'll push them forward, but you have to figure out how to balance it in doing it in such a way that doesn't shut them down. Once they shut down, the game is over. They just quit learning. I believe that every child comes in the classroom with talents to offer. Every single one of them. Some of them are a little more academically focused, and others you have to work a little bit harder to connect to academics, but they're there. And then making sure that every child feels valued as a student, in the writing, and as a part of our classroom community, is my most important job.	E (Enjoyment) P (Philosophy) CE (career experiences) EXP (Expectations) P (Philosophy)

Deborah's response was tagged using four different codes. This first code applied to this text was "enjoyment." The second code was "philosophy of education" because she described her teaching approach in the classroom. The third code was "career experiences" because she explained how her career experiences have influenced her philosophy of education. The fourth code applied was "expectations" because Deborah explained her intention for her students. Below Figure 5.4 highlights how data looked after this step of the coding process.

Interview answers with strong relevance to the research questions were broken down for further analysis. Passages with a singular code remained together. The responses that were coded with multiple codes were broken down into smaller pieces of data to allow for the grouping of codes to be done more efficiently. The interviews, observations, and self-reflecting memos yielded over 1,500 different units of data for my study.

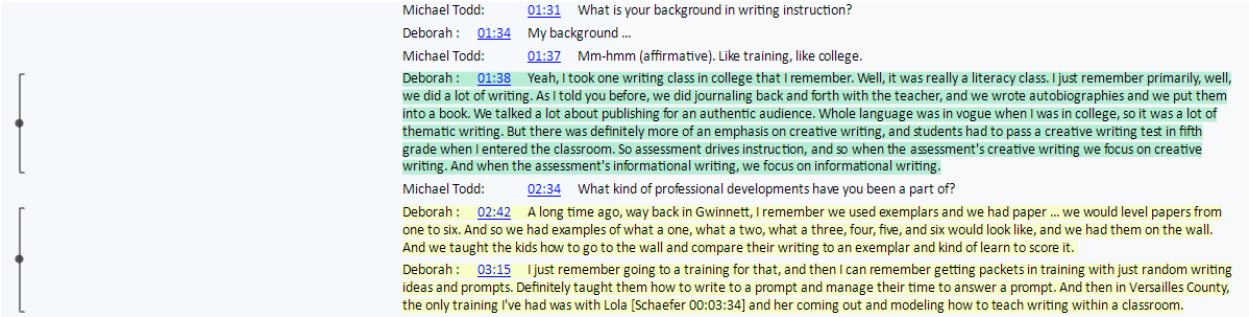


Figure 5.4. An excerpt from the second interview with Deborah.

For example, in the above section that is highlighted in green, Deborah was referencing her experiences with writing education in college and subsequently the section was tagged using the following codes: college preparation, positive experiences with writing, whole language, fictional writing, and evaluation of writing. In the above section that is highlighted in yellow, Deborah was referencing professional development sessions she had attended. That unit of text was tagged using the following codes: professional development and time.

Phase 3: Grouping Codes

The third phase of the data analysis process involved grouping similar codes into broad categories. Identifying what Stake (1995) called *correspondence* involves finding and locating patterns that are consistent throughout the study. Stake notes that although meaning comes from the frequency of reoccurrence, "usually the important meaning will

come from the reappearance over and over" (p. 78). This saved time, as it allowed the grouping of similar codes to be done more efficiently. Having the data stored on the Dedoose platform allowed me to interact with the data in ways that would have been much more difficult through traditional manual highlighting of transcripts.

At this point, I started to combine some of the codes into larger correspondence of patterns. For instance, "accountability" and "expectations" both referred to the same core issue of accountability of writing, so they were combined to allow larger patterns to emerge within the data in *Figure 5.5*. These patterns aided in the development of major themes of the study.

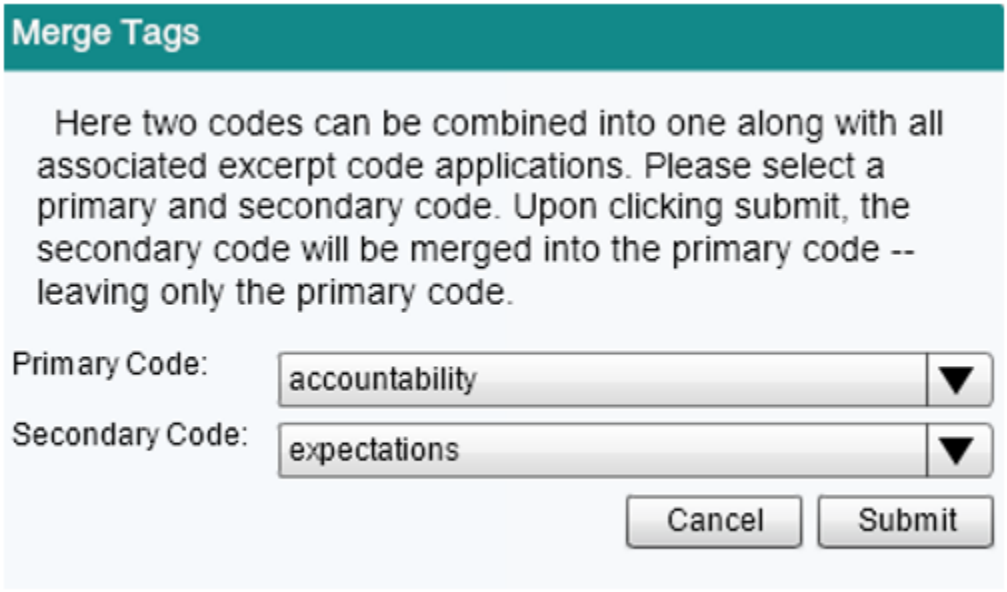


Figure 5.5. The Process of Merging Codes.

Eighty-one codes were generated from the data during the coding process. They were then combined into 43 patterns of correspondence. This process allowed for the major themes of the study to become prevalent in the data.

Phase 4: Identifying Correspondence in Patterns

It is important for any researcher to become well-versed with the data. Accordingly, I combed through the data while being skeptical about first impressions and basic meanings (Stake, 1995). Categorical aggregation was used to identify reoccurring patterns in the data. Next, I broke down the data into patterns. Repetitive patterns led to what Stake (1995) referred to as correspondence:

> It also is important to spend the best analytic time on the best data. Full coverage is impossible, equal attention to all data is not a civil right. The case and the key issues need to be kept in focus. The search for meaning, the analysis, should roam out and return to these foci over and over (p. 84-85).

Based on this rationale, the majority of my attention was focused on the individual interviews, as they yielded the best data for addressing the research questions.

Phase 5: Recognizing Larger Patterns

The fifth phase of the data analysis process involved detecting patterns that existed within and across various categories. The goal of this study was to understand the strategies and practices utilized by Fairlands Elementary teachers that led to their success with writing on the Georgia Milestones standardized test. In this phase of the data analysis, I looked at the correspondence of patterns that were previously created to highlight the major themes of the study. Utilizing an online platform aided the researcher in assessing the frequency of individual codes used most often throughout the entirety of the study as seen in *Figure 5.6*. The Dedoose platform combines all types of data entered into the software—survey results, interviews, artifacts, memos, and observations—to aid

in triangulation of the data generated for the study. I cross-referenced these themes with data to ensure accuracy. These overarching themes will be discussed in the upcoming sections of this chapter.

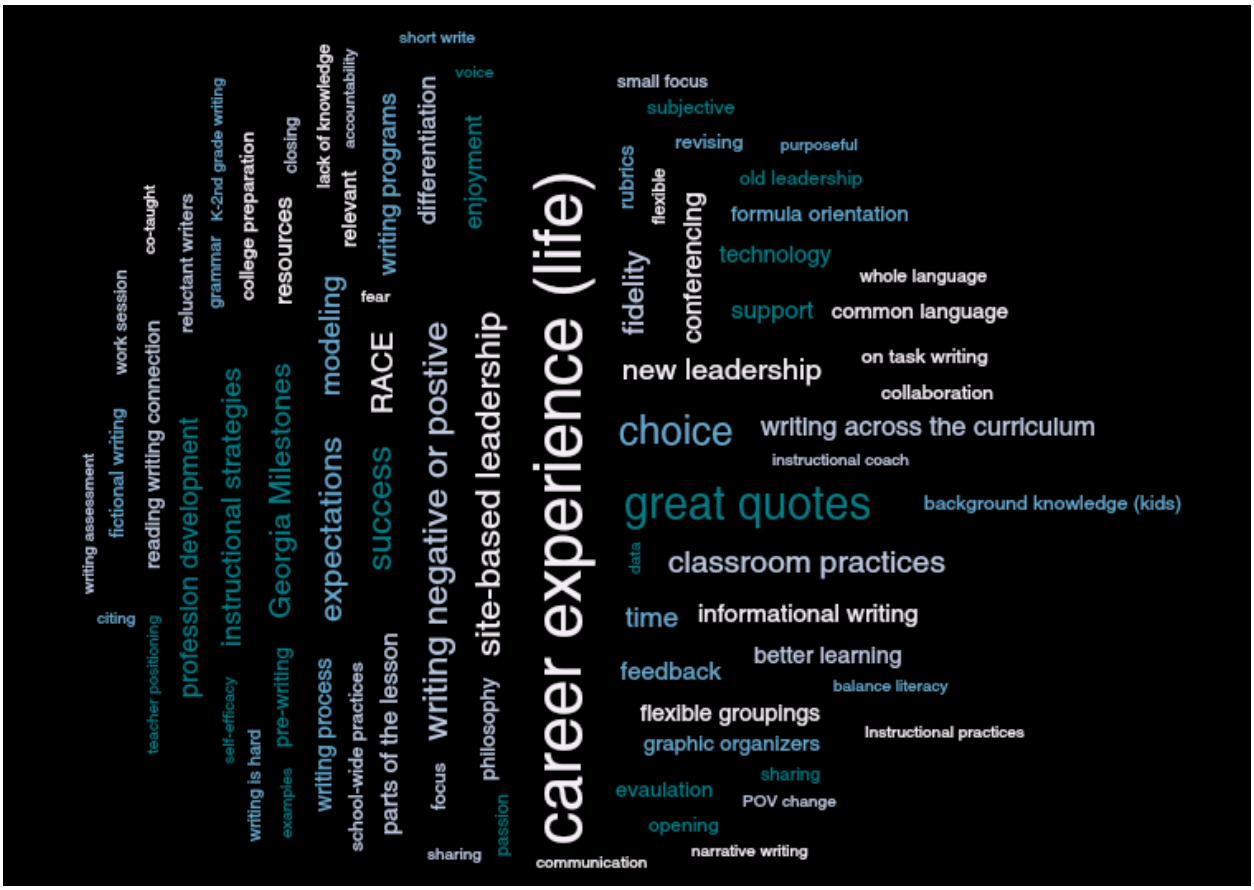


Figure 5.6. Code cloud produced by Dedoose.

Major Themes

A goal of all elementary schools is to provide a solid foundation of learning that students can build upon over their lifetime (Jeynes, 2005). One goal of this study was to determine participants' life and career experiences regarding writing. Did participants view their past experiences as influential to their current teaching practices? Did they think that college courses or professional development had adequately trained them to teach writing? I asked the seven participants at Fairlands Elementary School many

questions about writing—specifically, about the strategies and practices that they found successful.

Interviews, observations, self-reflecting memos and artifacts were analyzed with the goal of determining participants' general beliefs about writing. Four primary themes resulted from this analysis: Teachers' Experiences on Classroom Practices, Leadership Attention, Quieting the Noise through Formulaic Writing, and Modeling as a Roadmap for Success (see Figure 5.7). These themes will be discussed in the following sections.

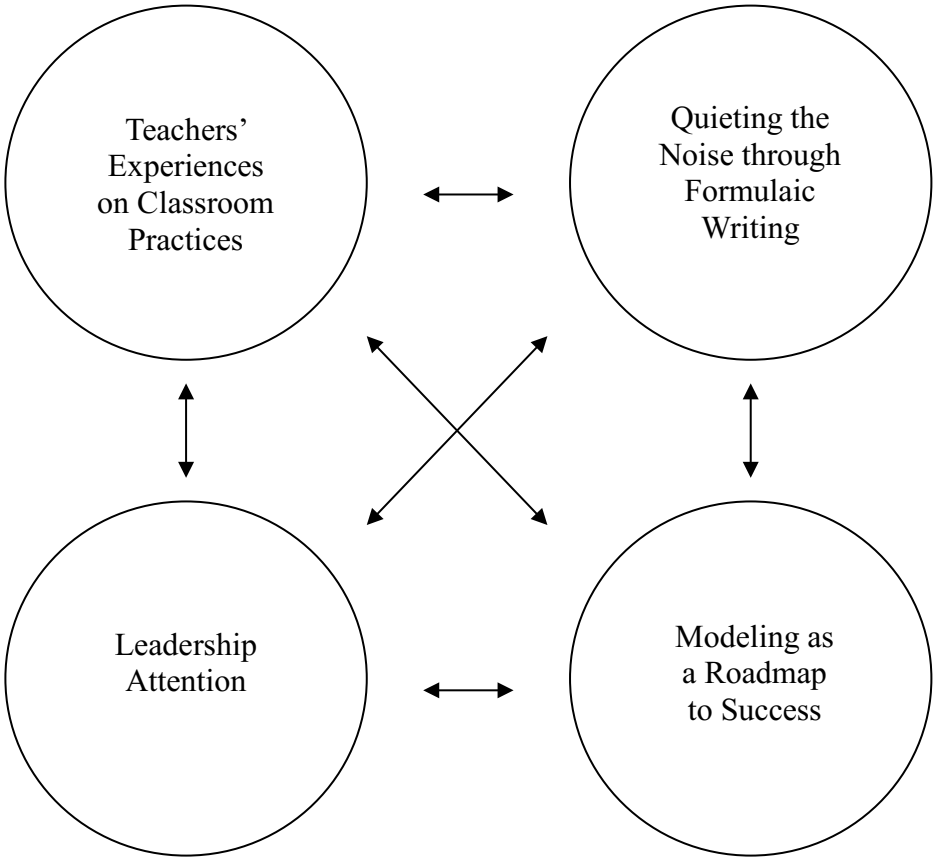


Figure 5.7. Interaction of major themes.

Teachers' Experiences on Classroom Practices

All participants in this study were influenced by the world around them, and had unique, individual experiences that influenced their personalities. Their past experiences

influenced their writing teaching careers. The multitude of various trainings also had a huge impact on their work. Therefore, the more we learned about them, the better we could understand the messages central to the strategies and practices they use to teach writing. In this theme, I will discuss the several examples of when their personal lives and experiences entwined with their writing teaching careers (Myers et al., 2016).

School leaders presented a plethora of different professional development sessions over the past several years. The ability to teach writing was clearly a focus of the former principal. She provided the staff exceptional learning opportunities, such as learning writing techniques from college professors. Throughout the study, the most dominant evidence which emerged from the data involved participants' life and career experiences. The participants offered a wide range of experiences, from how they viewed themselves as writers in school and how each participant's institution of higher education prepared him or her for teaching writing, to the professional development they had received since becoming teachers. Thus, it was clear that participants had background knowledge about how to teach writing effectively. In this section, I will describe major life events or career experiences which impacted participants' instruction of writing.

Deborah's memories of writing in school involved "handwriting and copying poems off the board." Deborah had few positive memories of writing in school, but as she was completing her undergraduate degree, one of her professors had a profound impact on her as a writing teacher. She related how the professor "[had] us journal . . . and [showed] us the power of that." Deborah said that this professor had made a large impact on her ability to teach writing because "she really conducted class the way she wanted us to teach children."

Jay's earliest memories of writing involved handwriting, perhaps because hers was poor. She described herself as a feeble writer because of her lack of good penmanship until she experienced a passionate writing teacher in middle school: "I will never forget him because we completed the state writing project with him." Jay remembered this experience due to her teacher's passion for writing and his ability to create meaningful class projects.

Linda had already begun her career as a teacher when she was given the opportunity to visit a local college and learn teaching techniques from college professors: "I mean, if I have to get up . . . five days in the summer, that would be worth my time. It really was. It was like these are actually good lessons." One particular lesson that Linda had shared with her colleagues had been replicated throughout Fairlands Elementary School dealt with Play-Doh. Linda described the lesson as this:

> Like I totally use every year to like introduce writing. You have them, um, draft what, um, a pencil holder. And then draw it out. And then they make it with play dough. And then you're like, "Oh, dude, I totally forgot to tell you, but I need it to have this. Can you just squash it?" So, they make you squash it. And you do it over and over and over again. And like every time they build it, you come with something else to do and you make them squash it. And so finally, you say, "Okay, what'd we do first. First, we planned. Great. And then what happened? We built it, alright. And after we built it, we made changes to it. And then you say writing process, this, this, this." It's like the best little lesson ever. Plus, you get to stomp out Play-Doh.

Sarah's experiences centered around the opportunities she has had as a special education teacher. She is the only teacher in the building certified in The Strategic Instructional Model (SIM) strategies. Sarah discussed the training she received on how to work with less proficient writers:

> [I attended] professional development where they taught us how to work with poor writers and how to bring that [better writing] out in them a little bit. So, I feel like I can break it down for those poor writers. Even when I co-teach, believe it or not, a lot of the techniques they use—my really low writers—I use with even the high writers, and the writing gets better as well.

Sarah's role as a special education teacher has allowed her the opportunity to learn from numerous colleagues, as she worked with various teachers in different grade levels at Fairlands Elementary School. Similar strategies could be used with low level or high-level writers to improve students' writing products. Writing is an individual task, but with the use of effective strategies and conferencing, teachers can point out areas of improvement for each writer in the classroom.

Stella did not describe herself as a passionate writing teacher; however, she has been exposed to various writing programs during her career:

> I've always pulled from lots of different things, and I think I've said that before, and used whatever resources [are] out there. I don't think there's one perfect plan. That's just my general opinion. I don't think you can follow a, "Oh, this is gonna work." Maybe if you're beginning, if you're a new teacher, yeah, that might be a good idea until you figure out what kind of works, and you pull from this, that,

> and the other. That might be a good idea, especially if you haven't been taught anything in school.

Stella combined aspects of various programs that she had found to be effective so that they worked for her. Her ability to combine effective aspects from various writing programs to which she has been exposed allowed her to show her passion for writing rather than simply reading scripted lessons to her students.

Stephanie had a beneficial experience in the area of using rubrics that she applied to her classroom practice:

> I taught language arts, and we always did a writing sample in the beginning of the school year, and we rated it on everything. And then, throughout the year, we would use that same rubric and just do different aspects of it, because it would be too much to do everything. And then at the end of the year, we would do a final writing sample and rate it on everything. And then we would make charts and look for growth and look for areas that were stagnant.

Tracking students' growth in writing is difficult. The data collected for this study indicated that students wanted to know how they were going to be assessed in writing and teachers needed to clearly communicate the evaluation process to their students. This type of transparency allowed students to understand more of the requirements of making a good score on their piece of writing.

Leadership Attention

Many researchers recognized that the school leader's leadership style significantly influenced teacher's job satisfaction (Aydin, Sarier, & Uysal, 2013; Lear, Hodge, & Schulz, 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). This theme reflected the relationship between

the school leadership and their efforts to reach the writing goals of the school and increase their effectiveness as writing teachers. After all, the principal was expected to be an instructional leader who could support, inspire, and develop students and teachers, as well as to communicate effectively with all school's stakeholders. Hallinger and Heck (1998) found that a school leader's leadership style was the main factor that greatly influences teacher effectiveness.

For the faculty and staff at Fairlands Elementary School, the 2017–2018 school year marked the arrival of a new principal and a new assistant principal. Prior to this change, the school had been led by the same principal since the school was built. The former principal had, according to Stella, "a real passion for writing." This was evident in the number of professional development opportunities that she brought to the school or sent staff to with the expectation that they would redeliver the training to the faculty. Some of those professional development opportunities included presentations and workshops by Lola Schaefer and Mark Diamond. The staff were exposed to Lucy Calkins's Writing Workshop model, the Strategic Instructional Model, and the 6 + 1 Traits of Writing model. Third- through fifth-grade teachers at Fairlands Elementary School placed a heavy focus on using the R.A.C.E. strategy at the start of the 2014–2015 school year." R.A.C.E. is an acronym for restate the question, provide an answer, cite evidence, and explain. In addition, all grade levels had focused on Writing Across the Curriculum, and the staff attended county-wide professional development days. Finally, several teachers were sent to seminars at local universities.

Teachers had become accustomed to their expectations and responsibilities under the former principal. At the start of the 2016–2017 school year, some of the participants

recalled struggling with the new leadership style and expectations. Sally described the leadership change:

> I came from an administrator [principal] who, if I didn't see her, we were good. If I saw her, we had a problem. That was just because she was busy with all the other admin stuff to do. Also, for ten years, that's what I had. You get used to the administrator you have. Now, she'll come in, she'll just pop in, and I'm like, "Uh, what do you want? What do I do?" I'm thinking back, did I get a parent email that I don't know about?

The former principal did not go into classrooms unannounced, while the current principal often visits classrooms. Not all participants had the same type of close supervision with the new administrators; two teachers complained about the lack of supervision of instruction throughout the year. For example, Stella recalled, "How do you get observed—this is confidential—how do you get observed when you're giving a standardized test? Is that an observation?" Linda recalled, "They're [administration] supposed to do three 10 minutes and one 30 minutes. But like this year, one of their 10 minutes was during a grade-level meeting. I'm, 'How does that really tell you anything about my classroom?'"

Five of the seven participants believed that the school had shifted away from Writing Across the Curriculum. Deborah's perceptions was that the sole focus was on Georgia Milestones scores. She believed that the majority of teachers were still incorporating writing throughout the curriculum, but that it was no longer an expectation in their lesson plans. Jay did not know how school leadership would know whether quality writing instruction was happening in her classroom: "Honestly, the administration

this year has only been in my classroom once this entire year." Linda noted that the entire focus was on reading and math scores because that is what the Georgia Milestones primarily measured. When I asked Stella about Writing Across the Curriculum, she said, "It is, only by teachers doing it by their own initiative. Nobody's asking for it." Fairlands Elementary has benefited from a carryover effect of previous initiatives by the former principal, and teachers still incorporate Writing Across the Curriculum into their lesson plans.

The school faculty and staff went through a shift in expectations with the new principal's leadership style. Without an administrative focus on Writing Across the Curriculum, the Georgia Milestones writing scores could drop in the years to come. District-level support for writing was lacking because the county is unwilling to commit to a formal writing program or give teachers the resources that this study's participants have asked for, and teachers at Fairlands Elementary School have been successful at teaching writing on their own. The former principal understood her school's weakness in writing and decided to bring in outside resources to help teachers improve their writing instruction.

Modeling as a Roadmap to Success

This theme demonstrated participants' use of the modeling style of instruction in order to build meaningful student connections between what students are learning and being able to show understanding of that learning. This strategy helped then set the stage for learning. The teacher modeling strategy provided them a very effective instructional foundation for concepts/skills their students were initially learning (Bianco, 2010; Ritter, 2012; Yan, 2005).

The third major theme that emerged from the data was modeling, being mentioned over thirty times during the interviews. In addition, teachers used modeling techniques during each the observations I conducted. Writing requires more modeling than any other subject matter in school because there are so many ways that adults and students approach writing tasks (Shanahan, 2015). All seven participants discussed the importance of modeling when teaching writing to students. Deborah described a writing lesson in which she incorporated it:

> A good writing lesson would include some brainstorming with the kids that gets them excited and enthusiastic and gets some ideas churning in their heads, and then modeling perhaps a new strategy that you want them to try, maybe using metaphors or using dialog or using strong adjectives—modeling it, then giving them some time to write on their own, and then sharing out.

Teachers who modeled the writing process helped students to understand that writing was not a linear process; rather, it was one that required constant reevaluation of word choice, sentence construction, and paragraph development.

Modeling the writing process can be difficult for teachers who struggle to write because modeling can expose their weaknesses as a writer. Sally noted, "I have a hard time modeling because it [writing] doesn't come easy to me." Even though Sally did not view herself as a strong writer, she was willing to model for her students because she knew that modeling would benefit them. This was even more impressive considering her assertion that the writing process was never modeled for her as a student. Fortunately, she has received writing training at her school, which has helped her gain the confidence to model the writing process in front of her students:

> I will say that when I do model . . . I show them that I'm bouncing all over the course of my brainstorm, because it's not a linear thing. Then I'll jot down ideas of what I do want to happen. Maybe they're going to try to solve this problem this way and it's going to fail. I'm going to try to solve a problem or write the problem, quote, fail. I show them it's not about complete sentences . . . While I struggle with that teaching piece, I show them all the terrible things that could go wrong with it and how not to let it bother you. It's okay to mess up. It's okay to strike through. It's okay to do all these things. They tend to be a little less anxious about it.

The writing process was often not presented to students as clearly as Sally demonstrated it. Although Sally's self-efficacy as a writing teacher was low because of her past experiences, her training had prepared her to model for her students.

Sarah, who worked with students with learning disabilities, was also a strong believer in modeling. As I observed Sarah, I saw a teacher who was extremely comfortable modeling with students. She created a supportive classroom environment that aided in the development of students' willingness to participate in the writing process. The lesson that I observed was based on observable weather, and Sarah kept insisting that everyone contribute to the discussion with their background knowledge while she modeled in front of the group.

During my observation of Stella's class, she also modeled for her students: "Okay, everybody. We are going to write. First, you are going to brainstorm topics." Stella believed in keeping the class together during the writing process, allowing students to share with one another how they were shaping their story. Stella set students up for

success by modeling and having all students start with the same introduction: “I thought this was a great way to have students have their story set up correctly.”

Stephanie also expressed her belief in the power of modeling: “To teach writing, to teach narrative writing, to model, to show different styles that different authors use . . . and to teach the kids, it is totally okay to completely copy the style and just make it your own.” Allowing students to experiment with their own writing voice, and to even borrow a few words from a professional author, could help students feel successful as writers. Stephanie added, “Modeling, I do a lot of mini-lessons, and then I model what we taught, and then they start off working together, and then gradually release to work independently. At the end, they would be assessed individually.” She said that that there are certain skills that students need modeled in order to become successful writers.

Quieting the Noise with Formulaic Writing

Faced with student writing problems, participants turned to formulaic writing to help improve their students’ quality of writing. Unfortunately, when presented with real-life writing tasks the formulaic approach does not always yield the intended results (Ryan & Barton, 2014). Formulaic writing did achieve its immediate goal of helping writers appear to write at a higher level, but students lacked the ability to transition the formulaic writing to real-world writing tasks. Often the teaching of writing was not at the forefront of classroom instruction because reading and math were still the backbone of classroom instruction. Many teachers turn to formulaic writing out of desperation because the teachers themselves lack pedagogical knowledge to teach writing effectively (Wilcox et al., 2016).

The last major theme that emerged from the data was the idea of focusing more on nonfiction writing or informational writing and providing students with "formulaic writing" to help guide the instruction. The topic of formulaic writing came up more than fifty times in the data. In my observations the formulaic writing was used successfully with informational writing. As students, six out of the seven participants mentioned their enjoyment of informational writing. The idea of gaining and explaining new knowledge is a major shift from the requirements of CRCT to the Georgia Milestones. It is important to highlight that the participants in this study were meeting the needs of their students by providing them with multiple formulas to follow. The context in which teachers present various skills to their students is vitally important in meeting the needs of their specific population.

Sally, a self-described struggling writer, expressed her preference of following a formula when teaching writing when she said, "Writing was always a formula: topic sentence, three supporting sentences, and the conclusion sentence. It's always been very rhythmic and very easy to follow a formula." This type of planned writing gave students a formula to follow and allowed all writers a way to approach certain genres of writing. The teachers at Fairlands Elementary School described giving students different formulas to follow during their writing activities. Providing options that students could use created variability in the writing products produced by the students. Therefore, instead of solely relying on just one formula Sally used a variety of formulas to afford students variability in their writing. Teachers utilized formulas to provide the basic construct of the requirements of the writing assignments but allowed students to understand their formula was a starting point and not an ending point of their writing.

The R.A.C.E. strategy is a writing formula that many teachers use with their students. Deborah explained, "I do a R.A.C.E. strategy paragraph probably three times right before the [Georgia] Milestones." The R.A.C.E. strategy is heavily used at Fairlands Elementary School by all teachers who participated in this study. They had utilized this strategy extensively to prepare their students for the rigors of the writing assessment on the Georgia Milestones. Stephanie recalled, "The R.A.C.E. strategy is the only one that I can think of that is, school-wide." This R.A.C.E. strategy was mentioned over 23 times during my interviews and was used during three out of seven of my observations. Teachers also highlighted giving students' graphic organizers to aid in their writing. Graphic organizers were used by participants in three out of the seven observations. Providing students with graphic organizers was another type of formula writing that most teachers provided for their students. Five out of the seven participants noted that they highlight material using the graphic organizer during their conferences. Students were shown how to use a graphic organizer to start and complete their writing assignments. Then teachers would provide additional ways to enhance the quality of their writing, beyond the simplicity of the graphic organizer. Teachers taught students such things as changing sentence structure or altering basic verbs and adjectives to make improvements to the overall paper.

The participants in the study did enjoy teaching nonfiction writing over fiction. Sally stated that "informational writing is better because there is a formula." Sally explained why teaching information writing is easier:

> It is more cut and dry. It's not so subjective because you are following the basic format of what the teachers have given you, and it's easier to grade because they

either followed the format using the requirements presented during instruction or they did not.

The use of some type of graphic organizers was evident in five out seven of my observations. Teachers gave graphic organizers to students to provide a formula to follow when completing a writing assignment. Stephanie recalled that when she was a student, she preferred to follow some sort of a formula for her writing:

> I had to do a lot of term papers, and they were almost like a mathematical formula that really helped me understand . . . even though they were a mathematical formula, they still taught us how to include style into it.

Formula writing is something that Stephanie has incorporated into her teaching of writing. As I observed her class, she provided her students with a formula to respond to the writing prompts that she had given the class. Stephanie provided the following graphic organizer on the Promethium Board. I diagrammed it below, in Figure 5.8.

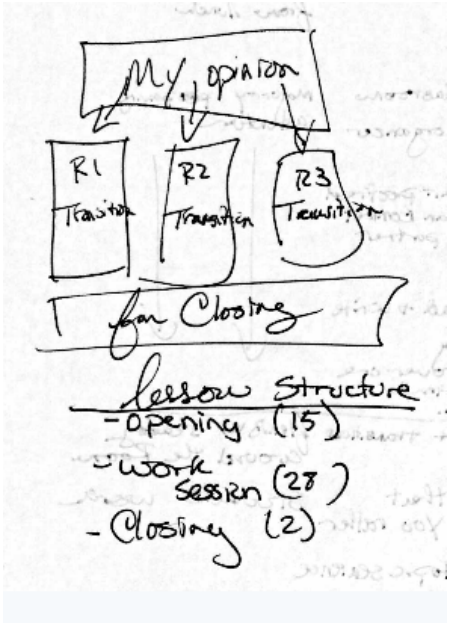


Figure 5.8. A drawing from my observation in Stephanie's classroom.

Summary of Themes

This chapter provided the major findings from this study in the form of conceptual themes that emerged from the data obtained from interviews, observations, and artifacts: Teachers' Experiences on Classroom Practices– participants experiences shaped their careers in various ways, leadership attention–principals provided resources and positive school environment to promotor teaching and learning writing, modeling as a roadmap to success – participants found success with the use of the modeling instructional strategy, and quieting the noise with formulaic writing–participants used formulaic instructional strategy to help overcome their personal challenges with writing.

This chapter began with a description of the analytic process that I used to develop those themes. The chapter concluded with the four major themes that were prevalent throughout the study. In the next chapter, I will provide the conclusions for the overall study, interpret the findings, and provide future recommendations in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter will present the conclusions of my study, implications of its findings, suggestions that may help further improve students' writing ability at Fairlands Elementary School, and recommendations for further research. According to the historic findings in the 1983 report "A Nation at Risk," American schools have struggled to teach students effective writing skills. These academic shortfalls in written composition have since been underscored by a multitude of national assessments (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). In the years since this report, there has been little growth in scores for writing. The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies and practices used by teachers at an identified Georgia elementary school resulting in students significantly improving their writing skills and meeting national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. What were the life and career experiences of teachers at an identified Georgia elementary school who took responsibility for improving student writing skills resulting in students meeting national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

RQ 2. What strategies did teachers use at an identified Georgia elementary school to significantly improve student writing skills and meet national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

RQ 3. What practices did teachers use at an identified Georgia elementary school to significantly improve student writing skills and meet national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

The majority of the data was collected through phenomenological interviews. Seidman (2013) notes that "a phenomenological approach to interviewing focuses on the experiences of the participants and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 16). I interviewed seven teachers who contributed to a reduction in the number of remediate writers at one elementary school in the state of Georgia. Categorical aggregation was used to analyze the data, and member checking was used to ensure the accuracy of interview data. Data analysis included the interview data as well as a variety of additional resources, including a self-inventory, self-reflecting memos, observational notes, and artifacts.

I immersed myself in the data by listening to the interviews, reading transcripts, reviewing memos, and examining documents. All data collected throughout the study were uploaded to the digital platform Dedoose. During the data coding process, I allowed pieces of data that were tagged with one code to stay together; pieces tagged with multiple codes were broken down for further analysis. I began to reorganize the coded data into broader categories in order to start detecting patterns in the data. This process of breaking down the data is known as "correspondence" (Stake, 1995). This reorganization of the data aided in developing the major themes of the study.

In Chapter 5, I presented findings of this study within the four major themes that emerged from the data. Below is a summary of the major findings:

- All participants' pedagogical approaches to writing instruction were influenced by their past experiences.
- All participants reported that the support from their school principals helped them settle on various practices that led to their success in teaching writing.
- All participants found formulaic writing strategies to be useful in improving students' writing.
- Participants reported increased student learning when modeling was used as an instructional strategy.

In this chapter, I will explore the implications of each of these findings, the discuss the limitations of this study, and provide recommendations for improving writing instruction at Fairlands Elementary School and other similar contexts. Lastly, I will provide recommendations for further research that could build on the findings of this study.

Research Questions: Final Discussions Summary

In this section, I provide answers to the three research questions that drove this study. I will discuss participant teachers' life and career experiences, their school-wide instructional strategies, and the teaching practices they used to improve student writing.

Life and Career Experiences of Teachers

RQ1. What were the life and career experiences of teachers at an identified Georgia elementary school who took responsibility for improving student writing skills resulting in students meeting national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

Although each participant had unique childhood experiences, there were a few striking commonalities that emerged. All of the participants cited a desire to make a

positive impact on the world through teaching. Stella left a promising career as a computer programmer for teaching. She stated, "I wanted a job where I was making a difference." The participants also held similar beliefs about writing while they were students. They received more enjoyment from informational writing than fiction writing. All of the participants had a passion for acquiring new information as both a student and teacher. The participants wanted to become classroom elementary teachers, but none had a true desire to teach writing. With the introduction of the Georgia Milestones Assessment System in 2014, the teaching of writing became a fully tested subject area in third, fourth, and fifth grades. This tested subject forced teachers to develop skills to teach writing. To assist with this, the former principal allowed the faculty and staff to be exposed to a plethora of professional development opportunities and incorporate their learnings into their classroom teaching practices.

All teachers participated in professional development, with several mentioning presentations and workshops by Lola Schaefer and Mark Diamond, as well as exposure to the Lucy Calkins' Writing Workshop model. These various presentations allowed the faculty and staff of Fairlands Elementary School to apply these trainings (albeit at random) to their classroom because it aided in meeting students' needs. Sally stated, "It seemed that our former principal was always bringing in someone to talk to us about writing." The previous principal was passionate about writing, as evidenced by the various supports that she provided to the staff. In addition, all grade levels at Fairlands Elementary had focused on Writing Across the Curriculum, and all teachers had the opportunity to attend county-wide professional development days. Even with the professional development, teachers did not develop high degrees of self-confidence

regarding their writing instruction, and none fully enjoyed it as much as teaching other subject matter.

Lola Schaefer, a professional author and writing specialist, provided training to the Fairlands Elementary staff in 2010. This was the first writing-based professional development offered to the staff, which may be why so many staff members referenced it. The majority of the participants remembered her trainings vividly and believed that her techniques may have helped to raise the school's writing scores (Schaefer, 2001). Six of the seven participants in this study were employed at Fairlands Elementary at that time. The other participant joined the staff at the start of the 2014–2015 school year. Schaefer's professional development training focused on using grade level-appropriate picture books as mentor texts to guide the style and selection of words. This was to help writing teachers better understand how writing voice changes depending on the task assigned (Schaefer, 2001). Another key point from this training was for teachers to focus on one thing during the editing process. This allows both the teacher and student to understand the editing expectations and to feel successful. According to the participants who were present for this professional development, Schaefer stressed that the goal of the workshop was to help both teachers and students be more successful. She suggested telling students what the expectations for their writing would be and providing choices for how to complete a writing task (Schaefer, 2001).

Mark Diamond was also introduced to the staff during the 2014–2015 school year. He came to the school several times throughout one school year to lead professional development training. His longest training was completed during pre-planning, and he also checked in with teachers throughout the school year. Diamond has published three

books related to teaching writing: *6 Tricks to Student Story Writing Success* (Diamond, 2005), *6 Tricks to Student Informational Writing Success* (Diamond, 2007), and *6 Tricks to Student Persuasive Writing Success* (Diamond, 2006). Linda recalled the Mark Diamond training:

> I can't say that I got a ton out of Mark's training, but I think he gave the staff a lot to think about because his approach is more geared around what tricks or techniques you need to teach the children to be successful.

Five out of the seven participants referred to the Mark Diamond professional development as impacting their instruction of writing. When asked what things they learned from Diamond that they have applied to their writing instruction, the teachers' answers centered around small tidbits of knowledge. These tidbits allow students to apply specific writing techniques rather than being overwhelmed by the larger writing process.

The instructional coach at Fairlands Elementary often presented helpful instructional tips at faculty meetings and selected resources from Lucy Calkins, although Calkins never visited the school. Calkins is one of the foremost experts on elementary writing and has written a multitude of books, manuals, and resources, as well as her own curriculum (Heinemann Dedicated to Teachers, n.d.). Five participants mentioned independently reading Calkins's books. Two of the participants, Stella and Jay, tried to improve their writing instruction by reading a book written by Calkins every summer. Jay stated, "As I was trying to improve my ability to teach writing, Lucy Calkins was a name that I heard before." The writing workshop model that is prevalent in schools as a method for teaching writing was pioneered by Calkins at Columbia University. Even

though she was mentioned by the majority of the participants in this study, the writing workshop model was not demonstrated in any of my classroom observations. However, this could have been due to the time of year my observations were completed—the students had fewer than ten days of school remaining.

School-Wide Strategies for Writing Instruction

RQ2. What strategies did teachers use at an identified Georgia elementary school to significantly improve student writing skills and meet national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

For the purposes of this study, the word strategy was defined as a set of techniques that produce an overall aim (Pinnell & Fountas, 1998). The reader should note that in this study, strategies and practices are two distinct things. Practices will be discussed in the next section. In this section, I focus on writing instructional strategies at the school level (as opposed to the classroom level). Overall, the school-wide strategies were difficult to ascertain because strategies seemed to be lacking.

One of the collected artifacts that was used in this study was Fairlands Elementary School's School Improvement Plan (SIP). The seven-page SIP provided a snapshot of instructional strategies that were expected to be used by teachers throughout the school. The SIP included three major goal components: a College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) goal, academic and instructional goals, and a climate goal. This study focused on the academic and instructional goals part of the SIP, with particular attention paid to how the SIP addressed writing. The plan mentioned the R.A.C.E strategy (restate the question, answer the question, cite evidence, and explain) once, writing instruction twice, and balanced literacy five times. While most participants in this student

acknowledged using the R.A.C.E. strategy, the implementation of balanced literacy had not yet begun.

R.A.C.E. strategy. When asked about a school-wide writing strategy, the only one that participants mentioned was the R.A.C.E. strategy. However, none of the seven participants had any recollection of completing training on the R.A.C.E. strategy during the current school year. Deborah stated, "It was brought down from the middle school a few years ago." The strategy was a big push to answer constructed response questions. Stella stated, "I think one reason why we haven't had any trainings this year is because we were already trained on the R.A.C.E. strategy." Fairlands's SIP states, "If we continue to focus on R.A.C.E. strategies, then our students will have a strong writing foundation." The view that R.A.C.E alone could develop a strong foundation in writing was surprising to me, as it is just one way to answer a constructed response question (Boyles, 2013). Despite the fact that the R.A.C.E. strategy was mentioned in the SIP as a school-wide strategy for improving writing instruction at Fairlands, I did not witness any teachers using this strategy during my observations. Interestingly, although R.A.C.E. was mentioned in the SIP as an expected strategy for writing instruction, there had not been any formal trainings on it that year, nor were there any steps in place to ensure teachers were using it with fidelity.

Writing Across the curriculum. Six out of seven participants stated that Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) was the preferred writing strategy of the school from 2015 to 2017. However, WAC was not specifically mentioned in the current SIP. Stephanie noted, "It encompasses everything, even in math. We have to write in everything that we do. In social studies, we write in social studies. We write in science. We write in

language arts. It's not just limited to language arts." The improvements seen from 2016 to 2017 suggest that WAC made a positive impact on students' writing ability during those years.

Classroom-based Practices for Writing Instruction

RQ 3. What practices did teachers use at an identified Georgia elementary school use to significantly improve student writing skills and meet national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test?

For the purposes of this study, practices were defined as the carrying out of exercises of instruction. In this section, I will focus on the day-to-day writing practices at Fairlands Elementary School by highlighting how the teachers there made writing personalized and enjoyable for their students through engaging techniques. References to classroom practices appeared frequently throughout the data, suggesting that effective writing practices were a relative strength for teachers at Fairlands Elementary School.

Developing background knowledge. Throughout my interviews and observations, all the participants stressed the importance of developing students' background knowledge before presenting them with a writing task. Students may try to avoid a writing task by giving the answer "I don't know what to write." In order to counteract this barrier, Wolfinger (2002) stressed that teachers should choose writing topics about which students have a rich knowledge base. Teachers at Fairlands Elementary School often selected writing topics about which students were knowledgeable. Writing about a topic that students already have basic knowledge of helps them to realize that they have something valuable to say on that topic. Zuidema and Fredricksen (2016) noted that students expressed their knowledge through written

form; through student writing, teachers were better able to ascertain what aspects of knowledge students understand.

I observed Jay using all of the science standards from the entire year to address a crucial question: "What effect does the sun have on all the topics that we have learned about this year?" Throughout the year, Jay developed students' science background knowledge to allow every student to become an expert and to be able to provide a worthwhile answer to the question. Before starting the assignment, Jay had students reintroduce previously covered topics aloud with the class. Sharing ideas in a pre-writing activity, as suggested by Wigglesworth and Storch (2012), allowed students to work in small groups so that they could share their ideas with one another.

In another classroom, Stella read a picture book that focused on fourth-grade math concepts. Stella used math concepts that the students had learned throughout the year to encourage them to make their own versions of the book. In reading this book, she modeled how the reader had to solve each problem to progress to the next page. She adapted the book to fit the fourth-grade standards, and the class made a list of different math concept pages that they could incorporate into their own versions of the book.

Sarah provided another example illustrating the classroom practice of developing background knowledge in students prior to introducing the assignment. She spent a significant amount of time at the opening of her lesson talking about the weather and what types of weather were most likely to occur at this time of year. She also created an anchor chart, a visual display of information, with the class that included various "exciting" verbs and adjectives that could be used in their weather reports.

Deborah allowed students to reminisce about all the different experiences they had had as a class over the year. This reminiscing reminded students of the new knowledge they had gained over the course of this academic year. She encouraged them to select a topic about which they would be interested in writing. Before students started on their writing assignment, Deborah allowed them to share what they had selected (Poulson, Avramidis, Fox, Medwell, & Wray, 2001). This gave students who were having difficulty selecting a topic an opportunity to hear their classmates' selections before beginning their writing assignment.

Collaborating with teachers. Historically, Fairlands Elementary School has experienced a low teacher turnover from year to year, which has allowed teachers to develop strong working relationships with coworkers and the administration (The governor's office of student achievement, n.d.). I observed teachers from different grade levels collaborating; they initiated this voluntary, informal sharing of instructional ideas. Linda benefited from this collaborative practice:

> I think those moments where you do a lesson or something and it stinks are the moments where you think, "Okay, this is what I'm going to do differently," just being reflective on what works and what doesn't work and being able to go to another teacher and be like, "Hey, this doesn't work for me." They're like, "Okay, what about this?" or "I want to teach ledes. What are your thoughts on that?" Just having a collaborative moment.

Relying on colleagues can help get a teacher unstuck when a particular lesson idea or writing concept is not being understood by students. Sally described another prime instance of collaboration between teachers:

> I collaborate with Linda, and she would give me writing ideas, because that is her forte. I would go to her and say, "I need to teach persuasive writing." She would go, "Here, read this book, this book, and this book, and then use this one as the model. This is the two that the kids can choose from. You model it." She would give me ideas. She would be my resource.

Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of colleagues can be helpful in knowing to whom to go for help with specific instructional needs (Harrison & Killion, 2007). This type of collaboration was aided by the low teacher turnover at Fairlands Elementary School. Sally gave coworkers credit for her success as a teacher of writing, noting, "A lot of it comes from my colleagues." Relying on other teachers' strengths was a great way to improve an area of weakness. As Sally said, "It is better than looking for resources online."

Conferencing. Throughout my interviews, it was evident that conferencing was often used as a component of writing instruction at Fairlands Elementary School (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983; Saddler et al., 2014). The teachers at Fairlands are given the autonomy to teach how they feel will be most effective, and they mentioned numerous ways to conference with students.

Deborah, who taught third grade, only had formal conferences with students a few times a year, but she frequently moved around the room, having small informal conferences with students. This allowed her to gauge how the writing instruction was going throughout the room. Conferencing with students presented a multitude of different challenges; nevertheless, the teachers at Fairlands still continued to conference with students. Some of the difficulties presented by conferencing were a lack of time to

meet with each student, uncertainty about how to lead a proper writing conference, and students who had difficulty incorporating suggestions into their writing.

Stella and Sally, both fourth-grade teachers, regularly conferenced with students to improve their writing. They often kept students who required more support at their teacher table while they were conferencing with students who did not need as much support with writing (Wolfinger, 2002). This allowed them to check in with those students who needed support more often.

Linda, a fifth-grade teacher, described herself as a confident writing teacher. She placed a great deal of responsibility on her students to come to her for conferences. This allowed students who wanted constructive feedback to have a way to receive it on an as-needed basis:

> I wish I had a great organizational skill for that, but I don't. So we had what we call the revision chair, and if it's empty, you can pop in it at any point. So, when they're ready, they just come over. Once they're in the chair, I know they need revision. So they have to read it to me like how they wrote it, not like how they want it to sound, and we just talk about it as we go. So, like, you know, there may be the lede, and I'll tell them, "I like that" [or] "that's not good" or "You lost me right there—go back" or "You threw me off the cliff." That's our big one. So, when you get to the end of a thought process or a conclusion, you know, it's like walking someone to the end of the cliff. You want to stop them before they fall and die. So, if I fall and die, then you've dropped me. You didn't finish. You didn't catch me.

Linda was proud of her ability to ask her students difficult questions about their writing. Although she did require all students to attend at least one formal conference per semester, she stated, “As they become more confident writers, I don’t require them to come for a conference.” Linda, who was working with the advanced content fifth graders, recalled, “My job is to bring them back down to reality and make them hungry writers again.” She encouraged her students to build on their knowledge and become better writers each time they sat down to write a paper (Brooks & Brooks, 1999; Piaget, 1955).

Sally liked to conference with all of her students to make sure that each one worked up to his or her potential as a writer. However, she expressed the difficulty of meeting with each student for a conference:

> Then I also feel that I need to conference with every single student because, while, you know, Susan over here can write according to this formula, but she can do so much, and I can push her in that area. Then I’ve got Sam over here who’s still learning how to write just a paragraph.

Sally attempted many different strategies when conferencing with students, with a goal of building on their knowledge and helping them become better writers (Piaget, 1955). One practice that she found effective was placing one Hawaiian lei on herself and another lei on the student with whom she was conferencing to indicate that they were on an island together and could not be disturbed. Sally says, “I probably see every kid once a week.” Sally had low self-efficacy as a writing teacher, but she did provide top-quality writing components in her classroom, as mentioned by Linda in her interviews.

Sarah addressed conferencing in a different way because she worked with students who have a learning disability. Sarah commented, “So they don’t often think

they need to revise because they think they're so good at it, you know? So, I think that conferencing piece, that's what makes a good writer a great writer." Sarah went on to explain that students often perceived that their work did not need revision, but "something happens when you read the story with someone else—the words are not as amazing as you originally thought." Allowing students to understand the difficulties of building knowledge and creating meaning out of their words relates back to the theory of constructivism (Piaget, 1955). Constructivism engages students in the task of learning by applying or transferring the learned knowledge to a different mode of learning. Writing demonstrates critical thinking skills towards a particular topic (Piaget, 1955).

Stella shared her struggles with using conferencing: "The conferencing piece is the area [with which] I really struggle. I even had the instructional coach come in and give me some pointers, but he said that I was doing great." Stella commented that she struggled to conference with students effectively. Expressing her frustration, she posed this question: "If I am so effective at conferencing, why is there this long line at my desk?" Although conferencing does cause her some stress, Stella believed in the importance of conferencing, noting, "That's how I do it—more individualized, more of me working with them hands on, one-on-one." This allowed each learner in her classroom to have his or her original thoughts challenged, leading to the creation of new knowledge based on the feedback received (Jonassen, 1999; Piaget, 1955).

Meeting students' needs. Through the data analysis process, the repetition and frequency of comments and ideas around providing students with choice and differentiated assignments to match a student's ability was eventually combined into one code, "meeting students' needs." This classroom practice, evident in each of my

observations, provided students with choices and differentiated assignments. Differentiation consists of the efforts of teachers to respond to variance among learners (Tomlinson, 2014). It allows students to feel ownership about their choices and how they are going to approach an assignment. Deborah discussed a practice that the literacy coach used in her classroom and that she now incorporates into her teaching:

> So, we pulled up an illustration of colonial America. And then as the kids were talking about what they saw in the picture, she [the literacy coach] sorted their ideas into persuasive, informational, and narrative [different forms of writing]. And then we took three days, and one day they wrote a narrative on the picture, one day they wrote an informational [essay], and one day they wrote an opinion [piece].

This format provided students with choices, as they could pick which aspect of the picture they wanted to address in their writing. The teachers at Fairlands Elementary School were striving to improve the quality of students' writing by providing them with a plethora of different topics about which to write, so long as they were improving in the genre that was assigned. From my observations, these teachers were making an effort to account for the various interests of the students in their classrooms.

Students were given some sort of option in all of the writing assignments that I observed in teachers' classrooms. Stella noted that providing choice "gives students a natural buy-in to the writing assignment." She went on to say, "Students are given some choice on the Georgia Milestones about what they are going to write about, so why wouldn't I do the same thing?"

Linda gave her students choices in how they responded to the book they were reading in class. Linda provided choices through a "choice board," which allowed students to self-select what aspects of the text they were going to write about. Sally provided choice within a lesson by allowing groups to choose which questions they were going to answer. Sarah integrated choice into her lessons by allowing students to write about the weather. Students were able to choose a weather situation and then write a story based on that choice. Stella also integrated writing into her math lesson, as students were required to produce a twelve-page picture book. They could use any math topic that they had learned about over the entire year. Stephanie provided choices by requiring the students to pick only some of the questions to answer. Students were given a list of questions that centered around "would you rather" type questions (e.g., would you rather have a something stuck in your teeth or something hanging out of your nose?).

Deborah allowed students to reflect on the entirety of the year and then write about one memory that really stood out to them. Jay taught a similar lesson, posing this question to her class: "What things have we learned about that are affected by the sun?" She allowed students to reflect on everything they had learned in science and apply it to the essential question. Students were empowered during this writing lesson because they were given options about what to write.

Making writing fun. Students often struggle to enjoy writing because of all the requirements and demands that writing necessitates (Ray et al., 2016). A student rarely has the opportunity to interact with writing as an enjoyable task rather than as a classroom chore; this often makes it difficult to raise students' self-efficacy regarding writing (Hutchings, 2015). In this study, participants made intentional attempts to make

writing enjoyable for their students. For example, Linda described what a short writing focus in her classroom might be like:

> We do a lot of ten-minute writes, which are literally ten minutes, and wherever you are is where you are . . . but a lot of times, I mean, they'll just, they'll start something and then be like, "This is awful, I want to start over." [And I will tell the student,] "You should do that."

This allows students to enjoy the writing process and not become overwhelmed by all the additional demands of writing. The participants accomplished this by orchestrating short writing tasks, incorporating brainstorming activities, using story cubes, and partitioning writing into manageable parts.

Five out of the seven participants in this study mentioned the importance of sometimes focusing on writing for a short period of time. Linda stated that "short writing tasks can allow students to feel successful as writers," which in turns leads to greater enjoyment of writing.

This reduction of the writing task allows students to feel successful in the writing process. This was a key component to most classrooms I observed at Fairlands Elementary School. Sally described a short writing focus as a brainstorming activity: "'Throw it on paper.' They go back and look at it. I tell them, 'More details you put there, then you have a better opportunity to remember to put it in your first draft.'" This allowed students to have a place to reference if they chose to continue working on the piece of writing.

Sally also used Story Cubes (see Figure 6.1) to wrap up the last ten minutes of class: "Sometimes, we just want to write. So, we roll the dice, I post them up on the

board, and they have to use the dice to create a story." This activity allowed students to experience the joys of writing without becoming overwhelmed by all the nuances of writing. It was important for students to enjoy the writing process and feel successful. Continued enjoyment of writing often leads to more success in the writing process (Philippakos & MacArthur, 2016).

Linda stated that writing can become an overwhelming task for students, but that teachers should not make that process seem negative:

> It can't be a punishment, like sometimes you make them sit there forever and write. It's pointless. If they're frustrated, it's okay to be frustrated. Okay, let's walk away from it if you can't get the words on paper. Let's use the voice-to-text feature because it just can't be that it's a punishment. I think sometimes we use writing as . . . a punishment.

Linda understood the difficulty that writing presents for some of her students, but she stressed that writing should be an enjoyable task for them.

Figure 6.1. Story Cubes. Retrieved from https://www.amazon.com

Sarah strived to make her students feel like successful writers in her classroom in the following way:

> I break it down into parts for them so, so I don't ever expect them to sit and do an entire writing process in one sitting, because I think for struggling writers, getting started is so hard. I really focus on the brainstorming and give them as much brainstorming as possible.

For Sarah, Sally, and Linda, the writing process did not need to be taught or done in one sitting; rather, the process was broken down into manageable pieces that allowed the student to feel successful. When I asked Sarah about her philosophy of education, I found her response to be profound:

> I feel like if you give them the right opportunity, they're going to . . . shine, and they're going to feel success; and when they feel success, they only want more of it, so I feel like they can do anything.

Creating opportunities for students to enjoy writing was a common practice that was evident both in my observations and from the interviews conducted.

Intersection of Research Questions

Only one school-wide strategy was being implemented across third through fifth grades at Fairlands Elementary School at the time of this study—the R.A.C.E. strategy. However, Writing Across the Curriculum was a school-wide strategy that had been used in previous years. In the year of this study, Fairlands had a new principal who did not emphasize or require WAC. Thus, teachers no longer had to highlight how they were incorporating it in their lesson plans. I believe that having one or more school-wide

writing strategies highlighted the importance of writing instruction for both students and faculty.

The former principal at Fairlands recognized writing instruction as an area of weakness at the school and tried to address it with targeted professional development. Over her tenure, she brought numerous experts to the school to help improve teachers' writing instruction. This type of professional development did not lead to many school-wide strategies, but it did create numerous classroom practices that teachers implemented with their students. Teachers would pick and choose various aspects of these professional development sessions that they believed would integrate well into their style of teaching. The introduction and adoption of various classroom practices based on these professional development sessions became an organic movement within the walls of Fairlands Elementary School. Some aspects of writing instruction became more prominent because they were frequently highlighted by presenters, such as modeling. However, due to the flexibility given to teachers to teach writing as they saw fit, these professional development sessions did not end up becoming strategies required by the school's administration. A major benefit from this study was the create and development of various classroom practices.

Implications and Discussion of the Study

This study focused on the experiences of seven female elementary teachers at one school in the state of Georgia who had improved the writing skills of their students. This study has numerous implications for school districts, universities, and colleges. Postsecondary instructors strive to improve the quality of writing teachers who enter the workforce, while in-service teachers work to further hone their craft of writing

instruction. In this section, I will provide my interpretations of the four primary findings discussed in Chapter 5.

Given that 60% of elementary-aged students in this country cannot meet their state's writing standards, it is imperative that this situation be assessed and addressed (NAEP, 2012). One primary concern is the stagnation of test scores on national writing assessments that were first highlighted in "A Nation at Risk" (Gardner, 1983). Clearly, teachers have struggled for many years to teach writing well (Calkins, 2011; Graves, 2004). This lack of quality writing instruction has impacted American business to the point where U.S. companies are spending billions of dollars annually to improve their employees' writing skills (Morgan & Pytash, 2014). In many cases, teachers struggle to find the time to properly teach writing because they do not value writing (Magrath et al., 2003; Powell, 2013; Totten, 2005; Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012). Colleges and universities should be instilling a passion for teachers to "view writing as a worthwhile and enriching endeavor in order to motivate children to think of themselves as writers" (Levin, 1993, p.17). Unfortunately, this is not occurring.

According to its CCRPI score, Fairlands was a high-performing school. This indicates that it was functioning well across several domains. The focus on improving writing scores should have had some beneficial impact on the staff's ability to teach writing.

Four major themes emerged from the data analysis in this study: the impact of teachers' experiences on classroom practices, a focus on leadership, modeling as a roadmap to success, and quieting the noise with formulaic writing. In the following sections, I will discuss the implications of these themes for relevant stakeholders. The

first theme was the impact of teachers' experiences on classroom practices. Throughout the study, it was evident that teachers' experiences—from elementary school through their workplace-based professional development—played a large role in how they approached the teaching of writing in their classrooms. The lack of skills or background knowledge to teach writing was evident in five out of the seven participants in the study. Furthermore, all the participants struggled to be truly passionate about teaching writing. This theme addressed RQ1. The second theme, a focus on leadership, related to how a school's administrators could deliberately impact writing instruction in a school. This theme addressed RQ2, which deals with school-wide writing strategies. The third theme, modeling as a roadmap to success, related to how teachers used modeling in their classrooms to help guide and improve student writing. The fourth theme, quieting the noise through formulaic writing, reflected teachers' use of a standardized approach to writing as a means to help students put their thoughts on paper in an organized way. Both the third and fourth themes addressed RQ3, regarding the strategies and practices that were implemented at the school with respect to writing.

Impact of Teachers' Experiences on Classroom Practices

The past experiences of the teachers in this study played a pivotal role in how they approached writing in their classrooms. Although all seven participants had at least one writing teacher throughout their K-12 education who made an impact on their journey of becoming writers, all seven struggled to name more than one primary or secondary teacher who demonstrated a passion for writing or who impacted their attitude toward writing in a positive way. This lack of positive role models for writing likely contributed to these teachers' discomfort teaching writing. A major implication based on

this theme is that the teacher education profession must begin to produce teachers who are not only competent writers, but also confident and passionate writing teachers who are able to instill in their students a joy of and appreciation for writing. Furthermore, regardless of their own experiences with writing, teachers must understand that it is incumbent upon them to find ways to help students enjoy the process of writing while also ensuring students' writing competence. This will help to address students' fear and dislike of writing.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the concept of teacher efficacy. Bandura (1977) described teacher efficacy as the belief that one can bring out the desired learning outcome with all students. In the classroom, teacher efficacy contributes to a teacher's perceived ability to teach a subject. For this reason, it is imperative that teachers have an awareness of their ability to successfully teach a subject. Five of the seven participants in this study believed that they were unprepared to teach writing at the start of their careers. This reflects a failure on the part of their postsecondary education programs to prepare them for the challenge of teaching writing at the elementary level. One potential reason that the teachers in this study had such low self-efficacy could be that their professors failed to understand their prior experiences and struggled to impart to them successful classroom practices for teaching writing.

Oleson and Hora (2014) note that without proper training, teachers "teach the way they were taught" (p. 1). This concept has a huge implication on how postsecondary institutions prepare pre-service teachers for the demands of teaching writing. Unless there is a concerted effort by universities and school systems to raise the self-efficacy of teachers with respect to writing, it is likely that teachers will continue to feel inadequate

in this regard. It would be beneficial for pre-service teacher education programs to require one or more classes with a specific focus on writing pedagogy. I would also encourage these programs to include Writing Across the Curriculum as part of their curricula. The administration at Fairlands Elementary School has made some effort in raising teachers' efficacy towards writing. For example, the leadership team brought in experts to provide quality professional development opportunities geared toward raising the efficacy of teachers regarding writing. However, significant work still lies ahead to overcome any previous negative writing experiences of the teaching staff.

Impact of Leadership Focus

Hallinger and Heck (1998) found that the focus of school leadership has an effect on teacher success in the classroom. Participants in this study frequently referred to the various trainings they were exposed to under the school's previous principal. The former school leader worked toward a shared a vision for improving the writing instruction at Fairlands Elementary School. She mandated that Writing Across the Curriculum be implemented at the school and required teachers to highlight in their lesson plans how they were doing so. The former principal was aware of the school's weakness with respect to writing instruction and provided strategic professional development to address that weakness. Furthermore, she allowed teachers to implement the knowledge and skills in their classrooms with autonomy, never forcing everyone to use the same classroom practices. The major implication is that school leaders need to provide their staff with flexibility in how they incorporate various trainings. Regardless of the classroom practices chosen by teachers, however, there needs to be some degree of accountability for both training implementation and for student improvement. The improvement in

writing scores at Fairlands may be partially attributable to her vision and to the school-wide strategy that she implemented to address weaknesses in writing. This suggests that school leaders must be vigilant in identifying academic weaknesses and putting forth a definitive plan or school-wide strategy to address them, while still allowing teachers some degree of flexibility in their individual teaching practices.

Impact of Modeling as a Roadmap to Success

This study confirmed the findings of previous studies (Graham & Perin, 2007b; Rogers & Graham, 2008) that modeling is a key component of quality writing instruction. All of the participants in this study actively modeled at least part of the writing process. Teachers did not simply allow students to write independently, but rather modeled specific writing strategies. I posed this question to my participants: "What are the components of a quality writing lesson?" The answers that the participants gave varied widely, but all of the participants agreed that writing needs to be modeled (Harris et al., 2013). Modeling allows students to have clear expectations of how the writing process should look and feel. It requires more than just writing and time; modeling writing requires the teacher to be transparent about all of the difficulties and successes that are inherent in the writing process (Shanahan, 2015). Considering the importance of modeling, it is imperative that pre-service teachers—and in-service teachers, if necessary—be taught proper writing skills, as well as how to effectively model writing for their students. This can be done through professional development and, as mentioned previously, through pre-service teacher education courses focused on writing pedagogy.

Impact of Quieting the Noise Through Formulaic Writing

Teachers often struggle to understand appropriate models or frameworks for teaching writing (Graham & MacArthur, 2013). One instructional approach is providing students with a formula to follow with their writing. This type of writing is easily modeled, and students understand what they are supposed to accomplish with a formula writing approach. Providing students with a structured approach to their writing aids them in making improvement (Wiley, 2000). Overall, the literature does not support formulaic writing. Teaching formulaic writing in isolation can stunt students' development as writers (McCarthey, 2008). However, when integrated properly into writing instruction, as has happened at Fairlands Elementary School, formulaic writing can serve as an effective practice for improving writing instruction.

Four out of the seven teachers I observed demonstrated a formulaic writing lesson. Teachers need to have in mind a clear framework of how to teach writing (Graves, 2004). Formulaic writing can be particularly useful for teachers who have low self-efficacy in their own writing ability. However, most teachers are not properly exposed to any formal writing training during their pre-service teacher education programs (Tyre, 2012). Again, this reinforces the need for teacher training programs to include coursework on writing pedagogy, one component of which should be the appropriate use of formulaic writing as a tool for writing instruction.

Suggestions for Further Improvement

Fairlands Elementary School made significant growth in student writing scores over the course of two years. The strategies and practices implemented at Fairlands seem to have made a positive impact on students' writing abilities. However, in the field of

education, there is always room for growth and improvement. In this section, I will provide some recommendations for how Fairlands Elementary could continue its trajectory of growth in writing.

Develop a Writing Committee

My first recommendation is for Fairlands Elementary School to institute a Committee on Writing. This committee would have one teacher from each grade level, with the instructional coach serving as the committee head. The committee would be tasked with developing a comprehensive plan for how to further improve writing instruction at the school. Below, I offer additional suggestions of how the Committee on Writing could positively impact writing instruction across the school.

Common language. The teachers at Fairlands used various writing terms in their classes. For instance, one teacher may have referred to the "introduction" to a piece of writing, while another teacher may have called this part the "beginning." This could create confusion for students as they move from teacher to teacher (Seah, 2016). The Committee on Writing could develop a common language for writing instruction so that when students move from one grade level to the next, they would already be familiar with the writing terminology being used in class.

Capturing quality writing instruction. Utilizing the unique role of the Committee on Writing, I suggest all teachers who engage in writing instruction be observed by a member of the Committee on Writing at least once a semester. This observational data may be used to inform how writing instruction is completed from grade level to grade level. The committee member could use a checklist developed from Graham and Perin's meta-analysis of quality writing instruction (Graham & Perin,

2007a). Analysis of the writing data would be crucial to further understand how the faculty approaches writing instruction. The Committee on Writing members would capture data from various grade levels during their own planning.

Five-year plan. I suggest that Fairlands Elementary School refocus on setting writing goals and develop an overall plan to address any school-wide gaps in writing instruction. These gaps would be identified by the committee based on the collected observations. The Committee on Writing could develop an achievable timetable for the improvement of writing instruction and include that plan in the SIP. At the start of every year, the teachers at the school should sit down with building leadership to examine the results from the Georgia Milestones standardized test in writing. A follow-up goal could be for teachers to adjust their instruction to address specific areas of student weakness on the writing portion of Georgia Milestones.

Re-implement Writing Across the Curriculum

Participants of this study discussed the topic of Writing Across the Curriculum numerous times. During the previous administration, teachers were required to highlight the portions of their lesson plans that addressed Writing Across the Curriculum. This practice ended when the former principal left the school. I recommend that this practice be reinstated, as it would help teachers integrate writing into math, social studies, and the sciences. Many participants held strong convictions that the implementation of WAC is what led to gains in test scores at Fairlands.

Fine-Tune Modeling Practices

Based on my interview and observations, the one classroom practice that was most impactful to the improvement of writing at Fairlands Elementary School was

modeling. This practice was tagged over thirty times in my data. This emphasis on modeling aligns with the findings of Graham and Perin (2007a) and Rogers and Graham (2008), who conducted meta-analyses of best writing practices and found that modeling is indeed one of the most important components of good writing instruction. In these formative years of education, teachers are laying a foundation for writing. Although writing does come easily for a small percentage of students, most students need to be exposed to good writing techniques over the course of many years in order to hone their writing skills. Modeling provides a cornerstone upon which students can build their writing skills. The Committee on Writing could digitally record modeling practices of some of the best writing teachers at Fairlands and use these videos to help improve other teachers' use of modeling in their own classrooms.

Limitations of the Study

Study limitations should be acknowledged in qualitative research to add to the credibility and trustworthiness of the overall study (Maxwell, 2013). In this study, I examined the strategies and practices used by elementary teachers employed at one elementary school in the state of Georgia by interviewing and observing seven elementary writing teachers. I used purposeful sampling to interview selected teachers who held a variety of life experiences. The participants included seven White female elementary writing teachers who had taught between 18 and 29 years. There was not much variability in the years of experience of teachers who participated in the study. I provided detailed descriptions of the research site, step-by-step participant selection procedures, and data collection and analysis procedures to enhance transferability of my findings to a similar context. The practices that I found to be successful in improving

writing at Fairlands Elementary School would not necessarily improve writing scores at other grade levels. As a result, transferability is limited to the elementary setting.

The time of year when data were collected for this study may have impacted the study's findings. Data were collected near the end of the school year after all major testing had been completed. Had I conducted interviews and observations earlier in the school year, it is possible that teachers may have provided different information and been doing somewhat different writing activities in their classrooms. Teachers were compliant with the requirements of participating in the study, but they were probably also looking forward to their summer break.

Due to the nature of qualitative research, the researcher is the main instrument in data collection and data analysis (Miles et al., 2014). To combat researcher bias in this study, I utilized reflective memoing after each interview and observation (Miles et al., 2014). I was also active during interviews by asking follow-up questions as needed for clarification, which is evident in the interview transcripts (Seidman, 2013). In spite of these various limitations, the results of this study may be beneficial to a multitude of educational stakeholders.

Researcher reactivity refers to how the presence of a researcher affects a group dynamic (Maxwell, 2013). It was imperative that I remained conscious of how my presence in the teachers' classrooms may have impacted their teaching practices and students behavior, particularly since they were fully aware of when I would be observing them. While I believe that all information conveyed during data collection was honest, it is possible that these lessons were staged due to the fact that teachers knew the time and date of their observations.

Another limitation of the study related to researcher bias. I am a struggling writer who was not trained in how to write from a young age, and I have spent the majority of my adult life dealing with the repercussions of being a struggling writer. As a result, data analysis may have been biased and impacted the overall analysis of the collected data. Maxwell (2013) stated that researchers should understand their subjective stance towards the researched topic and learn to use their researcher bias to the benefit of the study. I hope that I have accomplished this in my study

A final limitation relates to the fact that much of the data in this study came from participant self-reports. It is possible that participants may have exaggerated their ability to teach writing well or the various supports that they provided to their students.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study captured teachers' perspectives on writing instruction. Future studies many examine the same phenomenon from the students' and administrators' perspectives to get a more holistic picture of writing instruction and how an elementary school could improve students' writing scores from one year to the next. Although the three research questions were answered, many additional research opportunities related to this study still exist. In this section, I will discuss some of these potential avenues for further study.

This study focused on school-wide strategies and teacher practices. Another study might approach the topic of writing from an administrator's perspective. How could an administrator implement effective change in her or his school? How would an administrator know if the adjustments are effective? This study focused on school-wide strategies and teacher practices. Another study might approach the topic of writing from the students' perspective. What practices improve students' enjoyment of writing, and

what practices have the opposite effect? What do students feel are the most impactful and helpful practices regarding writing?

One possible extension of this study would be to replicate it with more participants. Although this study included seven teachers who taught third, fourth, and fifth grade writing during the years in question, there are numerous other teachers at Fairlands who chose not to participate in this study. Another extension of the study could include a more longitudinal aspect. Have the writing scores at Fairlands continued to rise, or have they begun to decline over the past few years? What factors may have contributed to this improvement or decline?

Every participant in this study had at least 12 years of teaching experience. Another study could focus on teachers with fewer years of experience. Yet another study could investigate how teachers' self-efficacy regarding writing is related to the colleges they attended and how this related to their overall job satisfaction. This could have implications on teacher retention.

Additional studies could investigate schools whose writing scores have decreased significantly over the course of a few years or schools in different geographical regions that have also seen improvements in their writing scores.

Another possible extension of this study would be exploring a link between writing scores, English language arts scores, and math scores. Does a relationship exist between the rising and lowering scores between all three tested areas? On the Georgia Milestones, writing is a not an isolated subject, but rather is integrated into all subjects listed above.

Several participants in this study mentioned the lack of district-level support for writing. It would be interesting to conduct a study of what resources district-level employees claim are available in various districts and compare that information to teachers' knowledge and use of those supports or resources.

Final Conclusions

American schools are struggling to produce quality writers. American businesses spend $3.1 billion annually to improve their employees' writing ability (Pytash et al., 2014). The purpose of this study was to explore the life and career experiences of seven writing teachers at a Georgia elementary school which had significant growth in students' writing scores and the strategies and practices that led to these improvements. This study gave an active voice to seven female teachers at the school, which could allow other school districts and universities to practically apply the results to their own educational setting.

Over 50% of elementary-aged students do not meet national writing standards. The research site was selected due to the decrease of remediate writers from the 2016 to 2017 administration of the Georgia Milestones. This case study has the potential to impact how pre-service teachers are trained for the complexities of teaching writing and how schools continue to improve teachers' ability to teach writing.

Teachers at Fairlands Elementary School were given the autonomy to teach writing in the ways that best fit their individual personalities and preferences. The participants in this study referenced the school's former principal and her focus on improving writing instruction. The former principal exposed the faculty and staff to a multitude of different professional development sessions aimed at improving writing

instruction. The teachers could then self-select what components of these professional development sessions worked best with their teaching style. It is possible that this freedom to choose different teaching practices helped improve students' writing scores. The participants of this study became competent writing teachers who served their instructional needs and the needs of the students they taught.

Fairlands Elementary School lacked a well-thought-out school-wide plan to address writing instruction. The only school-wide strategy that was being actively used for writing during the time of the study was the R.A.C.E. strategy. Unfortunately, this approach fails to encompass all the intricacies of a quality writing approach, as it only addresses answering a constructed response question and does not prepare students for other writing tasks, such as writing a narrative. Several participants mentioned how the previous principal supported Writing Across the Curriculum as a school-wide strategy; they expressed that this may have had a large impact on the improvement in writing scores at the school. Interestingly, many of the participants believed that the school was no longer using WAC.

Numerous classroom practices used by teachers at Fairlands Elementary School impacted instruction. Throughout my observations and interviews, the teachers exhibited and mentioned many such classroom writing practices, including developing background knowledge, collaborating with coworkers, conferencing with students, meeting students' needs, using formulaic writing, modeling for students, and making writing fun.

Study data yielded four major themes: teachers' experiences on classroom practices, a focus on leadership, quieting the noise through formulaic writing, and modeling as a roadmap for success. Each uncovered theme aligned clearly with the

research questions I used to guide the study. As teachers, our experiences impact who we are in the classroom. In this study, I attempted to examine how the participants developed as writers throughout their lifetime, as well as how their experiences impacted their classroom practices. The theme of a focus of leadership highlighted the importance of a leader's impact on a school (Hallinger & Heck, 1998) and how that impact can affect classroom instruction. The quieting the noise through formulaic writing theme included giving students a basic format to follow in their writing, which led teachers to continue to push students to apply a plethora of skills to develop competent writers. The final theme, modeling as a roadmap for success, was the most impactful to me because this technique gave students the correct scope and sequence for pushing themselves as writers (Shanahan, 2015).

Effective writing instruction has the potential to improve many aspects of our educational system and transform our national workforce. It is incumbent that we make progress in overhauling postsecondary teacher education programs in order to ensure that future teachers are well prepared to teach writing, while simultaneously finding ways to effectively support in-service writing teachers. Only then will our nation find itself no longer "at risk" with respect to its next generation of writers.

REFERENCES

Adler, M. J., & Van Doren, C. (2014). *How to read a book: The classic guide to intelligent reading*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Adler, P. A., & Adler, P. (1987). *Membership roles in field research* (Vol. 6). Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage.

Algozzine, B., & Diliberto, J. A. (2004). Improving descriptive sentence writing in elementary students. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, *48*(4), 34–36. https://doi.org/10.3200/PSFL.48.4.34-36

Andrade, H. L., Wang, X., Du, Y., & Akawi, R. L. (2009). Rubric-Referenced self-assessment and self-efficacy for writing. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *102*(4), 287–302. https://doi.org/10.3200/JOER.102.4.287-302

Applebee, A. N., & Langer, J. A. (2009). EJ extra: What is happening in the teaching of writing? *The English Journal*, *98*(5), 18–28.

Applebee, A. N., & Langer, J. A. (2011). A snapshot of writing instruction in middle schools and high schools. *The English Journal*, *100*(6), 14–27. https://doi.org/10.2307/23047875

Aydin, A., Sarier, Y., & Uysal, Ş. (2013). The effect of school principals' leadership styles on teachers' organizational commitment and job satisfaction. *Kuram ve Uygulamada Eğitim Bilimleri*, *13*(2), 806–811. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=psyh&AN=2013-15442-006&site=ehost-live%5Cnuysalsengul@yahoo.com.tr%5Cnyilmazsarier@yahoo.com%5Cnaaydin@ogu.edu.tr

Aydın, Z., & Yıldız, S. (2014). Using wikis to promote collaborative EFL writing. *Language Learning & Technology*, *18*(1), 160–180.

Baker, L. (2006). Observation: A complex research method. *Library Trends*, *55*(1), 171–189.

Baker, N. L. (2014). Get it off my stack: Teachers' tools for grading papers. *Assessing Writing*, *19*, 36–50. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2013.11.005

Ballard, K. D., & Glynn, T. (1975). Behavioral self-management and story writing with elementary school children. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, *8*(4), 387–398.

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, *84*(2), 191–215. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191

Barbour, R. S. (2005). Making sense of focus groups. *Medical Education*, *39*(7), 742–750.

Bell, T. H. (1993). Reflections one decade after a nation at risk. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *74*(8), 592. https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/17506200710779521

Bianco, S. D. (2010). Improving Student Outcomes: Data-Driven Instruction and Fidelity of Implementation in a Response to Intervention (RTI) Model. *Teaching Exceptional Children Plus*, *6*(5), 1-13.

Bifuh-ambe, E. (2013). Developing successful writing teachers: Outcomes of professional development exploring teachers' perceptions of themselves as writers and writing teachers and their students' attitudes and abilities to write across the curriculum. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, *12*(3), 137–156.

Bodnar, J. R., & Petrucelli, S. L. (2016). Strengthening academic writing. *NADE Digest*, *9*(1), 40–43.

http://proxying.lib.ncsu.edu/index.php?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1097538&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Boushey, G., & Moser, J. (2006). *The daily 5: Fostering literacy independence in the elementary grades*. Portsmouth, NH: Stenhouse Publishers.

Boyles, N. N. (2013). *That's a Great Answer!: Teaching Literature-response Strategies to Elementary, ELL, and Struggling Readers*. North Mankato, MN: Maupin House Publishing, Inc.

Bracey, G. W. (2003). April foolishness: The 20th anniversary of a nation at risk. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *84*(8), 616–621.

Brimi, H. (2012). Teaching writing in the shadow of standardized writing assessment : An exploratory study. *American Secondary Education*, *41*(1), 52–78. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&profile=ehost&scope=site&authtype=crawler&jrnl=00031003&AN=84030212&h=Cng9I75r12IDYJFUrigf9W+AkSafl7Sqq8ZV2SfTbQj/fcTBtiXZupuPz/FbI8DIGaeFVEbhggAMv1bZ0dLTMg==&crl=c

Brooks, G. W. (2007). Teachers as readers and writers and as teachers of reading and writing. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *100*(3), 177–191. https://doi.org/10.3200/JOER.100.3.177-191

Brooks, M. G., & Brooks, J. G. (1999). The courage to be constructivist. In *Educational Foundations: An Anthology* (pp. 184–194). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Byrne, Z. S., & LeMay, E. (2006). Different media for organizational communication: Perceptions of quality and satisfaction. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, *21*(2), 149–173.

Calkins, L. (1994). *The art of teaching writing* (2nd ed.). Ontario: Heinemann.

Calkins, L. (2011). A curricular plan for the writing workshop. *Portsmouth, NH*: Heinemann.

Camera, L. (2015). House will clear NCLB reauthorization by march, education leader says. http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2015/01/house_on_track_to_clear_nclb_r.html

Campbell, J. R., Voelkl, K. E., & Donahue, P. L. (1997). NAEP 1996 trends in academic progress. Achievement of US students in science, 1969 to 1996; mathematics, 1973 to 1996; reading, 1971 to 1996; writing, 1984 to 1996.

Casner-Lotto, J., & Barrington, L. (2006). *Are they really ready to work? employers' perspectives on the basic knowledge and applied skills of new entrants to the 21st century US workforce.* ERIC.

Cawelti, G. (2006). The side effects of NCLB. *Educational Leadership*, *64*(3), 64.

Cohen, S. (1976). The history of the history of American education, 1900-1976. *Harvard Educatonal Review*, *43*(3), 298–330.

College and Career Ready Performance Index. (n.d.). http://www.gadoe.org/CCRPI/Pages/default.aspx

Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, *19*(5), 2–14. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X019005002

Conrad, B. D., & Stone, C. (2015). Connecting the dots in preservice teacher education: Focusing on literacy instructional strategies to prepare teacher candidates for curriculum and certification challenges. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, *8*(4), 41–50.

Cooper, C., & Travers, C. (2012). *Teachers under pressure: Stress in the teaching profession*. London. Routledge.

Cox, S. E. (2014). *Perceptions and influences behind teaching practices: Do teachers teach as they were taught?* Brigham Young University-Provo.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, *39*(3), 124–130.

Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT). (n.d.). http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Pages/CRCT.aspx

Crocco, M. S., & Costigan, A. T. (2007). The narrowing of curriculum and pedagogy in the age of accountability urban educators speak out. *Urban Education*, *42*(6), 512–535.

De Leeuw, J. (2016). Rubrics and exemplars in writing assessment. In *Leadership of Assessment, Inclusion, and Learning* (89–110). New York. Springer.

De Silva, R. (2014). Rubrics for assessment: Their effects on ESL students' authentic task performance. In *Center for English language communication 4th symposium proceedings*.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2018). *The sage handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Diamond, M., & Gilbert, J. (2006). *6 tricks to student persuasive writing success: An easy guide for students, teachers & parents.* Atlanta, GA: Anyone Can Write Books.

Diamond, M., & Gilbert, J. (2005). *6 tricks to student story writing success: An easy guide for students, teachers & parents.* Atlanta, GA: Anyone Can Write Books.

Diamond, M., & Gilbert, J. (2007). *6 tricks to student informational writing success: An easy guide for students, teachers & parents.* Atlanta, GA: Anyone Can Write Books.

Emig, J. (1972). Writing is a mode of learning. *College Composition and Communication*, *28*(2), 122–128.

English Language Arts Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE) K-5. (2017). https://www.georgiastandards.org/Georgia-Standards/Pages/ELA-K-5.aspx

Farnan, N., & Dahl, K. (2003). Children's writing research and practice. *Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts*, *2*, 993–1007.

Feldman, R. S., & Zimbler, M. (2012). Improving college student success: The challenges and promise of developmental education. *McGraw-Hill Research Foundation.*

Fisher, R. (2006). Whose writing is it anyway? Issues of control in the teaching of writing. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *36*(2), 193–206. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057640600718513

Fisher, R. (2012). Teaching writing: a situated dynamic. *British Educational Research Journal*, *38*(2), 299-317.

Flower, L., & Hayes, J. R. (1981). A cognitive process theory of writing. *College Composition and Communication*, *32*(4), 365–387.

Flower, L., & R., H. J. (1981). A cognitive process theory of writing. *National Council of Teachers of English*, *32*(4), 365–387.

Fosnot, C. T., & Perry, R. S. (1996). Constructivism: A psychological theory of learning. *Constructivism: Theory, perspectives, and practice*, *2*, 8-33.

Freiberg, H. J. (2002). Essential skills for new teachers. *Educational Leadership*, *59*(6), 56–60.

Friedman, L. T. (2007). *The world is flat 3.0: A brief history of the twenty-first century* (3rd ed.). New York,NY: Farrar. Straus, and Giroux.

Gallagher, H. A., Arshan, N., & Woodworth, K. (2016). Impact evaluation of the national writing project's college-ready writing project in high poverty rural districts. *Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness*.

Gallagher, A., Woodworth, K., McCaffrey, T., Park, J., & Wang, H. (2014). Impact evaluation of national writing project professional development program. *SREE Fall 2014 Conference Abstract Template*.

Gallavan, N. P., Bowles, F. A., & Young, C. T. (2007). Learning to Write and Writing to Learn: Insights from Teacher Candidates. *Action in Teacher Education*, *29*(2), 61–69. https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2007.10463449

Gardner, D. P. (1983). A nation at risk. http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/detail?accno=ED226006

Garlid, S. W. (2014). Writing is not really something I do. *Afterschool Matters*, *20*, 47–52.

Georgia Milestones Assessment System. (2017). http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Pages/Georgia-Milestones-Assessment-System.aspx

Gewertz, C. (2013). Standards Worrying Teachers. *Education Week*, *32*(22), 1–12.

Gilbert, J., & Graham, S. (2010). Teaching writing to elementary students in grades 4–6: A national survey. *Source: The Elementary School Journal*, *110*(4), 494–518. https://doi.org/10.1086/651193

Given, L. M. (2008). *The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA Sage Publications.

Glasersfeld, E. von. (1987). Constructivism. *The Concise Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology and Behavioral Science*, *6*, 19–21.

Goodlad, J. I. (1990). *Teachers for our nation's schools*. Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 350 Sansome St., San Francisco, CA 94104.

Graham, S., Bollinger, A., Olson, C. B., D'Aoust, C., MacArthur, C., McCutchen, D., & Olinghouse, N. (2012a). Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers: A Practice Guide. NCEE 2012-4058. *What Works Clearinghouse*.

Graham, S., Capizzi, A., Harris, K. R., Hebert, M., & Morphy, P. (2014). Teaching writing to middle school students: A national survey. *Reading and Writing*, *27*(6), 1015–1042. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-013-9495-7

Graham, S., & Harris, K. R. (1997). It can be taught, but it does not develop naturally: Myths and realities in writing instruction. *School Psychology Review*. *26*(3), 414-424.

Graham, S., & Harris, K. R. (2005). Improving the writing performance of young struggling writers: Theoretical and programmatic research from the center on accelerating student learning. *The Journal of Special Education*, *39*, 19–33.

Graham, S., & Harris, K. R. (2015). Common Core State Standards and writing:

Introduction to the special issue. *The Elementary School Journal*, *115*(4), 457–463.

Graham, S., Harris, K. R., & Santangelo, T. (2015). Research-based writing practices and the common core: Meta-analysis and meta-synthesis. *The Elementary School Journal*, *11*(4), 498–522. https://doi.org/10.1086/681964

Graham, S., Hebert, M., & Harris, K. R. (2015). Formative assessment and writing: A meta-analysis. *The Elementary School Journal*, *115*(4), 523-547.

Graham, S., Hebert, M., Paige Sandbank, M., & Harris, K. R. (2016). Assessing the writing achievement of young struggling writers: Application of generalizability theory. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, *39*(2), 72-82.

Graham, S., & MacArthur, C. A. (2013). *Best practices in writing instruction*.New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Graham, S., McKeown, D., Kiuhara, S., & Harris, K. R. (2012b). A meta-analysis of writing instruction for students in the elementary grades. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *104*(4), 879–896. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029185

Graham, S., & Perin, D. (2007a). A meta-analysis of writing instruction for adolescent students. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *99*(3), 445–476. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.99.3.445

Graham, S., & Perin, D. (2007b). Writing next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high schools. *A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York, NY. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education*.

Graham, & Sandmel, K. (2011). The process writing approach: A meta-analysis. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *104*(6), 396–407. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2010.488703

Graves, D. (1975). An examination of the writing processes of seven year old children. *Research in the Teaching of English*, *9*(3), 227–241.

Graves, D. H. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Heinemann Educational Books, 4 Front St., Exeter, NH 03833.

Graves, D. (2004). What I've learned from teachers of writing. *Language Arts*, *82*(2), 88–94.

Great Schools. (n.d.). https://www.greatschools.org/

Green, E. (2014). *Building a better teacher: How teaching works (and how to teach it to everyone)*. New York, NY. WW Norton & Company.

Grisham, D. L., & Wolsey, T. D. (2011). Writing instruction for teacher candidates: Strengthening a weak curricular area. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, *50*, 348–364. https://doi.org/10.1080/19388071.2010.532581

Hall, A. H., & Axelrod, Y. (2014). I am kind of a good writer and kind of not: Examining students' writing attitudes. *Journal of Research in Education*, *24*(2), 34–50.

Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (1998). Exploring the principal's contribution to school effectiveness: 1980-1995. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *9*(2), 157–191.

Harris, K. R., & Alexander, P. A. (1998). Integrated, Constructivist Education: Challenge and Reality. *Educational Psychology Review*, *10*(2), 115–127. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022169018926

Harris, K. R., Graham, S., Friedlander, B., & Laud, L. (2013). Bring powerful writing strategies into your classroom!: Why and how. *Reading Teacher*, *66*(7), 538–542. https://doi.org/10.1002/TRTR.1156

Harrison, C., & Killion, J. (2007). Ten roles for teacher leaders. *Educational Leadership*, *65*(1), 74.

Hatch, J. A. (2002). A special section on personalized instruction accountability shovedown: Resisting the standards movement in early childhood education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *83*(6), 457–462.

Hawkins, L. K., & Razali, A. B. (2012). A tale of 3 P's–penmanship, product, and process: 100 years of elementary writing instruction. *Language Arts*, *89*(5), 305–317. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ehh&AN=75378469&site=ehost-live

Heinemann Dedicated to Teachers. (n.d.). https://www.heinemann.com/authors/430.aspx

Hillocks Jr, G. (1982). The interaction of instruction, teacher comment, and revision in teaching the composing process. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 261-278.

Hillocks, G. (2002). *The testing trap: How state writing assessments control learning*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Hillocks, G. (2017a). Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article: What Works in Teaching Composition: A Meta-analysis of Experimental Treatment Studies, *93*(1), 133–170.

Hillocks Jr, G. (1981). The responses of college freshmen to three modes of instruction. *American Journal of Education*, *89*(4), 373-395.

Hoy, A. W. (2000). Changes in teacher efficacy during the early years of teaching. In A*nnual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA*.

Hutchings, M. (2015). Write On! A Sociocultural Approach to Promoting Engagement and Motivation in Writing for Elementary Students (master's thesis). Univesity of Victoria, British Columbia.

Jardine, D. M. (2006). *Piaget and education primer* (7th ed.). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Jensen, J. M. (1984). *Composing and comprehending.* http://search.proquest.com/docview/63446365?accountid=14182

Jeynes, W. H. (2005). A meta-analysis of the relation of parental involvement to urban elementary school student academic achievement. *Urban Education*, *40*(3), 237–269.

Jonassen, D. (1999). Designing constructivist learning environments. *Instructional-Design Theories and Models, 2*, 215–239.

Jonassen, D. H. (2006). A constructivist's perspective on functional contextualism. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, *54*, 43–47. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-006-6493-3

Kaplan, J. S. (2008). The National Writing Project: Creating a Professional Learning Community That Supports the Teaching of Writing. *Theory Into Practice*, *47*(4), 336–344. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405840802329391

Kaplan, J. S., & Kaplan, J. S. (2008). The national writing project: Creating a professional learning community that supports the teaching of writing. *National Writing Project*, *47*(4), 336–344. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405840802329391

Kennedy, D. (2006). *Writing and using learning outcomes: A practical guide*. Ireland. University College Cork.

Kern, D., Amdre, W., Schilike, R., Barton, J., & McGuire, C. M. (2003). Less is more:

Preparing. *The Reading Teacher*, *56*(8), 816–826.

Kitzinger, J. (1994). The methodology of focus groups: The importance of interaction between research participants. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, *16*, 103–121.

Klein, A., & Camera, L. (2015). NCLB Rewrite Could Target Mandate on Annual Test. http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/01/09/nclb-rewrite-could-target-mandate-on-annual.html

Koster, M., Bouwer, R., & van den Bergh, H. (2017). Professional development of teachers in the implementation of a strategy-focused writing intervention program for elementary students. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *49*, 1–20.

Kovach, J. V., Miley, M., & Ramos, M. A. (2012). Using Online Studio Groups to Improve Writing Competency: A Pilot Study in a Quality Improvement Methods Course. *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education*, *10*(3), 363–387. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4609.2012.00349.x

Krueger, R. A. (1994). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. http://library.valdosta.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat01393a&AN=vsu.390531&site=eds-live&scope=site

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2014). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage publications.

Kumpulainen, K., Mikkola, A., & Jaatinen, A.M. (2014). The chronotopes of technology-mediated creative learning practices in an elementary school community. *Learning, Media and Technology*, *39*, 53–74.

Ladd, H. F. (2017). No Child Left Behind: A deeply flawed federal policy. *Journal of*

Policy Analysis and Management, *36*(2), 461–469.

Lear, J. L., Hodge, K. A., & Schulz, S. A. (2014). Talk to me!! Effective, efficient communication. *Journal for Research in Business Education*, *56*(2), 64–77. https://reddog.rmu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ehh&AN=115062850&site=eds-live&scope=site

Levin, J. (1993). Cultivating Writing in the Primary Grades by Developing Holistic and Reflective Teaching Strategies for Pre-Service Teachers. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED362902.pdf

Limbrick, L., Buchanan, P., Goodwin, M., & Schwarcz, H. (2010). Doing things differently: The outcomes of teachers researching their own practice in teaching writing. *Canadian Journal of Education*, *33*(4), 897–924.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry* (Vol. 75). Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage.

Lowry, J. E., & Berry, D. C. (2008). Using the teaching perspectives inventory and athletic education to improve teaching and learning strategies. *Athletic Training Educational Journal*, *98*(4), 33–35.

Mackenzie, N. (2011). From drawing to writing: What happens when you shift teaching priorities in the first six months of school? *The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, *34*(3), 322.

Magrath, C. P., Vice, A. A., Bristow, C., Faulkner, L. R., Garcia, C. a, Gee, E. G., … Hudelson, S. (2003). The neglected " R " the need for a writing revolution. *Writing*, (April). Available www.collegeboard.com

Maxwell, J. A. (1996). *Qualitative research design* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA.

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA.

May, G. L., Thompson, M. A., & Hebblethwaite, J. (2012). A Process for Assessing and Improving Business Writing at the MBA Level. *Business Communication Quarterly*, *75*(3), 252–270. https://doi.org/10.1177/1080569912441822

McCarthey, S. J. (2008). The impact of no child left behind on teachers' writing instruction. *Written Communication*, *25*(4), 462–505.

McLeod, S. (2015). Developmental psychology Jean Piaget [photograph]. https://www.simplypsychology.org/piaget.html

Meister, D. G., & Melnick, S. A. (2003). National new teacher study: Beginning teachers' concerns. *Action in Teacher Education*, *24*(4), 87–94. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ788428.pdf

Menken, K. (2006). Teaching to the test: How no child left behind impacts language policy, curriculum, and instruction for english language learners. *Bilingual Research Journal*, *30*(2), 521–546.

Merriam, S. B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis* (6th ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mission Statement. (n.d.). October 3, 2017, from http://www.ncte.org/mission

Mo, Y., Kopke, R. A., Hawkins, L. K., Troia, G. A., & Olinghouse, N. G. (2014). The neglected "r" in a time of common core. *Reading Teacher*, *67*(6), 445–453. https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1227

Morgan, D. (1997). *The focus group guidebook* (Vol. 1). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

publications.

Morgan, D. N., & Pytash, K. E. (2014). Preparing preservice teachers to review of the research literature. *English Education*, *47*(October), 6–32.

Murray, D. M. (1972). Teach writing as a process not a product, *71*(3), 18–21.

Myers, J., Scales, R. Q., Grisham, D. L., Wolsey, T. D., Dismuke, S., Smetana, L., … Martin, S. (2016). What about writing? A national exploratory study of writing instruction in teacher preparation programs. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, *55*(4), 309–330.

NACE. (2014). *National Association of colleges and employers (NACE)*. http://www.naceweb.org/surveys/job-outlook.aspx

NAEP. (2012). Writing 2011: National assessment of educational progress at grades 8 and 12. https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main2011/2012470.pdf.

National Center for Education Statistics. (1999). Report Card Highlights. *The Nation's Report Card: Writing 1998*.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2003). The Nations' Report Card Writing Highlights 2002. *The Nation's Report Card: Writing 2002*. https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard//pdf/main1998/1999464.pdf.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2007). The Nations' report card writing 2007. *The Nation's Report Card: Writing 2007*. http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2008468

National Center for Education Statistics. (2012). The Nation's Report Card: Writing 2011. *The Nation's Report Card: Writing 2011*. https://doi.org/NCES 2008-468

National Commission on Writing. (2006). *Writing and school reform.* New York, NY. The

College Board.

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices. (2010). Common core state standards for english language arts & literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects, 1–66. http://www.corestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/ELA_Standards.pdf

Oleson, A., & Hora, M. T. (2014). Teaching the way they were taught? Revisiting the sources of teaching knowledge and the role of prior experience in shaping faculty teaching practices. *Higher Education*, *68*(1), 29–45. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-013-9678-9

Pajares, F. (2003). Self-efficacy beliefs, motivation, and achievement in writing: A review of the literature. *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, *19*, 139–159. https://doi.org/10.1080/10573560390143085

Pajares, F. (2007). Empirical properties of a scale to assess writing self-efficacy in school contexts. *American Counseling Association*, *39*(January), 239–250.

Parnell, R., & Procter, L. (2011). Flexibility and placemaking for autonomy in learning. *Educational and Child Psychology*, *28*(1), 77–88. https://doi.org/10.1002/ace

Parr, J. M., & Limbrick, L. (2010). Contextualising practice: Hallmarks of effective teachers of writing. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *26*(3), 583–590.

Patton, M. (1990). *Purposeful sampling*. *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (Vol. 2). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Persky, H. R., Daane, M. C., & Jin, Y. (2003). The Nation's Report Card: Writing, 2002.

https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED476189.pdf

Philippakos, Z. A., & MacArthur, C. A. (2016). The effects of giving feedback on the persuasive writing of fourth-and fifth-grade students. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *51*(4), 419–433.

Piaget, J. (1955). The construction of reality in the child. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, *19*(1), 77–77. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0038817

Pinnell, G. S., & Fountas, I. C. (1998). *Word Matters: Teaching Phonics and Spelling in the Reading/Writing Classroom.* Westport, CT: Heinemann.

Porter, M. E., & Rivkin, J. W. (2012). The looming challenge to US competitiveness. *Harvard Business Review*, *90*(3), 54–61.

Poulson, L., Avramidis, E., Fox, R., Medwell, J., & Wray, D. (2001). The theoretical beliefs of effective teachers of literacy in primary schools: An exploratory study of orientations to reading and writing. *Research Papers in Education*, *16*(3), 271–292. https://doi.org/10.1080/02671520110058697

Powell, H. S. (2013). *Epistles of a writer: A case study of writing instruction in middle grades (Doctoral dissertation)*.

Pritchard, R. J., & Honeycutt, R. L. (2006). The process approach to writing instruction: Examining its effectiveness. *Handbook of Writing Research*, 275–290.

Pytash, K. E., Edmondson, E., & Tait, A. (2014). Using mentor texts for writing instruction in a high school economics class. *Social Studies Research and Practice*, *9*(1), 95–106.

Quible, Z. K., & Griffin, F. (2007). Are writing deficiencies creating a lost generation of business writers? *Journal of Education for Business*, *83*(1), 32–36. https://doi.org/6

Ray, A. B., Graham, S., Houston, J. D., & Harris, K. R. (2016). Teachers use of writing to support students' learning in middle school: A national survey in the United States. *Reading and Writing*, *29*(5), 1039–1068.

Regan, K., Evmenova, A. S., Good, K., Legget, A., Ahn, S. Y., Gafurov, B., & Mastropieri, M. (2018). Persuasive Writing With Mobile-Based Graphic Organizers in Inclusive Classrooms Across the Curriculum. *Journal of Special Education Technology*, *33*(1), 3–14.

Ritter, J. K. (2012). Modeling powerful social studies: Bridging theory and practice with preservice elementary teachers. *Social Studies*, *103*(3), 117–124. https://doi.org/10.1080/00377996.2011.596857

Rogers, L. A., & Graham, S. (2008). A meta-analysis of single subject design writing intervention research. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *100*(4), 879–906. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.100.4.879

Ryan, M. E., & Barton, G. (2014). The spatialized practices of teaching writing in Australian elementary schools: Diverse students shaping discoursal selves. *Research in the Teaching of English*, *48*(3), 303–328.

Saddler, B., Saddler, K., Befoorhooz, B., & Cuccio-Slichko, J. (2014). A national survey of revising practices in the primary classroom. *Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal*, *12*(2), 129–149.

Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*.Thousands Oaks, CA. Sage.

Sams, L. (2003). How to teach grammar analytical thinking, and writing: A method that works. *The English Journal*, *92*(3), 57–65.

Sanders-Reio, J., Alexander, P. A., Reio, T. G., & Newman, I. (2014). Do students' beliefs about writing relate to their writing self-efficacy, apprehension, and performance? *Learning and Instruction*, *33*, 1–11.

Schunk, D. H., & Mullen, C. A. (2012). Self-efficacy as an engaged learner. In *Handbook of research on student engagement* (pp. 219–235). New York, NY. Springer.

Schwartz, F. (1996). Why many new teachers are unprepared to teach in most New York City schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *78*(1), 82.

Schwarz, C. V, & Gwekwerere, Y. N. (2007). Using a guided inquiry and modeling instructional framework (EIMA) to support preservice K-8 science teaching. *Science Education*, *91*(1), 158–186.

Seah, L. H. (2016). Elementary teachers' perception of language issues in science classrooms. *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education*, *14*(6), 1059–1078.

Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research* (fouth). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Seidman, I., Rubin, H. J., Rubin, I. S., & Dilley, P. (2004). Interviews and the philosophy of qualitative research. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *75*(1), 127–132.

Seow, A. (2002). The writing process and process writing. *Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice*, Cambridge University Press, 315–320.

Shanahan, T. (2015). Common core state standards: A new role for writing. *The Elementary School Journal*, *115*(4), 464–479.

Simmerman, S., Harward, S., Pierce, L., Peterson, N., Morrison, T., Korth, B., Shumway, J. (2012). Elementary teachers' perceptions of process writing. *Literacy Research*

and Instruction, *51*(4), 292–307. https://doi.org/10.1080/19388071.2011.557764

Skaalvik, Ei. M., & Skaalvik, Si. (2014). Teacher self-efficacy and perceived autonomy: Relations with teacher engagement, job satisfaction, and emotional exhaustion. *Psychological Reports*, *114*(1), 68–77. https://doi.org/10.2466/14.02.PR0.114k14w0

Smart, K. L., Hicks, N., & Melton, J. (2013). Using problem-based scenarios to teach writing. *Business Communication Quarterly*, *76*(1), 72–81. https://doi.org/10.1177/1080569912466256

Snyder, J., & Bristol, T. J. (2015). Professional accountability for improving life, college, and career readiness. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *23*(16), 34. https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v23.2002

Snyders, C. S. B. (2014). I wish we could make books all day!: An observational study of kindergarten children during writing workshop. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *42*(6), 405–414. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-013-0625-2

Sperling, M., Appleman, D., Gilyard, K., & Freedman, S. (2011). Voice in the context of literacy studies. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *46*(1), 70–84. https://doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.46.1.4

Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Storch, N. (2005). Collaborative writing: Product, process, and students' reflections. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *14*(3), 153–173.

Strauss, V. (2015). Rewriting no child left behind: Competing views. http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2015/01/14/rewriting-no-child-left-behind-competing-views/

Street, C. (2003). Preservice teachers attitudes about writing and learning to teach

writing: Implications for teacher educators. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, *3*(3), 159–188.

Street, C., & Stang, K. (2009). In what ways do teacher education courses change teachers' self confidence as writers? *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 75–95. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23479190

Strohl, A., Schmertzing, L., & Schmertzing, R. (2014). Elementary teachers' experiences and perceptions of departmentalized instruction: A case study. *Journal of Case Studies in Education*, *6*, 1.

Sundeen, T. H. (2015). Writing instruction for adolescents in the shadow of the common core state standards. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *59*(2), 197–206. Retreived from: https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.444

The governor's office of student achievement. (n.d.). https://schoolgrades.georgia.gov/

The Institute of Education Sciences. (2012). Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers, 109. Retreieved from: http://www.readingrockets.org/sites/default/files/Teaching-Elementary-Students-to-Be-Effective-Writers.pdf

The NAEP Glossary of Terms. (n.d.). https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/glossary.aspx

Thornton, T. P. (1998). *Handwriting in America: A cultural history*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Tobin, R., & Tippett, C. D. (2014). Possibilities and potential barriers: Learning to plan for differentiated instruction in elementary science. *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education*, *12*(2), 423–443.

Tomlinson, C. A. (2014). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all*

learners. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Tompkins, G. E. (2013). Seven reasons why children should write stories. *Language Arts*, *59*(7), 718–721.

Totten, S. (2005). Writing to learn for preservice teachers. *The Quarterly*, *27*(2), 1–4.

Troia, G. A., & Graham, S. (2016). Common core writing and language standards and aligned state assessments: a national survey of teacher beliefs and attitudes. *Reading and Writing*, *29*(9), 1719–1743. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-016-9650-z

Troia, G. A., & Olinghouse, N. G. (2013). The Common Core State Standards and evidence-based educational practices: The case of writing. *School Psychology Review*, *42*(3), 343.

Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, A. W., & Hoy, W. K. (1998). Teacher efficacy: Its meaning and measure. *Review of Educational Research*, *68*(2), 202–248. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543068002202

Tschannen-Moran, & Johnson, D. (2011). Exploring literacy teachers' self-efficacy beliefs: Potential sources at play. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *27*(4), 751–761. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.12.005

Tschannen-Moran, M., & McMaster, P. (2009). Sources of self-efficacy: Four professional development formats and their relationship to self-efficacy and implementation of a new teaching strategy. *The Elementary School Journal*, *110*(2), 228–245. https://doi.org/10.1086/605771

Tyre, P. (2012). The writing revolution. *The Atlantic*. https://b.3cdn.net/nvps/766a2ce5c220f75955_8am6bt5ju.pdf

van Hartingsveldt, M. J., de Groot, I. J. M., Aarts, P. B. M., & Nijhuis-van der Sanden,

M. W. G. (2011). Standardized tests of handwriting readiness: A systematic review of the literature. *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology*, *53*(6), 506–515. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8749.2010.03895.

Vitali, F. (2016). Teaching with Stories as the Content and Context for Learning. *Global Education Review*, *3*(1).

Warren, S. J., Dondlinger, M. J., & Barab, S. A. (2008). A MUVE towards PBL writing: Effects of a digital learning environment designed to improve elementary student writing. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, *41*(1), 113-140.

Wiebe Berry, R. A. (2006). Inclusion, power, and community: Teachers and students interpret the language of community in an inclusion classroom. *American Educational Research Journal*, *43*(3), 489–529.

Wigglesworth, G., & Storch, N. (2012). What role for collaboration in writing and writing feedback. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *21*(4), 364–374.

Wilcox, K. C., Jeffery, J. V, & Gardner-Bixler, A. (2016). Writing to the Common Core: Teachers' responses to changes in standards and assessments for writing in elementary schools. *Reading and Writing*, *29*(5), 903–928.

Wiley, M. (2000). The popularity of formulaic writing (and why we need to resist). *The English Journal*, *90*(1), 61–67.

Wixson, K. K., Valencia, S. W., Murphy, S., & Phillips, G. W. (2013). A Study of NAEP Reading and Writing Frameworks and Assessments in Relation to the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts. *American Institutes for Research*.

Wolbers, K. A., Dostal, H. M., Graham, S., Cihak, D., Kilpatrick, J. R., & Rachel Saulsburry. (2015). The writing performance of elementary students receiving

strategic and interactive writing instruction. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, *20*(4), 385–398. https://doi.org/10.1093/deafed/env022

Wolfinger, N. H. (2002). On writing fieldnotes: collection strategies and background expectancies. *Qualitative Research*, *2*(1), 85–93.

Wood Ray, K. (2001). *The Writing Workshop: Working through the Har Parts (And They're All Hard Parts).* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English. https://doi.org/0-8141-1317-6

Yan, G. (2005). A process genre model for teaching writing. In *English Teaching Forum, 43,* 18–26.

Zainal, Z. (2017). Case study as a research method. *Journal Kemanusiaan*, *5*, 1–6.

Zepeda, S. J. (2014). *The instructional leader's guide to informal classroom observations*. London. Routledge.

Zuidema, L. A., & Fredricksen, J. E. (2016). Resources preservice teachers use to think about student writing, *51*, 12–36.

Zumbrunn, S., & Krause, K. (2012). Conversations with leaders: Principles of effective writing instruction. *Reading Teacher*, *65*(5), 346–353. https://doi.org/10.1002/TRTR.01053

Appendix A: IRB Approval

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
for the Protection of Human Research Participants
PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

PROTOCOL NUMBER:	**03610-2018**	**INVESTIGATOR:**	**Mr. Michael Todd**
		SUPERVISING FACULTY:	**Dr. William (Bill) Truby**
PROJECT TITLE:	***Improving Students' Writing Skills: Strategies and Practices of A Georgia Elementary School.***		

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **Exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under **Category 2**. Your research study may begin immediately (03.28.2018). If the nature of the research study changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before instituting any changes.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

☒ ***Should the nature of this approved research study change in a manner that the exemption criteria may no longer apply, the researcher must consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before implementing any changes. Please submit all revised documents to the IRB Administrator at irb@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your IRB.***

Elizabeth W. Olphie *03.28.2018*
Elizabeth W. Olphie, IRB Administrator Date

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.
Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-259-5045.

Revised: 06.02.16

Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol

Start your time by stating the guidelines for the focus group. The list of guidelines will be posted in the room that the focus group takes place (Krueger & Casey, 2014; D. Morgan, 1997).

1. You have the right to leave or to pass on any question. Being here is voluntary.
2. This is not a counseling session or support group.
3. The focus group will operate within the time parameters.
4. Keep the discussion that happens in this room confidential.
5. Everyone's ideas should be respected. Do not make judgments about what someone else says.
6. One person talks at a time.
7. If you need a break, please take one.
8. Everyone has the right to talk. I may ask someone who is talking a lot to give others a chance to speak their viewpoints.
9. There are no right or wrong answers.
10. Does anyone have any questions before we get started?

Make it clear that the researcher will be making notes throughout the focus group (Krueger, 1994).

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Table 3.1

Interview Questions	
K-12 education	8. Tell me about yourself. 9. Please tell me about your first experiences with writing as a student. a. Was that experience positive or negative? b. Overall, was writing enjoyable or negative. 10. Do any experiences come to mind when you think of writing and your k-12 education? a. Do you have any specific stories of writing at the elementary level that you would like to share? b. Do you have any specific stories of writing at the middle school level that you would like to share? c. Do you have any specific stories of writing at the high school level that you would like to share? 11. Can you remember any specific writing lessons from your days as a student? 12. Do you have any memories of working with a teacher on a piece of writing? 13. As you reflect on your K-12 experiences as a writer, do you have any teachers who stand out as good writing teachers? 14. Why do you believe they were good writing teachers?
Current Experiences	1. What is your philosophy of education? 2. When I say the word "writing," what does it mean to you? 3. How do you feel about yourself as a writing teacher? 4. Do you see any connection between your weaknesses/strengths as a student and things you struggle/successful with as an adult? 5. Tell me about how college prepared you to teach writing. 6. What should be the purpose of classroom writing instruction? 7. What is your background in writing instruction? a. What professional development, if any, have you received at your school regarding writing instruction? 8. In your opinion, what are the components of a good writing lesson? a. How many days a week do you teach writing?

b. How much time do you have to teach writing?
c. How often do you meet with students about their writing?

9. Do you think you teach writing well? How have you come to this opinion?
10. What guidance are teachers given with writing? (administration, instructional coach, district support) Describe it to me.
11. Are teachers told how to teach writing?
12. What type of evaluation do you typically use in the area of writing?
13. How have you used writing in your professional life?
14. Are there any strategies that your school uses school-wide?
    a. Do you decide how you teaching writing? (team meetings, individual preference, pacing guide, Georgia Standards of excellence)
    b. If so, what are its strengths and weaknesses of what you just described to me?
15. How does the school leadership know that students are receiving quality writing instruction from grade-level-to-grade-level?
16. Anything you would like to share that I haven't asked you?

Knowledge of Writing Instruction

1. Throughout your participation in this study, have your views on writing changed? If so, how?
2. What are the components of a good writing lesson?
3. How do you help a struggling writer?
4. How do you extend a good writer?
5. What classroom strategies have you found to be useful in teaching writing?
6. How did you locate or learn these strategies?
7. What is your biggest challenge in teaching writing?
    a. How do you try to address that challenge?
    b. How do you differentiate in a writing lesson?
8. Do you think you teach writing well? Why or why not?
9. How do your past experiences influence your teaching of writing?
10. How do the writing requirements on the Milestones Assessment effect your teaching of writing?
11. Do you feel the school is still focusing on Writing Across the Curriculum?
12. Has the school moved on to another needed area?
13. Anything you would like to share that I haven't asked you?

Current Experiences and Knowledge with Writing Instruction	1. Throughout your participation in this study, have your views on writing changed? If so, how? 2. What are the components of a good writing lesson? 3. How do you help a struggling writer? 4. How do you extend a good writer? 5. What classroom strategies have you found to be useful in teaching writing? 6. How did you locate or learn these strategies? 7. What is your biggest challenge in teaching writing? a. How do you try to address that challenge? b. How do you differentiate in a writing lesson? 8. Do you think you teach writing well? Why or why not? 9. How do your past experiences influence your teaching of writing? 10. How do the writing requirements on the Milestones Assessment effect your teaching of writing?

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Start your time by stating the guidelines for in-depth interviewing. A copy of the guidelines will be given to the candidate to review before starting the interview.

1. Maintain eye contact throughout the interview.
2. The researcher should listen more and talk less to ensure understanding from the participant.
3. Follow up on what the participant says by:
    a. ask questions when you don't understand
    b. ask to hear more about a particular subject of interest
    c. asking exploring questions and not probing questions
4. According to Seidman his two favorite approaches (allows for the participant to be put at ease by not asking a direct question):
    a. asked participants to talk as if they were someone else
    b. ask the participant to tell story
5. Asked participants to reconstruct and not to remember this allows for the researcher to ask more general questions, which in turn allows for the participants to answer the question fully.
6. As the researcher you want to limit your own interaction, this allows for the participant to be heard and understood.
7. As the interview is taking place you want to follow your hunches by asking follow-up questions.
8. Allow the interviewer to be okay with veering off your interview guide.
    a. Often being married to an interview guide creates an opportunity to manipulate their participants to responding to the questions.

9. Allowing for wait time and tolerate silence between you and your interviewee.

Appendix E: Variety of Instructional Methods

Teacher: Date of Observation:

Observer:

Class: Period of the Day:

Time of Observation: Start: End:

Total Time Spent in Observation:

Number of Students Present: Grade Level:

Topic of the Lesson:

Time	Instructional Method	Teacher Behavior	Student Activity

Appendix F: Survey Questions

Teacher Questionnaire

Projects Contacts Library Help

Survey Actions Distributions Data & Analysis Reports

Teacher Questionnaire

Demographics (Base/Universal) Block Options

Q1

You are being asked to participate in a research study entitled, "Improving Students' Writing Skills: Strategies and Practices of a Georgia Elementary School," which is being conducted by Michael R. Todd, and Dr. William Truby at Valdosta State University. The purpose of this study is to identify the strategies and practices used by teachers and identified rural Georgia elementary school resulting in student significantly improving their writing skills in meeting national writing standards as measured by the Georgia Milestones standardized test. This research study is anonymous. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, to stop responding any time, or skip questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age participate in the study. Your participation serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in the research project and your certification that you are 18 or older.

Questions regarding the purpose or the procedures of the research should be directed to Michael R. Dodd at mrtodd@valdosta.edu. This study has been exempted from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for taking the rights and the welfare of research participants. If you have any concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB administrator at 229 – 259 – 5045 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Q2 Thank you for answering the following questions.

Q3 Please list the grade level you teach.

Q4 Including the year, how many years have you been teaching? (Please type a number.)

Q5 What is your highest level of education?

- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Specialist degree
- Doctoral degree

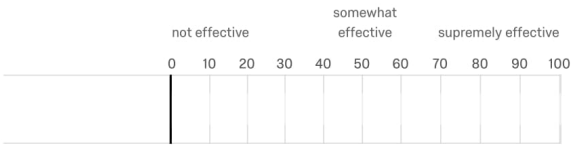
Q6 Were you employed at Midway Elementary during the 2015-2017 school years?

- Yes
- No

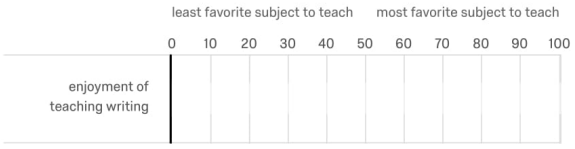
Q7 What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

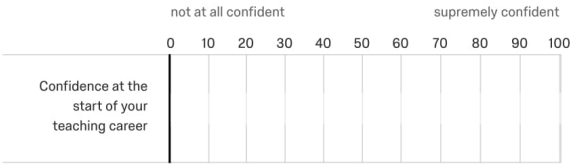
Q8 How effective do you believe you are as a writing teacher?



Q9 How much do you enjoy teaching writing?

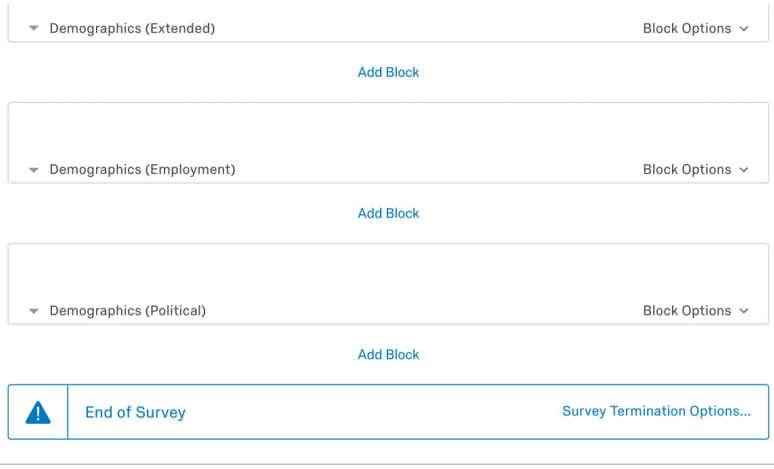


Q10 As you started your career as a teacher, how confident did you feel about teaching writing?



Q11 Does your school/county implement a standard writing program? (Yes or No) If yes, please list or describe.

Add Block



Qualtrics.com Contact Information Legal