Exploring Kindergarten Teachers' Self-Perceptions of Writing Instruction: An Appreciative Phenomenological Approach

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EXPLORING KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS’ SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF WRITING
INSTRUCTION: AN APPRECIATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

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Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Educational Policy, Planning, and Leadership

by

Elizabeth Auguste

March 2018
EXPLORING KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS’ SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF WRITING INSTRUCTION: AN APPRECIATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

by

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Approved March 2018

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Abstract

Current data point to the need for more research on writing instruction. The latest National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results showed that 73% of students in Grade 8 and Grade 12 scored basic or below on writing assessments, a trend reflected in college students’ writing. These data co-exist with research that reported teachers’ low self-efficacy with writing instruction. The most effective way to address these troubling statistics is to take a proactive approach that looks at writing instruction from its genesis—kindergarten. This post-intentional phenomenological study (Vagle, 2014) explored two aspects of kindergarten teachers’ self-perceptions of writing instruction (SPWI)—self-efficacy and outcome expectancy, constructs in Bandura’s (1997) Social Cognitive Theory. Twelve teachers from 11 schools across a suburban school district in Virginia participated in the study. The lens of Appreciative Inquiry during data gathering, analysis, and reporting engendered a valuation of teachers’ lived experiences, and the term, Appreciative Phenomenology, was used to describe this strengths-based approach to research. The benefits of this approach were evidenced in the rich, thick, and nuanced tentative manifestations of the phenomenon that emerged from the data. Specifically, kindergarten teachers’ SPWI were largely influenced by: students’ progress, kindergarten readiness, district and building supports, opportunities for professional development, and teaching across classroom instructional groupings. Relative to these findings, recommendations for national, state, and district leaders are included.

Keywords: self-efficacy, outcome expectancy, appreciative phenomenology, kindergarten, writing
KEY TERMS

*Intentional Relations*: Intentional relations signify how humans make meaning, in conscious and subconscious ways, of a phenomenon as it becomes manifest in its unique contexts.

*Movements Through*: The phrase represents a post-intentional philosophical understanding of intentional relations with phenomenon as tentative, shifting, and partial—always in a state of being shaped—in new and changing contexts.

*Outcome Expectancy*: Outcome expectancy is a judgment of the likely consequences of a course of action (Bandura, 1997).

*Phenomenon*: A phenomenon is described as something that becomes manifest or appears through the active nature of living in the world (Heidegger, 1962/2008).

*Self-Efficacy*: Self-efficacy is confidence or belief in one’s ability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments in a specific context (Bandura, 1997).

*Self-perceptions of writing instruction (SPWI)*: Self-perceptions of writing instruction are the combined influence of self-efficacy and outcome expectancy on how teachers make meaning of their writing instruction.

*Tentative manifestations*: Tentative manifestations are how we come to understand phenomenon. The understandings are tentative in that they are temporally interpreted based on contexts. Phenomenon is fluid and shifting—not represented by an “essence”—because contexts change (Vagle, 2014).
Theoretical orientation to writing: This construct represents the assumptions and beliefs that teachers hold about teaching writing and about how students learn to write (Graham, Harris, MacArthur, & Fink, 2002)

Writing Instructional Outcome Expectancy (WIOE): WIOE describes a teacher’s perception of the likely outcome of self-satisfaction if writing is taught at anticipated levels.

Writing Instructional Self-Efficacy (WISE): WISE refers to a teacher’s perception of confidence in his or her ability to teach the compositional (e.g., idea development, writing for a purpose) and conventional (e.g., spelling, punctuation, handwriting) skills of early writing
EXPLORING KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS’ SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF WRITING INSTRUCTION: AN APPRECIATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

A good ending is far more likely when there is a good beginning.

—Teale, Hoffman, & Paciga, 2014, p. 185

The artistry inherent in putting thoughts to words in a way that engages, enlightens, captures, and transports a reader is a skill that empowers. This artistry is not developed and honed without conscious and expert guidance, nor without authentic and frequent practice. It is no wonder, then, that recent research has underscored the importance of a good beginning to writing instruction and its significant influence on students’ continued competence and engagement with writing (Al-Bataineh, Holmes, Jerich, & Williams, 2010; Calkins, 2011; Kim, Al Otaiba, & Wanzek, 2015; K. W. Ray & Glover, 2008; Ritchey, Coker, & Jackson, 2015). A child’s formal introduction to the power of the written word holds a breadth and depth of influence spanning corporate observations that writing competency is critical to career readiness in a technological society (Middleton, 2011; National Commission on Writing, 2004) to poetic observations about the ability of good writing to change the world (Fox, 1993). This span of influence becomes even more evident when considering the reciprocal relationship between early writing and reading development, the impact of literacy on cross-content academic performance, and the avenue for self-expression that writing affords (Atwell, 1998;
Diamond, Gerde, & Powell, 2008; Graham, Harris, & Santangelo, 2015; Graham & Hebert, 2011; Hall, Simpson, Guo, & Wang, 2015; Pondiscio, 2015; Puranik, Al Otaiba, Sidler, & Greulich, 2014). Despite these significant benefits, early writing instruction has historically received little attention in the literature.

Within recent years, however, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers have acknowledged the need for a stronger research base on effective writing instruction, especially as it applies to authentic and effective instructional practices in kindergarten classrooms (K. Brown & Martino, 2014; Korth et al., 2017; Kramer-Vida, Levitt, & Kelly, 2012; Puranik et al., 2014; Roberts & Wibbens, 2010; vanNess, Murnen, & Bertelsen, 2013; Watanabe & Hall-Kenyon, 2011). Writing in kindergarten is unique as it is usually at this stage of development that a child’s writing potential is extremely vulnerable and can either be realized and nurtured or innocuously quelled. The role kindergarten teachers play in cultivating and validating the thoughts, ideas, and “coming-to-be” of the young minds they touch daily highlights the value of the teacher and the value to the student of this good beginning to writing instruction that Teale and colleagues (2014) advocated for.

A taken-for-granted assumption is that researchers, practitioners, and policymakers all have the same definition of what writing instruction entails. To ensure clarity, however, I adopted P. Harris, McKenzie, Fitzsimmons, and Turbill’s (2003) definition of writing as “encoding and composing meaning into written text in order to achieve particular purposes” (p. 15). This blending of encoding and composing meaning aligned with Hayes and Flower’s (1980) seminal work that described early writing instruction as equal part instruction of conventions (the mechanics) and equal part
instruction on composition (the meaning). Supporting students’ development of both processes is necessary for a literate workforce and for nurturing artistry that has the potential to change the world. Early writing instruction must be positioned as a central element of educational endeavors as, more than any other academic pursuit, writing allows an appreciation for, and valuation of, students’ lived stories, intellect, opinions, and voice (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Roberts & Wibbens, 2010). Supporting the genesis of these processes for our most vulnerable population should be a societal priority.

**Statement of the Problem**

Though a clear argument exists for increased research on early writing, historically, a national focus on early reading instruction has significantly out-paced research on early writing instruction (National Commission on Writing, 2003, 2006). Of the three historically foundational R’s—reading, writing, and arithmetic—writing has been appropriately dubbed the Neglected R (National Commission on Writing, 2003). As a result, many elementary teachers have expressed a lack of confidence about their ability to teach writing (Al-Bataineh et al., 2010; Brindle, Graham, Harris, & Hebert, 2016; Galligan, 2011; Gilbert & Graham, 2010). This lack is evidenced by studies documenting significant variance in teachers’ pedagogical knowledge about writing instruction (Korth et al., 2017; A. Ray, Graham, Houston, & Harris, 2016; Ritchey et al., 2015), time spent on writing instruction (Puranik et al., 2014), and adherence to any formal writing curriculum (Cutler & Graham, 2008). A meta-analysis of writing research conducted from 1999 to 2004 (Juzwik et al., 2006) showed that only 5% of writing studies targeted elementary students, a trend still evident more than a decade later (Graham et al., 2015; Puranik et al., 2014; Ritchey et al., 2015). This paucity of research becomes even more
pronounced when looking at studies specifically focused on kindergarten writing instruction (Auguste, 2018; Puranik et al., 2014).

While national policy has recognized the critical nature of EBP for reading development in kindergarten (e.g., the Reading First legislation, implemented as part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001), educational reform initiatives have largely ignored emergent writing. This research gap is problematic for kindergarten teachers as it co-occurs with a dramatically changing and amorphous landscape of writing instructional expectations in kindergarten classrooms. The 2010 Common Core State Standards’ (CCSS) recommendations for kindergarten writing curriculum (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers [NGA CCSSO], 2010) were particularly influential in this ever-shifting landscape, as they were the first formalized national recommendations for kindergarten writing (see Appendix A). Though the CCSS prompted necessary national conversations about the “what” of kindergarten writing instruction (Graham & Harris, 2015; Graham et al., 2015), these standards also became part of a larger, ongoing, national discourse on the proliferation of neoliberal market-based, assessment-driven markers of performance for both students and teachers (Butler, 2014; Goodman, 2014; Lewis & Young, 2013; McDonald, 2013). Specific to kindergarten, intense debates centered around what many envisioned as a dichotomized philosophical shift away from play-based, developmentally appropriate instruction in kindergarten to a formalized, academically-intense curriculum (see Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016; Carlsson-Paige, McLaughlin, & Almon, 2015; Graue, 2009; Heitin, 2015; Richards & Han, 2015; Russell, 2011; Scanlan, 2017). This conflicted environment that kindergarten teachers are teaching through becomes even more
complicated as, beyond discussions of the “what” of writing instruction in kindergarten, many local education agencies have yet to adequately address the question of “how” (Al-Bataineh et al., 2010; Graham et al., 2015). Teale and colleagues (2014) identified this as a curriculum gap evidenced by “the absence or insufficiency of attention to certain curricular elements critical for continued success in reading or writing” (p. 181). The complex melding of both a research gap and a curricular gap is significant as it influences the shaping of teachers’ self-perceptions of their ability to teach writing to emergent literacy learners. This influence ripples to touch kindergarteners’ development of writing competencies and love of creating meaning through the written word.

**Significance of the Problem**

Teale and colleagues’ (2014) observations about the symbiotic relationship between a good beginning and a good ending to writing development serves as a cautionary reminder for all practitioners in the elementary-to-college educational pipeline. Effective writing instruction in kindergarten cannot be perceived as just an elementary pedagogical problem. National data on writing competencies for grades eight through college expose a literacy crisis facing our country and underscore the critical nature of a good start to writing instruction (Achieve, 2005; Graham & Perin, 2007).

Based on data from the U.S. Department of Education’s (DOE) 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress for Grades 8 and 12, only 27% of students performed at or above the proficient level in writing (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012). In addition, studies conducted with college-aged students highlighted the significant number of college freshmen enrolled in remedial writing courses (e.g., Bahr, 2012; Brock, 2010; Hassel & Giordano, 2015). Using data from
1999-2000, NCES reported that 68% of degree-granting two and four year institutions offered remedial courses in writing, more than the 56% that offered remedial classes in reading but slightly less than the 71% offering math. Twenty-eight percent of first-year students were enrolled in remedial courses (NCES, 2003).

The 2013 NCES report did not distinguish among writing, reading, or math, but reported one in five first-year undergraduate students self-reported enrollment in a remedial course (NCES, 2013), and the 2016 report showed this increased to one in three students (NCES, 2016). NCES, however, found students under-reported their enrollment in remedial courses, so the researchers also analyzed students’ academic transcripts. They found that instead of the self-reported 33% of first-time 2003-2004 beginning students taking at least one remedial course, the actual number was 50%. In a study conducted by Achieve (2005), college professors claimed that one in every two high school graduates was not ready for college-level writing. These data do not imply a causal relationship between college performance and kindergarten instruction. The implication points to the critical need for informed analyses of writing instruction from kindergarten through college.

This study focused the analysis at the beginning of a child’s formal education—kindergarten. The purpose of this post-intentional phenomenological study was to uncover how kindergarten teachers make meaning of their movements through self-perceptions of writing instruction (SPWI). Teachers’ SPWI are future-focused and indicative of how equipped they feel to provide instruction that supports early literacy acquisition through the processes and products of writing. The philosophical concept of *movements through* is a foundational understanding for this study, signifying that humans
make meaning of phenomenon in ways that are tentative, shifting, and partial—always in a state of being shaped—in their unique contexts. This way of seeing and understanding acknowledged that the kindergarten teachers participating in this study graced us with unique glimpses of how their SPWI take shape in their present lifeworld. These glimpses provided needed insight on how best to support our educators and empower our students.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study focused on two aspects of self-perception—self-efficacy and outcome expectancy. Both self-efficacy and outcome expectancy are constructs embedded in Bandura’s (1986) Social-Cognitive Theory (SCT). Social-cognitive theorists propose that humans make meaning through social processes and conceptualize human action as simultaneously proactive and reactive, and reflective as well as vulnerable to conditioning. These distinctions of SCT make explicit the ontological assumptions that human actions are guided by agency and influenced by context. For this study, then, the term *self-perceptions of writing instruction* represented the combined influence of self-efficacy and outcome-expectancy on how teachers make meaning of their writing instruction. These perceptions are formed through social experiences, changeable through teachers’ actions, though partially constrained by contextual considerations. The following section will briefly explore these influential aspects of teachers’ SPWI.

**Self-Efficacy**

Bandura (1997) referred to perceived self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s ability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). Self-efficacy is described as a future-oriented, socially impacted, cognitive process that is domain-specific. Bandura aptly coined the term *instructional self-efficacy* to demonstrate
that an individual could feel highly self-efficacious in their ability to carry out an upcoming task (e.g., administrative) but feel inefficacious in carrying out another (e.g., instructional). Even with an instructional task, a teacher may feel self-efficacious about their ability to teach math but not science, or reading but not writing. An even more nuanced understanding is that self-efficacy can uncover distinctions between knowledge and ability. For example, a kindergarten teacher may feel very confident in their knowledge about the tasks and structures of writing, the developmental aspects of writing, and/or the purposes for writing, but feel much less confident about their ability, in the day-to-day classroom setting, to transmit that information to students effectively. I have coined the term writing instructional self-efficacy (WISE) to refer to teachers’ instructional self-efficacy in the content area of writing, defined as a teacher’s perceptions of confidence in his or her ability to teach the compositional (e.g., idea development, writing for a purpose) and conventional (e.g., spelling, punctuation, handwriting) skills of early writing.

**Outcome Expectancy**

While self-efficacy is indicative of one’s judgment of ability to organize and perform a task, outcome expectancy is defined as “a judgment of the likely consequences such performances will produce” (Bandura, 1997, p. 21). Bandura categorized the consequences of performance as physical (e.g., pleasure/pain), social (e.g., interest/disinterest), or self-evaluative (e.g., satisfaction/dissatisfaction). This study focused on the self-evaluative dimension of outcome expectancy specific to teachers’ writing instruction. Bandura explained that both perceived ability and self-satisfaction/dissatisfaction are distinctive, differentiated, and strong mediators of a
person’s intrinsic interest in a task. An individual may believe that a particular course of action will produce high levels of satisfaction, but may not follow that course of action if questioning his or her ability to execute the necessary activities. In another scenario specific to instruction, a teacher may believe he or she is highly self-efficacious in teaching a skill, but experience dissatisfaction with the outcome of his or her instruction. In this study, the term writing instructional outcome-expectancy (WIOE) referred to a teacher’s anticipation of the likely outcome of self-satisfaction produced from meeting his or her goals for writing instruction. Previous studies have distinguished domain-specific instructional outcome expectancy when applied to mathematics (see the instrument developed by Enochs, Smith, & Huinker, 2000) and culturally responsive teaching (see the instrument designed by Siwatu, 2007). This study sought to understand the specific domain of kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of writing instruction.

These two aspects of self-perception—self-efficacy and outcome expectancy—have the potential for providing rich and thick descriptions of kindergarten teachers’ movements through writing instruction.

**Research Question**

An understanding of teachers’ movements through self-perceptions of writing instruction is important as it can provide access to teachers’ perceptions of self-identified strengths and areas of needed support. This can then facilitate informed conversations for policymakers, curriculum developers, and providers of professional development for better framing their efforts to structure pedagogical support for kindergarten teachers. The research question that guided this post-intentional phenomenological study was:

How might kindergarten teachers’ movements through self-perceptions of writing
instruction take shape as they teach in their unique classroom contexts? By structuring the “asking” in this way, I hoped to loosen a priori boundaries of self-efficacy and outcome-expectancy that can frame the telling and, instead, focus the inquiry on how intentional relations with the phenomenon might take shape in ways that were unique to this study’s participants. Vagle’s (2014) seminal work on post-intentional phenomenology suggested constructing secondary questions to further clarify and focus the primary question. For this study, the research sub-questions (RSQ) were: (a) What experiences shape kindergarten teachers’ self-efficacy of writing instruction? (b) How do kindergarten teachers respond to their perceptions of students’ engagement with learning to write?, and (c) What does it mean for kindergarten teachers to experience self-satisfaction in the pursuit of instructional goals for writing?
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

*Writing allows children to see that those little marks on the page will be a source of joy and laughter, friendship, and power.*

—Lucy Calkins, 2011, p. 2

The literature review that guided this study provided a telescopic lens for understanding how kindergarten teachers’ movements through self-perceptions of writing instruction (SPWI) might take shape in their unique contexts. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) argued that a good literature review is not just a retelling or summary of extant ideas and findings but also allows the reader to critically analyze, make connections, and draw conclusions. This literature review, then, provides a way to critically look at what we have traditionally looked through (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nyström, 2008)—the driving purpose of phenomenological research.

To facilitate this targeted focus, it was necessary to unpack the concept of *movements through self-perceptions of writing instruction.* Specifically, what was self-perception and how did we observe it? What was this notion of *movements through?*, and what were the contexts within which self-perceptions take shape? With that end in mind, the purpose of this literature review was three-fold:

1. to make the construct of *self-perception* more concrete or tangible through a more in-depth exploration of the theoretical framework guiding this study,
2. to describe the philosophical framework underpinning the concept of
movements through, and

3. to critically analyze the unique contexts in which participants’ movements through SPWI are continuously being shaped.

Analyzing and connecting these three major literature strands can provide a unique glimpse into the lifeworld of kindergarten teachers’ writing instruction. This temporally bound glimpse can help support teachers’ efforts in allowing children to understand that writing is a powerful tool that can bring joy, create laughter, and forge lasting friendships.

Theoretical Exploration of the Literature

As briefly discussed in Chapter 1, the constructs of self-efficacy and outcome-expectancy, embedded in Bandura’s (1977) social-cognitive theory, are the two aspects of teachers’ self-perceptions this study sought to explore. Social-cognitive theorists make explicit the ontological understanding that humans make meaning in social contexts and take action guided by agency and mediated by context (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). These distinctions were important to the cohesiveness of this study, as the social nature of meaning is an epistemological thread that connects all the frameworks used to get to this movement through SPWI.

In addition, an inherent assumption is that this study can be impactful as teachers are agentic and can recalibrate, restructure, or reinforce instructional practices to improve their pedagogy. The reality of context, however, supported an understanding that these agentic changes are constrained by national, state, and district requirements articulated through standards and curriculum. Bandura (1997) clarified this dualism well by explaining that beliefs of self-efficacy and outcome expectancy are best understood in the
context of social systems. He stated, “The structural features of social systems that are especially germane concern the opportunities they provide and the constraints they impose” (p. 20). Ultimately, how teachers make meaning of their understandings of agency, opportunities, and constraints filter through their perceptions of self-efficacy and outcome expectancy and influence day-to-day decisions on how academic activities will be structured in their classrooms.

M. Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, and Hoy (1998) conceptualized the distinction between the constructs of self-efficacy and outcome expectancy well and explained:

The efficacy question is, Do I have the ability to organize and execute the actions necessary to accomplish a specific task at a desired level? The outcome question is, If I accomplish the task at that level, what are the likely consequences? (p. 210)

Specific to this study, writing instructional self-efficacy (WISE) described a teacher’s perception of confidence in his or her ability to teach the compositional (e.g., idea development, writing for a purpose) and conventional (e.g., spelling, punctuation, handwriting) skills of early writing. Writing instructional outcome-expectancy (WIOE) described a teacher’s perception of the likely outcome of self-satisfaction if writing is taught at anticipated levels.

Bandura (1986, 1997) stressed that self-efficacy and outcome-expectancy are differentiated but synergistic. He emphasized that, in this synergistic relationship, most of the variance in expected outcomes is accounted for by self-efficacy beliefs, limiting the stand-alone predictive power of outcome expectancy. These two distinctions made for a nuanced exploration of teachers’ self-perceptions and provided the rationale for exploring
the joint influence of both constructs. Consider a scenario in which a kindergarten teacher believes that teaching compositional skills and idea development will produce high levels of self-satisfaction, but plans lessons focused on spacing, punctuation, and neatness because she questions her ability to structure the content of lessons focused on composition. Her low self-efficacy beliefs overshadowed high outcome expectancies in her decision-making process. As the following section will make clear, exploring both constructs provided concrete and tangible ways to “get to” a well-rounded understanding of how kindergarten teachers’ make meaning of their decisions for writing instruction.

**Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy is future oriented, domain specific, and can differ in magnitude and strength (Bandura, 1977, 1997). This construct refers to a person’s belief about his or her ability to perform future actions in a specific task and is layered with an understanding of the important distinction between actual and perceived ability. Self-efficacy is indicative of a person’s perceived ability and not actual ability, as magnitude and/or strength of ability may not always align with a person’s perception of the same. Bandura (1977, 1997) explained that magnitude takes into consideration the perceived difficulty of a task, whereas strength is indicative of the level of certainty of ability. For example, a person may perceive that a task is very difficult (magnitude) and therefore feel very uncertain (strength) he or she can accomplish the task, or perceive that a task is not at all difficult (magnitude) and feel sure (strength) about his or her ability to accomplish the task. As a result, self-efficacy beliefs lead a person to designate a task as attainable or futile, influence his or her decision to attempt a task based on that designation, and mediate the amount of effort expended to accomplish the task (Bandura, 1997). The following section
will explore the literature on the sources of self-efficacy and then look specifically at how these apply to teachers in their lifeworld of kindergarten writing instruction.

**Sources of self-efficacy.** Bandura (1977, 1997) explained that four principal sources of information shape self-efficacy beliefs: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. Mastery experiences are the most influential source of information. When someone feels he or she has successfully completed a task in the past, it builds a robust belief in ability to complete that task in the future. Vicarious experiences are comparative judgments about capability based on observations of others performing a similar task, especially when a peer models the task. Verbal persuasion, or feedback, has the greatest influence when (a) the feedback is perceived as realistic, (b) when the person receiving the encouragement already has mastery experiences as referents, and (c) when the feedback originated from an expert(s) deemed credible, prestigious, and trustworthy (Bandura, 1997; M. Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Last, physiological states directly influence stress reactions, strength or stamina, and moods, and can therefore be self-fulfilling. For example, someone highly stressed in a situation may have perceptions of inefficacy that, in turn, lower motivation to persist in that activity and, ultimately, lower the likelihood that the person’s actions will result in a mastery experience (Bandura, 1997). This construct is especially pertinent to teachers, evidenced in the prevalence of international research on teacher stress, burnout, and attrition (e.g., Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014; Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Steca, 2003; Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Fisher, 2011; Heitin, 2012; Richards, 2012; Sass, Seal, & Martin, 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Wang, Hall, & Rahimi, 2015).
**Teacher self-efficacy.** M. Tschannen-Moran and colleagues (1998) conducted seminal research on how Bandura’s (1977) four sources of information on self-efficacy apply specifically to teachers. They defined teacher self-efficacy as “the teacher’s belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context” (M. Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, p. 233). Teachers with perceptions of high self-efficacy operate on the belief that all students are teachable and have confidence in their training or experience to develop strategies that can help students overcome obstacles to learning (M. Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Teacher self-efficacy has been researched expansively in the United States and internationally (e.g., Bellibas & Liu, 2017; Künsting, Neuber, & Lipowsky, 2016; Lee, Walkowiak, & Nietfeld, 2017; Shoulders & Krei, 2015; Zee & Koomen, 2016), and is an especially potent construct because of its reliable predictive power for student achievement (Pajares, 1996, 2003). M. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) developed a scale to measure teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs and found that beliefs about instructional strategies, the ability to engage students, and classroom management skills are strong mediators of perceptions of self-efficacy.

**Self-efficacy and instructional strategies.** In order to answer the first research sub-question—What experiences shape kindergarten teachers’ self-efficacy of writing instruction?—it is important to critically examine the limited amount of literature on WISE. This is an especially important construct for elementary teachers as they teach across many content areas. For example, a teacher may experience high self-efficacy for math instruction, but low self-efficacy for writing instruction. In addition, a teacher may
feel highly self-efficacious about writing content-knowledge but experience simultaneous feelings of inefficacy about his or her ability to apply instructional strategies to teach the content, an instructional dissonance between knowledge and ability often reported by preservice teachers (see Helfrich & Clark, 2016; Lemon & Garvis, 2016). Based on P. Harris and colleagues’ (2003) definition of writing given earlier, a further parsing of this concept of self-efficacy for teaching writing can uncover high self-efficacy for teaching the mechanics of emergent writing (e.g., punctuation, handwriting, spacing; spelling) coexisting with low self-efficacy for teaching the compositional skills of emergent writing (e.g., developing ideas, writing for a purpose; storytelling).

Graham, Harris, Fink, and MacArthur (2001) developed a teacher writing orientation scale (TWOS) that addressed teachers’ self-efficacy of writing instruction. They studied teachers in first through third grade and found significant correlations between teachers’ level of self-efficacy and the use of specific instructional strategies. The teachers with higher self-efficacy beliefs (a) spent more time on writing instruction focused on both composition and mechanics, and (b) placed a greater emphasis on natural and incidental learning (as opposed to an emphasis on correctness). More than a decade later, Ritchey and colleagues (2015) replicated the TWOS with first through third grade teachers and found that many of their hypotheses about teachers’ instructional practices were not confirmed when trying to replicate Graham and colleagues’ (2001) study. Interestingly, Ritchey and colleagues (2015) cited the possibility that mediating contextual factors—teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs, changes in curricular expectations, and the influence of high-stakes assessments— influenced instructional strategy choices.
These findings aligned with Al-Bataineh and colleagues’ (2010) study in which teachers of first through eighth grade reported insufficient training and inconsistent guidelines for teaching writing as influencing their perceptions of ineffectiveness to teach writing. Brindle and colleagues (2016) conducted a national survey with 1000 first through fourth grade teachers and found that, of the 19 evidence-based writing practices surveyed, teachers self-reported infrequent use of almost one-half of these practices during instruction. Additionally, teachers rated their preparation to teach writing lower than their preparation to teach reading, math, science, and social studies, with 76% reporting that they did not take any course in college that focused just on writing instruction.

One of the few studies conducted in kindergarten classrooms clearly demonstrated this pedagogical gap in writing instructional practices. Puranik and colleagues (2014) found large differences across classrooms for time teachers spent on writing instruction and for time students spent writing. In addition, they found that of a 90-minute language arts block, the average time students spent on writing was 6.1 minutes in the fall and 10.5 minutes in the winter, and the instructional focus was mostly on handwriting. When Cutler and Graham (2008) researched writing in first through third grade classrooms, the authors reported an instructional focus on grammar, usage, and mechanics. These findings demonstrate the critical need for further research on emergent writing.

**Self-efficacy, student engagement, and classroom management.** The need for further research on teacher self-efficacy for writing instruction is especially pertinent considering the influence of teacher self-efficacy beliefs on student engagement and achievement. Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) wrote a much-cited synthesis of
seminal research on student engagement. The authors conceptualized student engagement as a meta-construct with multi-dimensional influences across three domains: (a) behavioral domain—level of active participation, (b) emotional domain—positive and negative affective reactions, and (c) cognitive domain—level of effort exerted. Bandura (1997) spoke directly to a teachers’ responsibility to attend to all domains of engagement and argued that good instruction should not only develop technical skill and knowledge but should also promote students’ intrinsic interest in, and enjoyment of, subject matter by instilling “a liking for what is taught” (p. 219).

In this current study, teachers’ perceptions of student engagement (the interconnectedness of behavior, emotion, and cognition) served as the vehicle for uncovering answers to the second research sub-question—How do kindergarten teachers respond to their perceptions of students’ engagement with learning to write? It is important to note that this present study did not seek to explore instructional strategies or classroom management techniques for engaging students during writing instruction. The inquiry focused on how teachers responded to their perceptions of students’ engagement with their instruction.

Though kindergarten teachers have cited students’ engagement with writing as an important instructional goal (Nolen, 2001), there is a paucity of literature on how students’ engagement with writing affects teachers’ self-perceptions of their instruction. Cahnmann-Taylor and Preston (2008) conducted an after-school writing project with bilingual participants ranging in age from 4-48. The authors directly linked participants’ engagement with poetry writing and the sharing-out process to teachers’ own experienced pleasure and engagement with the teaching process. This present study sought to
understand how kindergarten teachers’ responses to students’ engagement during writing was shaping their SPWI.

Unfortunately, research focused on kindergarten teachers’ perceptions about their classroom management techniques during writing instruction is virtually non-existent. By asking teachers to think about student engagement during writing instruction, however, the behavioral domain of engagement can be a way for teachers to address their perceptions of this mediator of self-efficacy.

**Self-efficacy and change.** Though research shows that self-efficacy beliefs are relatively stable once formed, beliefs are vulnerable to change in the wake of a shock of some kind that shakes teachers’ established beliefs in their capabilities (Bandura, 1997; M. Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). M. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) suggested, and encouraged, future research on exploring and understanding the following:

What kinds of challenges or changes are strong enough to provoke a reexamination of established efficacy beliefs? …To what extent would a change in grade level or curriculum generate such a reexamination? How much does a change in context…arouse a reassessment? (p. 802)

One such impact that qualifies as a shock to the system is a change in instructional expectations (Gregoire, 2003; Landon-Hays, 2012; Ross & Bruce, 2007; M. Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998; M. Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). Doll (2008), a curriculum theorist who studied Chaos Theory, stated that curricular changes can be small but extremely impactful, and can be metaphorically viewed as “a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil causing a typhoon in Tokyo” (p. 194). The impact can be curvilinear
in nature as perceptions of self-efficacy may decline in the face of change but can improve if supportive processes are in place (Ross, 1994; Ross & Bruce, 2007; Stein & Wang, 1988; M. Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). This study attempted to answer the critical questions raised by M. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) as they apply to the largely un-researched experiences of kindergarten teachers. The purpose was to understand the shaping of kindergarten teachers’ movements through SPWI within many contexts that are constantly in flux, and to find ways to strengthen and support both the magnitude and strength of teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs of writing instruction.

**Outcome Expectancy**

The construct of outcome-expectancy is less researched as it is not predictive of students’ academic achievement. This construct under Bandura’s (1977, 1997) social-cognitive theory, however, is important for a holistic understanding of teachers’ affective responses to their instructional goals. The intended learning outcome of teaching a task is to make “constructive changes in what students know, what they are able to do, and/or what they value, for some significant period of time and in a way that is transferable beyond the learning environment” (C. Gareis, personal communication, November, 2015). With this outcome in mind, this study attempted to understand how teachers’ self-evaluation of their ability to get to this outcome influences their affective reactions to their instruction. Bandura (1997) helped to clarify these distinctions and explained that perception of a successful future performance (self-efficacy) can be interpreted as an accomplishment, but an outcome (outcome expectancy) is the affective reaction that is perceived to be likely following the accomplishment.
As discussed in Chapter 1, Bandura (1986, 1997) proposed that outcome expectations take three forms—physical, social, and self-evaluative. Though the anticipation of physical (e.g., pain/pleasure) and social (e.g., approval/disapproval) outcomes influence behavior, this study will focus on the self-evaluative form of outcome expectancy. This focus is deliberate, as Bandura and Cervone (1983) stressed the significant influence of internally generated self-evaluative outcome expectations, especially when considering the dynamic interplay of these expectations with self-efficacy beliefs.

Self-evaluative reactions to outcomes are linked to cognitive expectations of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a performance in a context-specific activity (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997; Bandura & Cervone, 1983). As with self-efficacy, outcome expectancy is not a global, omnibus construct but is task or domain specific. Bandura (1986) also specified that perceptions of ability (self-efficacy) and self-evaluative outcomes (outcome expectancy) are both influenced by internal standards and goals, and explained the cognitive mechanism that links these constructs in this way: “Whether or not a given level of progress will become a source of personal satisfaction depends upon the internal standards against which they are appraised” (p. 239). Figure 1 shows the critical and synergistic significance of the combined impact of self-efficacy and outcome expectancies on a teacher’s affective state.

It is surprising that educational literature seldom addresses outcome expectancy given the distinctive implications represented in all four quadrants. Specific to this study, answers to the third sub-question were explored using the construct of outcome-expectancy: What does it mean for kindergarten teachers to experience self-satisfaction in
the pursuit of instructional goals for writing? Inherent was the understanding that the opposite affective outcome—resignation or apathy—could be uncovered as an outcome experienced by teachers. Adding this lens to the study allowed for a more comprehensive view of teachers’ movements through SPWI.

**Figure 1.** The effects of different patterns of efficacy beliefs and performance outcome expectancies on behavior and affective states. Adapted from *Self-efficacy: The Exercise of Control* (p. 20), by A. Bandura, 1997, New York, NY: WH Freeman. Copyright 1997 by WH Freeman.

**Outcome expectancy and challenge.** The construct of WI outcome-expectancy was important to explore as it situated a teacher’s instruction in the delicate balance of challenge. Though a linkage exists between self-satisfaction and the pursuit of instructional goals, Bandura (1997) argued, “if goals assigned by others impose constraints and performance burdens, the pursuit can become aversive” (p. 220). This makes the current climate of standards-based accountability and the paucity of structural supports for writing instruction an important context, especially as imposed curricular goals usually take precedence over self-determined goals. Dissonance between imposed and self-determined goals can be described as a goal-gap, and this gap can negatively influence teachers’ pedagogical self-satisfaction (von der Embse, Sandilos, Pendergast, &
Mankin, 2016). By understanding teachers’ SPWI, the exact nature of this goal-gap has the potential to be explored, defined, and addressed.

**Outcome expectancy and impact.** Research has confirmed that self-satisfaction with teaching as a whole influences teachers’ stress levels, classroom management styles, and retention (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014; Richards, 2012; Ross, 1995; M. Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Unfortunately, recent research points to steadily declining trends in measures of teachers’ self-satisfaction (Heitin, 2012). Understanding, supporting, and strengthening teachers’ outcome expectancy beliefs, then, are important to ensuring an effective, invested, and sustainable workforce.

An exploration of the literature brings clarity to the constructs of WI self-efficacy and WI outcome expectancy. WI self-efficacy reflects a teacher’s perception of his or her ability to teach the mechanics and compositional processes of early writing, to engage students during writing instruction, and to maintain an efficiently managed classroom during writing instruction. WI outcome expectancy is indicative of a teacher’s judgment of a likely reaction of self-satisfaction based on his or her ability to accomplish these intended learning outcomes for writing instruction. These lenses, employing Bandura’s (1997) social-cognitive theory, align well with the philosophical underpinnings of a post-intentional phenomenological approach to research.

**Philosophical Exploration of the Literature**

This present study was framed by the writings of Vagle (2014) who proposed a post-structural conceptualization of phenomenology. Phenomenologists argue that phenomenology is both a philosophy and a methodology. This study’s use of post-intentional phenomenology as a methodology will be discussed in Chapter 3. Post-
intentional phenomenology as a philosophy, however, holds certain foundational tenets that simultaneously demonstrate philosophical coherence while advising philosophical cautions when applied to Bandura’s (1977) SCT framework.

**Philosophical Coherence**

Post-intentional phenomenology is an appropriate methodological framework to guide this study given the close alignment among the framework’s philosophical assumptions and structures and this study’s purpose, questions, and theoretical framework. The alignment starts with the very nature of phenomenon. Heidegger (1962/2008), a renowned phenomenologist, defined a phenomenon as something that becomes manifest through the active nature of living in the world. Post-intentional phenomenology sees relations with phenomenon as intentional, expressed through multiple manifestations, contextual, and explored with a habit of post-reflexivity. These assumptions underpin an exploration of, and facilitate an understanding of, the concept of *movements through*, and align well with Bandura’s philosophical tenets of social-cognitive theory.

**Intentionality.** Phenomenological research assumes intentionality. Intentionality signifies “how we are meaningfully connected to the world” (Vagle, 2014, p. 27) and demands that the unit of analysis in any study is how the intentional relations between the phenomenon and the subject become manifest and appear, and not a study of the subject itself (Dahlberg et al., 2008; Heidegger, 1962/2008; Husserl, 2002; Merleau-Ponty, 1947/1964; Vagle, 2014; van Manen, 1990). This distinction is based on the ontological belief that the subject (participant) and object (the world) of research are connected and not separated, or as Bandura (1997) proposed, relations and meaning-making are social in
nature. The concept of intentionality, then, captures the complexity of humans’ meaningful connections with the world (Vagle, 2014) through their interactions with phenomenon. For the study presented here, the teachers themselves were not the phenomenon studied. The phenomenon explored was the movements through SPWI.

**Tentative manifestations.** Though all branches of phenomenology acknowledge the foundational tenet of intentionality, Vagle’s (2014) *post-*ing of phenomenology made certain ontological distinctions that guided this study and underscored the concept of *movements through.* The concept of humans’ intentional relations with phenomenon being tentative, shifting, and changing is a significant departure of post-intentional phenomenology from more traditional phenomenological approaches. Vagle (2014) proposed that intentional relations with phenomenon do not have an essential essence or quality but that intentionality is multiple, varied, fleeting, and partial. This leads to an ontological exploration of intentional relations not for a discovery of the universal and invariant essence of a phenomenon, but with an understanding that we make meaning of phenomenon through tentative manifestations, as how humans make meaning of what is experienced is highly contextual and takes shape in whatever context it is being lived out. This multiplicity can be expressed with the preposition “through” (p. 40), signifying continuous movement as intentional relations with the phenomenon take shape and exist in a constant state of becoming. Tentative manifestations, as they applied to teachers’ SPWI, are especially pertinent as the assumption is that there is no one, invariant meaning that all kindergarten teachers have shared, or will share, in regards to how their movements through SPWI take shape. Rather, the passage of time and the changing of context shape new realities that influence this meaning-making process.
**Contextual.** The concept of tentative manifestations underpins another core distinction of post-intentional phenomenology—context matters (Vagle, 2014). The meanings teachers attach to their instructional self-perceptions (self-efficacy and outcome-expectancy) of writing “come into being” as they interact and move through their contextual environments. How we make meaning of the phenomenon, then, is dialogically created as it is “moving and shifting through the questions we pose, observations we make, and assertions we proffer” (Vagle, 2014, p. 42) in unique contexts. Bandura (1997) agreed with the fundamental nature of context to researching lived experiences and explained: “expectations of personal efficacy do not operate as dispositional determinants independently of contextual factors” (p. 203), and stressed the domain-specific nature of constructs within SCT. That the two frameworks cohered ontologically and provided a common-sense approach for answering the research question strengthened the credibility of the findings of this study.

Vagle’s (2014) insistence on the mutable, contextual, and temporal nature of intentional relations with phenomenon is an essential lens for any research conducted in a school setting, as that particular lifeworld is constantly changing, fluid, and vulnerable to context. This situates tentativeness in the lifeworld of teachers with an understanding that how they make meaning of their self-perceptions will ebb and flow, change and shift.

**Post-reflexive.** Post-reflexivity is another foundational philosophical tenet of post-intentional phenomenology and goes beyond positional reflexivity. Positional reflexivity is “how the researcher positions himself or herself in the world and articulates his or her commitments to interrogate such positioning” (Alvesson, Hardy, & Harley, 2008, p. 69). Vagle (2014) takes this practice a little further, asking for a “dogged
questioning of one’s knowledge” (p. 74). This questioning forces us to slow down—to “document, wonder about, and question our connections/discussions, assumptions of what we take to be normal, bottom lines, and moments of shock” (p. 132). According to Vagle, post-reflexivity should be evident throughout every facet of the research process, not just in data collection and analysis. I see this as a habit-of-practice—as an extension of a habit-of-mind—that is “not a matter of looking harder or more closely, but of seeing what frames our seeing” (Lather, 1993, p. 675). The study presented here, then, incorporated a habit-of-practice of post-reflexivity when examining kindergarten teachers’ movements through SPWI.

Developing this habit-of-practice has also dared me, as a post-intentional phenomenological researcher, to take a chance. When crafting the written expression of intentional relations of phenomenon as they becomes known, Vagle (2014) challenged researchers to go “outside of traditional form and go to examples that explode beyond tradition” (p. 136). While practicing post-reflexivity through journaling, I wondered if the reader and I were making the same reflexive connections, given the literature’s explication of specific contexts. Based on my own wondering, I have decided to explode past traditions…a little…and include portions of my post-reflexive journal in this manuscript as a way of slowing down through post-reflexivity (see sections titled Slowing Down Through Post-Reflexivity included throughout the manuscript). Vagle (personal communication, April 27, 2017) supported this literary approach, and I hope this inclusion allows us—researcher and reader—to connect in ways that may make “the reading” more nuanced and impactful.
Philosophical Cautions

The practice of post-reflexivity is especially important in light of Vagle’s (2014) caution against front-loading with an overdeveloped theoretical lens for exploring the phenomenon studied. Vagle (2014) stressed the importance of theoretical frameworks even as he warned against their prescriptive boundaries. Other researchers opening up teachers’ classroom experiences supported this loose application of theoretical frameworks and advised that researchers remain attentive and sensitive to frameworks’ detailed minutia that may then “limit teachers’ responses to fit within the perimeters of predetermined constructs” (Perry, Brenner, Collie, & Hofer, 2015, p. 10).

Vagle (2014) advised that the prescriptions and constraints we bring to a phenomenon can be addressed by conceptualizing lived experiences through the ontological lens of Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) “line-of-flight” (p. 36). Through this lens, how people make meaning of lived experiences is allowed the freedom to escape pre-established bounds of normality, singularity, and dogmatic thought by framing inquiry with the question of what could be. This approach is especially pertinent when conducting a literature review to frame research, as the literature should not “end up settling matters before the study was even conducted” (Vagle, 2014, p. 72). The use of extant literature, Vagle warned, should provide a readying of the reader for the phenomenon and not a priori explanations of what the phenomenon is or should be. Noted researchers, Glaser (1978) and Silverman (2005), advocated for delaying the literature review until after data collection and analysis to allow “pure” induction of theoretical analysis uncontaminated by extant ideas. Many researchers echo Vagle’s (2014) skepticism that purism is even tenable and acknowledged researchers’ personal
paradigmatic influences on the many processes of research. An alternative approach calls for a partial review of the literature that uses caution, alertness, and critical reflection (Charmaz, 2014; Dahlberg et al., 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Vagle, 2014).

For the contextual literature research that underpins this study, I conducted a partial review of the literature. This approach acknowledges the necessity of a literature review which situates the study in the “existing scholarly conversations in clearly articulated fields” (Vagle, 2014, p. 124), while still allowing an openness that captures the tentative manifestations of the phenomenon as it is lived out and not as it has been previously documented. This goal limited the scope of the contextual literature search but allowed a depth that was targeted and relevant to this study, to the research question, and to post-intentional phenomenological inquiry.

The challenge was in not allowing the robust theoretical, philosophical, and contextual literature to determine, a priori, how kindergarten teachers’ movements through SPWI take shape. Mediating this challenge, however, was an acknowledgement that this literature search focused specifically on kindergarten teachers and their unique contextual lifeworld, and that this specific research is virtually non-existent. This contextual backdrop, however, will allow greater clarity of perspective and understanding of the unique nature of intentional relations with phenomenon as they “become seen.”

**Contextual Exploration of the Literature**

Vagle’s (2014) post-ing of phenomenological research is based on the premise that phenomenon does not have an essential essence, but that the context within which the phenomenon is being experienced shapes the meaning ascribed to the experience. Context provides the platform for constructing a deep, thick, and nuanced understanding
and appreciation of the lifeworld of kindergarten writing instruction. This study used Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) contextually embedded design model to conceptualize this strand of the literature review. The use of an embedded design emphasizes the importance of exploring a phenomenon as it exists in nested or embedded settings and provides what Bronfenbrenner defined as ecological validity (see Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Embedded contextual lifeworld of writing instruction in kindergarten](image)

In this study, the first context explored described the philosophical frameworks that guided an understanding of early writing developmental processes. The national policy and ideological discourses that determined how these developmental processes are interpreted and weighted then overlaid and further “filtered” this review. Next, true to the tenets of post-intentional phenomenology, the state and district contextual frameworks that the participants in this study teach through continued to narrow a focus on the unique micro-contexts in which the participants’ intentional interactions shift and change to shape their SPWI. The dotted lines of the model alluded to the diffusiveness of influence
across contexts, as all four synergistically contributed to the lifeworld of writing instruction in kindergarten.

This contextual literature review did not include a review of research on the impact of classroom, school, kindergarten teachers’ collective efficacy, and/or building-level support on teachers’ WISE (perceptions of ability) and WIOE (expectations of self-satisfaction). Though classroom and building level contexts have significant influence over teachers’ self-perceptions, these very micro-focused factors had the potential to determine a priori how teachers make meaning of their movements through SPWI. Instead, these micro-focused contextual factors were explored during data collection and analysis as they emerged, and were identified, by participants. A discussion of these contextual factors is provided in Chapters 4 and 5.

While exploring the contexts noted in Figure 2, I am asking the reader to acknowledge taken-for-granted ideas about writing instruction. Examine them, and then join me in post-reflexivity. I ask you to heed Vagle’s (2014) admonition to “harness what is being read and thought…to own them, so to speak, and interrogate how they might influence the analysis” (p. 99). At the end of this literature review, I hope the reader is provided with a glimpse of the invisible threads that connect kindergarten teachers to the shifting, contextual lifeworld of kindergarten writing instruction (Merleau-Ponty, 1947/1964). This will allow us to take a journey where we can slow down and mine for moments of harmonic convergence, or dissonance, as the multiple voices of kindergarten teachers coalesce to invite an understanding of how they move through ever-changing manifestations of SPWI.
Philosophical Contexts for Writing Instruction in Kindergarten

Learning to write is a unique developmental process and both the uniqueness and the developmental nature of this strand of literacy are most evident in kindergarten classrooms (Auguste, 2018). Frederick Froebel, a German educator, was the first to design an organized curriculum for young children (Morrow, 2005). He coined the term kindergarten, which literally translates to children’s garden, and started the first kindergarten in 1837 in his native country (Peabody, 1882). Elizabeth Peabody followed Froebel’s model for early education and organized the first English-speaking kindergarten in America in 1960. Based on Froebel’s teachings, Peabody stressed learning in kindergarten through unstructured exploration, experimentation, and play because “intellectual duties are too heavy to be imposed upon little children” (Peabody, 1882, p. 517).

Readiness philosophy. A readiness approach to literacy education was the predominant educational philosophy when kindergarten was first established. This approach incorporated Froebel’s philosophy of kindergarten education with ideas proposed by Gesell’s (1925) maturation theory about children’s development of auditory, visual, and fine-motor skills (Morrow, 2005). The readiness view purported that a child only began to acquire literacy skills after formally starting school and that maturation progressed in an inevitable, predetermined order. Morphett and Washburne (1931) were also very influential in reinforcing the maturationist view of education. The authors reported, “by postponing the teaching of reading until children reach a mental level of six and a half years, teachers can greatly decrease the chances of failure and discouragement and can correspondingly increase their efficiency” (p. 503). The mental age of 6 years
and 6 months became the benchmark for beginning literacy instruction, and maturation development became synonymous with cognitive development (Bear & Barone, 1998; Durkin, 1970; Morrow, 2005).

Specific to writing instruction, proponents of the readiness approach argued that maturing fine motor skills hampered a child from properly holding a pencil until first or second grade (Bear & Barone, 1998). Consequently, kindergarten was understood as a place of readiness training, through play, for the cognitive demands of schooling, and this view dominated kindergarten classroom instruction for decades.

**Emergent literacy.** Ongoing research conducted by cognitive and developmental psychologists, psycholinguists, and literacy experts challenged the singularity of physical/neurological determinants of literacy readiness, proposing instead that sociocultural, psychological, and linguistic factors also affect literacy development and readiness (see Bazerman et al., 2017; Berninger, 2015; Clay, 1966; Durkin, 1970; Goodman, 2014; Hiebert, 1988; Holdaway, 1979; Teal & Sulzby 1986). This focused body of research facilitated a paradigm shift and the term emergent literacy, coined by Marie Clay in 1966, represented this new epistemology of literacy development.

**Assumptions of emergent literacy.** The philosophical tenets of emergent literacy were based on certain assumptions contradistinctive to a readiness approach to literacy (Clay, 1966). Specific to writing, these assumptions were:

- writing development begins before formal schooling and proceeds through generalized stages at rates unique to each child;
- reading and writing are reciprocal processes that develop concurrently and interrelatedly, rather than sequentially;
• writing should be embedded in authentic, real-life experiences;
• learning to write is a complex task that takes time and requires cognitive energy; and
• scribbling, random letters, and invented spellings are all valid ways to write during early phases of literacy development.

As this way of envisioning early literacy evolved, researchers also acknowledged the sociocultural (e.g., home, early childhood programs, community), psychological (e.g., background knowledge, motivation), and physical (e.g., health; neurological development) influences that mitigated a child’s position on, and movement through, the literacy development continuum (Atwell, 1998; Bear & Barone, 1998; K. Brown & Martino, 2014; Calkins, 2011; Clay, 1975; Graves, 1983; Hildebrand & Bader, 1992; McGee & Purcell-Gates, 1997; K. W. Ray & Glover, 2008; Sulzby & Teale, 1991).

**Defining emergent literacy.** Emergent literacy, then, is based on a philosophical belief that there is no single point in time when literacy development begins, and that it is instead a continuous process that starts at birth. Graves (1983) explained,

> Children want to write. They want to write the first day they attend school. This is no accident. Before they went to school they marked up walls, pavements, newspapers with crayons, chalk, pens or pencils…anything that makes a mark.

> The child’s mark says, “I am.” (p. 3)

Though Clay (1966, 1975) never defined emergent literacy, the assumptions undergirding the philosophy allow me to define emergent literacy as a continuum that spans a child’s development of receptive knowledge (reading and listening) and expressive knowledge (writing and speaking), and that moves from nonconventional to more conventional
avenues of communication. Specific to writing development, this view holds that very young children can distinguish between writing and drawing, and that children’s emergent writing begins with “marks on paper, frosty car windows, and any other surfaces available to them” (McCarrier, Pinnell, & Fountas, 2000, p. xv).

A nuanced understanding of emergent literacy and writing. Teale and Sulzby (1986) were very clear about their stance on the developmental relationship between writing and reading. They argued, “The child develops as a writer/reader. The notion of reading preceding writing, or vice-versa, is a misconception” (p. xviii). Other researchers, however, viewed this symbiotic relationship differently. Though agreeing that the processes of emergent writing and reading are developmentally co-occurring, they made the nuanced distinction that writing development initially leads reading development (Chomsky, 1971; Montessori, 1967). Chomsky (1976) emphatically stated, “I will argue that from a developmental standpoint, children are ready to write before they are ready to read, and that their introduction to the printed word should therefore be through writing rather than reading” (p. 3).

Many contemporary literacy researchers have adopted the philosophy of emergent literacy but adapt with this assumption of initial writing leading reading, arguing that encoding is cognitively less demanding than decoding (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2016; Cullham, 2005; Diamond et al., 2008; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Graves, 1983; Hall et al., 2015; Ouellette & Sénéchal, 2017; Puranik, Lonigan, & Kim, 2011; K. W. Ray & Glover, 2008). For example, Bear and colleagues (2016) conceptualized emergent literacy development as a braid that incorporates orthography (spelling), reading, oral language, stories, and writing. From birth, the braid begins with the
intertwining threads of oral language and stories, proceeds to experimentation with writing, is followed by attempts at early reading and, last, incorporates orthography as a way of “lengthening and strengthening” (Bear et al., 2016, p. 3) all components of the braid (see Figure 3). This analogy further delineates the processual development of emergent literacy while emphasizing that individual components of literacy weave, interconnect, and synergistically develop and strengthen.


The process, however, remains unique to each child, as each child’s “braid” is woven based on individually unique cognitive and environmental factors.

The implications of these distinctions for instructional planning in kindergarten classrooms are myriad. If writing development can facilitate reading development, and the discrete skills of writing are experimented with first, then kindergarten writing instruction should, at a minimum, share equal instructional time with reading instruction. As previously discussed, Puranik and colleagues (2014) conducted a study in kindergarten classrooms at nine Florida schools and reported that, of a 90-minute literacy block, the average time spent across classrooms on all writing or writing-related activity was 6.1
minutes in the fall and 10.5 minutes in the winter. This imbalanced approach to literacy instruction does not align with research on writing development. In addition, there is an abundance of research establishing the interconnectedness of reading and writing instruction, with a clear understanding that “fragmenting these complex literacy processes interferes with the greatest goal of literacy education—the construction of meaning from and through text” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. vi). Logically, then, regardless of the processual stance on initial writing versus reading development, this imbalanced time commitment to reading over writing instruction is problematic for teachers teaching through these philosophical and developmental dissonances. Pertinent to this study on the shaping of kindergarten teachers’ movements through SPWI, is the additional potential for dissonance when teachers’ own axiological and pedagogical beliefs about writing development and emergent writing are added to this educational mélange.

**Developmental stages of emergent literacy.** Though contemporary literacy researchers may disagree on the processual nature of reading and writing development, they agree on the generalizable existence of developmental stages of writing, frequently conceptualized as a literacy continuum (Bazerman et al., 2017; Bear et al., 2016; Gunning, 2010; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 1998; Robertson, 2007). These researchers also agree that stages overlap, and though a child’s movement through these stages are unique and fluid, the stages themselves are generally universal trends. This makes the full range of early writing competencies in any kindergarten classroom a complex construct. Bear and colleagues’ (2016) stage model, outlined in Appendix B, demonstrated this well with overlapping distinctions and the
inclusion of an age range from 1 to 100. Though there are many labeling variations among the models outlined in Appendix B, the developmental snapshots of the processes and products of writing represented in these stages are very similar. In this current study, Bear and colleagues’ stage model was used to represent the developmental stages of emergent literacy most evident in kindergarten where, typically, most children are emergent or beginning writers, with every conceivable variation in-between. Some unique features of Bear and colleagues’ stage model are that first graders can be emergent writers, or a child can enter kindergarten as a beginning writer. All the models emphasize a progressive nature of development, though Gunning (2010) stated that children “can and do move back and forth between stages” (p. 508).

**Philosophical Context: Implications for Kindergarten Teachers’ SPWI**

Froebel’s envisioning of kindergarten has indeed seen many changes in landscape. The *what* of the changes, however, was not as important to this current study as an understanding of *how* these changes impact teacher’s movements through SPWI. In a 1998 joint report by NAEYC and the International Reading Association (IRA), one of the *Statements of the Issues* reported that “among many early-childhood teachers, a maturationist view of young children’s development persists despite much evidence to the contrary” (NAEYC, 1998, p. 31). The report went on to claim that teachers still believed it was wasteful, and even potentially harmful, to introduce literacy instruction before children reached a certain stage of physical and neurological maturation. Almost a decade later, there was still concern over the changing nature of kindergarten. In a 2009 report by Miller and Almon (2009) to the Alliance for Children, the authors decried the movement away from play-based learning in kindergarten and called for “reversal of the
pushing down of the curriculum that has transformed kindergarten into de facto first grade” (p. 63). Others argued that while standards and curriculum should guide kindergarten instruction, instruction could incorporate play-based strategies to teach the standards (e.g., Katz, 2015; Richards & Han, 2015; Scanlan, 2017). These debates bring clarity to the necessity of understanding the alignment between teachers’ philosophical beliefs and their pedagogical training on writing instruction, and of discovering how this alignment influences teachers’ SPWI.

A concomitant contextual understanding is that kindergarten teachers trained after 2010 may have very different theoretical orientations about writing instruction—the “assumptions and beliefs they hold about learning and teaching” (Graham et al., 2002, p. 148)—from a teacher trained in 1980. Bassok and colleagues (2016) systematically documented changes in kindergarten from 1998 to 2010 over five dimensions to include: (a) teachers’ beliefs about school readiness, (b) time allocated to academic and nonacademic subjects, (c) classroom organization, (d) pedagogical approach, and (e) assessment practices. When comparing kindergarten teachers’ beliefs about school readiness, kindergarten teachers in 2010 had higher academic expectations for students and were more likely to believe that academic instruction should begin before kindergarten. Specific to literacy instruction, the number of teachers who believed students should learn to read in kindergarten rose from 31% in 1998 to 80% in 2010. Though Bassok and colleagues’ study focused on reading instruction, both reading and writing curriculum have changed in kindergarten, and teachers’ SPWI will also have necessarily adapted to these changes.
An often-overlooked component of the ongoing debate about academic expectations for kindergarteners is the changing national demographics of working parents and guardians in America and the impact on young children’s care experiences. Based on data from NCES (2015), the number of three- and four-year olds enrolled in pre-school have dramatically changed since kindergarten started in 1960. In 1970, the earliest national data recorded, 20.5% of three- and four-year olds were enrolled in pre-school. In 2000, this figure rose to 52.1% and, in 2014, rose again to 54.5%. This increasing trend in preschool enrollment prompted investigations of the quality of early childhood education curriculum and early childhood teacher preparation programs (see Ackerman, 2006; Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000; Horm, Hyson, & Winton, 2013; Maxwell, Lim, & Early, 2006; A. Ray, Bowman, & Robbins, 2006), and has influenced expectations for kindergarten instruction. With the potential for more than half of kindergarteners already introduced to some type of formal education, some educators and policymakers challenge the concept of kindergarten being a place of academic readiness. Recent research, though nascent, supports a trend of students entering kindergarten with stronger academic skills (Bassok & Latham, 2017). Instead of asking if kindergarten is the new first grade (Bassok et al., 2016), maybe a more appropriate question is whether pre-school is the new kindergarten.

As a reminder, this study did not attempt to inform the debate on play-based versus academic curriculum in kindergarten. What this study attempted to understand was the effect of these debates on teachers’ movements through self-perceptions (self-efficacy and outcome-expectancy) of writing instruction. As previously discussed, researchers have found that teachers with high self-efficacy (confidence in ability) are more open to
new instructional approaches and philosophies (Guskey, 1988; Landon-Hays, 2012; Stein & Wang, 1988; M. Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998; M. Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001), though this has not been studied with kindergarten teachers in their unique context.

This literature review elucidated the unique context of writing in kindergarten in relation to any other grade level. Schaub (2016) succinctly captured the ideologies framed by this study when she commented on the unique nature of kindergarten that “allows us to test the power of cultural ideas behind schooling” (p. 268). The literature also emphasized the nature of this current study’s phenomenon as tentative, partial, and fleeting. van Manen (1991) wrote, “The pedagogy of living with children is an ongoing project of renewal in a world that is constantly changing around us and that is constantly being changed by us” (p. 3). This is a noble and poetic lens for viewing the potential influence of this tentative, partial, and fleeting lifeworld of kindergarten writing instruction on kindergarten teachers.

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**Researcher’s Journal Entry: Slowing Down Through Post-Reflexivity 1**

After reading the 1998 report by the NAEYC and the IRA, I feel a level of frustration that I have decided to slow down, take out, examine closely, and doggedly question. This frustration “feels” familiar and I have connected it to similar emotions experienced during discussions with veteran teachers who also questioned if writing curriculum is asking too much of kindergarteners. As a practitioner, I saw this push-back as placing limitations on students’ creativity. The practice of post-reflexivity is allowing me to put such comments into context and, for the first time, I am looking at what I previously looked through with preconceived beliefs and assumptions. I can now see these teachers’ concerns as
possibly evolving out of their training, just as my pedagogy has evolved out of my training. This post-reflexive understanding is empowering and humbling.

I also recognize this as an important understanding as I prepare to interview teachers. Many of my participants could have been kindergarten teachers during the release of the 1998 NEAYC and the 2009 Alliance for Children reports. Again, post-reflexivity has made clear the importance of acknowledging that my participants’ life stories and years of experience may contradict and challenge my own literacy beliefs about the goals for writing instruction in kindergarten.

I wonder about my approach and sensitivity to the lived experiences of teachers if I had not slowed down for this post-reflexive understanding.

National Context for Writing Instruction in Kindergarten

Debates over the appropriateness of a readiness or emergent literacy approach to writing instruction were not occurring in a vacuum. In 1957, three years before Peabody’s first kindergarten, Russia launched Sputnik and plunged America into national debates about the adequacy of the American educational system. This launch led to a paradigm shift in the education arena (Barrett, 2012; Hersh, 2009; Steeves, Bernhardt, Burns, & Lombard, 2009) and influenced educational policy that became increasingly neoliberal in nature. This neoliberal trend was evidenced by: (a) increased federal oversight on education, (b) rhetoric on educational global competition, (c) crisis-based and curative language, (d) marketized solutions to these perceived crises, and (e) managerial models of school-, principal-, and teacher-accountability based on test scores (Anderson & Donchik, 2016; Apple, 2017; Danielson, 2016; Ford, Van Sickle, Clark, Fazio-Brunson, & Schween, 2017; Jones, 2015; Lipman, 2011). Ensuring America won the space-race began tsunami-like waves of change in the development of national
educational standards and models of assessment (Calfee, 2014; Hersh, 2009; Steeves et al., 2009). The following section provides a simplified overview of a very complex educational-policy reform timeline and identifies some of the key legislative acts and federal reports that directly and indirectly influenced the national context for writing curriculum in kindergarten.

**Paradigm shifts in educational standards.** America’s quest for international educational supremacy played a significant role in the changing culture of rising federal oversight in education. This goal of preeminence was apparent in many iconic legislative changes to the educational standards outlining the goals for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. The space-race directly and indirectly changed the focus of literacy education as the nation heeded an increasingly vocal impetus for excellence in math and science (Calfee, 2014).

**The National Defense Education Act—1958.** The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) was signed into law as a cornerstone of the country’s response to Sputnik’s 1957 launch (U.S. Senate, n.d.). Title III of the NDEA funded $28 million over four years to state educational agencies for science, math, and foreign language instruction, though millions more were targeted to national programs strengthening science education and research (Watters, 2015). Public education then, emphasized science, math, and foreign language instruction, and writing instruction was not a focus of national, state, or local standards and curriculum.

**The Elementary and Secondary Education Act—1965.** American education underwent another paradigm shift amidst policy changes in response to the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education ruling, emerging research linking poverty to student achievement
and the signing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act (see J. F. Jennings, 2001; Palmaffy, 1999). President Lyndon Johnson declared a war on poverty and, in 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act passed into law. ESEA represented an unprecedented movement towards increased federal oversight in, and aid for, education, in an attempt to continue to address national educational inequalities and to ensure equality of access to high-quality instruction for all students (ESEA, 1965). Title I of ESEA allowed the distribution of funds to schools and school districts with a high percentage of students from families with low incomes. Important to this discussion on literacy education, Title I was designed to close the skill gap in reading, writing, and mathematics, representing a shift in national curricula with an acknowledgement of the importance of reading and writing development. Additionally, the inclusion of language in the law that centered on high quality instruction started a national focus on teacher qualifications.

Relevant to this study is ESEA’s funding for Project Head Start, a project developed to ensure kindergarten-readiness of all students. Head Start provided programs designed to support the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children ages 3-5 in low-income homes (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2010). The program launched in 1965 and has since provided educational services for over 32 million American preschoolers, denoting ideological support for effective early education in America (U.S. DHHS, 2017). The ESEA also marked a continuous trend of shifting educational autonomy, oversight, and funding away from individual states to the federal government. Establishment of the DOE in 1980 formalized this trend and changed the trajectory of educational policy and leadership in America.
**A Nation at Risk report—1983.** A historically impactful report that further established federal oversight in education was the National Commission on Excellence in Education’s report, commissioned by President Reagan and released in 1983. The report titled, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, reinforced crisis-based educational rhetoric and elaborated on the risk of America losing its previously “unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation” (*National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983*, para. 1). The report continued national conversations about the expansion of the country’s educational foci beyond math and science to the five new basics: English, math, science, social studies, and computer science. These content-areas emerged as the chosen educational vehicles for international dominance.

**The Goals 2000: Educate America Act—1994.** The Goals 2000 Act further elevated the integral importance of early education to the national forefront, with an explicit emphasis on early literacy acquisition. Specifically, Section 102 stated, “By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn” (*Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, 1994). This was proposed through the provision of access to “high-quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs” (SEC. 102. 1A[i]) and through a focus on attaining competency in English language arts (ELA) for all students leaving Grades 4, 8, and 12. These goals had three major influences: (a) the stipulation of *all* children extended the reach of preschool to all families, regardless of income, (b) the inclusion of pre-school cemented national support for the philosophy of emergent literacy, and (c) the inclusion of competency in ELA reinforced the importance of literacy to the national educational policy agenda. Additionally, the Act required all states
receiving federal funding to develop rigorous standards for instruction and to align formal assessments to these standards, reinforcing standardization as an American educational ideology (Goals 2000: Educate America Act, 1994).

**The Reading Excellence Act—1998.** Students’ competency in English, as outlined in Goals 2000, sidelined writing development with a predominant emphasis on developing competency for reading. Passage of the Reading Excellence Act (REA, 1998) reinforced this imbalanced focus of literacy instruction. A bipartisan coalition, including the U.S. DOE, the White House, and Congress, developed the REA emphasizing the need for scientific research in reading instruction. The Act provided $260 million in competitive grants to improve reading instruction in kindergarten through Grade 3, and some of the goals outlined included (a) teaching every child to read by third grade, (b) providing pre-school children with readiness skills, and (c) providing early intervention to prevent inappropriate identification for special education (REA, 1998). This landmark legislation marked the first comprehensive definition of early reading instructional goals in legislature and included skill development for phonemic awareness, systematic phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension. In addition, funding was provided for scientific research on increasing students’ motivation for reading (REA, 1998).

**The No Child Left Behind Act: Reading First Initiative—2001.** In 1999, Congress convened a National Reading Panel tasked with preparing a report for the DOE. The panel reviewed evidence-based research on early reading skill acquisition and outlined best practices for early reading instruction. The report, released in 2000, aligned closely with the foci of the REA’s research agenda and recommended five core
components for effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). Although the report included some references to applying these core components to reading and writing tasks, the emphasis on instruction, professional development, teacher education, and computer technology integration was clearly focused on application to reading instruction.

ESEA’s reauthorization in 2001 under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001), mandated that states develop “challenging academic content standards and challenging student academic achievement standards” (SEC 1111 b1[A]) across core content areas determined by individual states. These standards had to include “at least mathematics, reading or language arts, and (beginning in the 2005-2006 school year) science” (SEC 1111 b1[C]). A stated goal of NCLB was for 100% of students to be proficient in reading and math by the end of the 2013-2014 school year (NCLB, 2001). Annual testing in reading and math for Grade 3 through Grade 8, and once in high school, were requisites for federal funding.

The National Reading Panel’s findings were included in NCLB as the Reading First Initiative and provided mandated guidelines for ELA standards. The stated goal of Reading First, like the REA, was students reading by the end of Grade 3 (U.S. DOE, 2000). State guidelines, then, focused on instruction, assessment, materials, and professional development for the five core early literacy skills recommended by the National Reading Panel. The Reading First initiative received unprecedented levels of federal funding, with the appropriation of approximately $1.5 billion for just the 2002
fiscal year and guaranteed funding until the next reauthorization cycle (see NCLB, 2001, Title 1-SEC. 1002,[b]).

Understanding the influence of the Reading First Initiative on emergent reading instruction is critical to understanding the need for this study. Increased and explicit federal oversight of states’ adherence to this initiative politicized and dictated the direction of the nation’s literacy agenda. The significant infusion of federal dollars evidenced a domination of Reading First’s five core reading skills in literacy standards and assessments for kindergarten through Grade 3 (Calfee, 2014). Explicit instruction of these skills dominated classroom literacy blocks (Goodman, 2014) and writing instruction faded into the background of literacy curriculum and instruction (National Commission on Writing, 2003, 2006). This unintended consequence was problematic, especially as many researchers and policy advocates criticized the Reading First reports’ methodology, scientific rigor, findings, and the ethical practices of some committee members (see Allington, 2002; Coles, 2000; Cunningham, 2001; Grunwald, 2006; Paley, 2007). In discussing this perceived misguided focus of literacy instruction, Goodman, Calfee, and Goodman (2014) gave voice to a growing “frustration of how political agendas have taken over government literacy policies while a strong base of knowledge about literacy is being ignored or marginalized” (p. 201).

By 2003, every individual state had complied with NCLB requirements and developed standards and assessments for reading (Rothman, 2011). The NCLB Act also held states educational agencies accountable for determining if these standards were met and for determining, and applying, punitive consequences to local education agencies if they were not. Additionally, NCLB legislature included a strong emphasis on teacher
quality, with parents given the right to request the professional qualifications of their child’s classroom teacher (NCLB, 2001).

_National Commission on Writing Report—2003._ Interestingly enough, a report by the National Commission on Writing (2003) was published the same year that all states had met the mandate to develop standards and assessments for reading and mathematics. The report acknowledged the imbalanced national focus on these content areas, and called writing the “Neglected R” (p. 3). Commission members stated:

American education will never realize its potential as an engine of opportunity and economic growth until a writing revolution puts language and communication in their proper place in the classroom. Writing is how students connect the dots in their knowledge. Although many models of effective ways to teach writing exist, both the teaching and practice of writing are increasingly shortchanged throughout the school and college years. (National Commission on Writing, 2003, p. 3)

The Commission also called for every state to provide developmentally appropriate writing opportunities, starting in the earliest years of schooling. Unfortunately, the report was not incorporated into any legislative mandates and remained, for most part, neglected.

_The Common Core State Standards—2010._ Although every individual state had developed standards by 2003, these standards varied widely in content, scope, and depth, especially with respect to goals for emergent writing (Carmichael, Martino, Porter-Magee, & Wilson, 2010; Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011; Reys, 2006; Rothman, 2011). The development of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010
represented an unprecedented educational reform initiative that sought to address this variability, and was another crucial policy initiative in the framing of this study.

The CCSS initiative created voluntary national standards in ELA and mathematics for kindergarten through Grade 12, and sought to align the scope and sequence of academic knowledge and skills in these subject areas across states (NGA CCSSO, 2010). This initiative started a new round of national conversations about the components of writing instruction from kindergarten through Grade 12 (Graham & Harris, 2015; Mo, Kopke, Hawkins, Troia, & Olinghouse, 2014) and outlined very specific and expansive guidelines for writing instruction in kindergarten (see Appendix A). The standards acknowledged the importance of emergent writing instruction and further endorsed movement away from a maturationist readiness approach to an emergent literacy approach to literacy instruction (Mo et al., 2014).

The District of Columbia, forty-five states, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity adopted the CCSS. Virginia, Alaska, Nebraska, and Texas are the only states that opted not to adopt the national standards and to maintain individual state standards, with Minnesota opting to adopt only the national standards for ELA. Many states that adopted the CCSS acknowledged that they were more rigorous than their previous standards (Kober & Rentner, 2011; Porter et al., 2011; Rentner, 2013), as increased rigor was a prerequisite for competitive federal funding through the Race-to-the-Top initiative. This initiative was a $4.35 billion grant earmarked to ensure students were college-and-career-ready (Moran, 2017). The neoliberal bent of the American educational system was continuously evident in the framework for the Race to the Top.
initiative, even with a basic and surface acknowledgement of the title—Race to the Top—a reiteration of President Eisenhower’s space-race.

**Every Student Succeeds Act—2015.** The 2015 reauthorization of ESEA, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), provided legislative support for the literacy guidelines of the CCSS and further reinforced the importance of writing standards in kindergarten. Under Section 2221, Subpart 2 titled, *Literacy Education for All, Results for the Nation* (ESSA, 2015), federal support for improving reading and writing academic achievement in local education agencies, as well as early childhood education programs, was promised. An ESSA goal was the provision of high-quality comprehensive literacy instruction. Specific to writing, high-quality instruction was described in the following way:

(C) includes age-appropriate, explicit instruction in writing, including opportunities for children to write with clear purpose, with critical reasoning appropriate to the topic and purpose, and with specific instruction and feedback from instructional staff;...(G) includes frequent practice of reading and writing strategies; (H) uses age-appropriate, valid, and reliable screening assessments, diagnostic assessments, formative assessment processes, and summative assessments to identify a child’s learning needs, to inform instruction, and to monitor the child’s progress and the effect of instruction; (I) uses strategies to enhance children’s motivation to read and write and children’s engagement in self-directed learning. (ESSA, 2015, pp. 178-179)
These goals tie directly back to the research sub-questions guiding this study as they address teachers’ instructional practices for students’ skill development and engagement with writing.

The outlined educational reform initiatives demonstrate the continuously shifting, malleable, and tentative context of developmental expectations, educational standards, and learning goals for writing instruction in kindergarten. Most recently, this has been evidenced with the CCSS’ explicit delineation of the “what” of kindergarten writing instruction and the ESSA’s explicit statements requiring frequent and consistent writing instruction.

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**Researcher’s Journal Entry: Slowing Down Through Post-Reflexivity 2**

An interesting caveat that I have been thinking about for some time is a significant change in one of the more respected literacy educational associations: The International Reading Association. On January 26, 2015, I felt validated in my insistence that, as a nation, we have an imbalanced view of literacy as, on that date, the International Reading Association (IRA) changed its name to the International Literacy Association (ILA). According to the ILA, changing Reading to Literacy reflected a 21st Century emphasis on all aspects of literacy, not just reading (Post, 2015). The organization’s broader emphasis included writing, speaking, and the new literacies.

This change came with a redesign of the association’s website, journal, and a change in my own stakeholder identity as a member. I applaud the change and wish only that it had occurred sooner.

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**Paradigm shifts in assessment policies.** Rapidly changing educational standards co-occurred with dramatic international, national, and local changes in the frequency and
role of assessments. High-stakes assessments increasingly became the predominant tools for defining and measuring both student achievement and teacher effectiveness and further politicized the determination of what knowledge counted the most for American students (Goodman et al., 2014).

**Assessment of students.** Standardized high-stakes testing became a national policy priority, and many felt the emphasis was primarily an effort to provide evidence of international educational dominance (see Hersh, 2009; Steeves et al., 2009). In 1963 (six years after Sputnik launched), the U.S. Commissioner of Education collaborated with Ralph Tyler, a noted educational evaluator, to design an assessment tool to track student achievement at a national level. Funded by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation, this initiative led to the establishment of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) testing organization (Vinovskis, 1998). NAEP held the first national assessments in 1969 and the 2001 NCLB Act—and later reauthorizations of ESEA—mandated NAEP participation and the public reporting of results for all states receiving Title I funding. Schools participate in NAEP assessments about every four years in reading, mathematics, science, writing, and other subjects. Biennial participation was mandated for assessments in mathematics and reading at Grades 4 and 8, though assessments in science and writing remained voluntary (Vinovskis, 1998). National results are reported for Grades 4, 8, and 12. Starting in 2007, writing assessments were mandated only in Grades 8 and 12.

Initial and successive iterations of the ESEA also mandated that individual states develop standardized tests to track student achievement as a requisite for receiving federal funding for education. Specifically, the Reading First Initiative mandated four types of assessments: screening, diagnostic, progress-monitoring, and outcome measures
Though NCLB legislation and standardized testing encouraged accountability in public schools and sought to close the achievement gap for minority students (NCLB, 2001; Wiliam, 2010), many critics argued that unintended consequences of NCLB were detrimental for public education. Federal mandates requiring schools to make adequate yearly progress, reporting of said progress with publicly accessible school report cards, and punitive sanctions for under-performance soon dominated educational discourse and created a unique culture through which teachers were conducting instruction. The colloquial phrase “teaching to the test” became popularized on educational platforms, and many researchers and policy-makers claimed that mandated tested subjects dominated classroom instructional time (e.g., Floden, Porter, Schmidt, Freeman, & Schwille, 1980; J. L. Jennings & Bearak, 2014; Strickland et al., 2001; The Times Editorial Board, 2015; U.S. DOE, 2013; Walker, 2014a, 2014b). A culture of testing ensued, and an often cited report disseminated by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations’ Council of Great City Schools claimed that students in 66 of the nation’s largest urban public school systems were required to take an average of 112 mandated tests between pre-K and Grade 12 (Hart et al., 2015). Some tests fulfilled federal requirements under NCLB and the Race-to-the-Top initiative, while others met state and local requirements. This number did not include optional state assessments or school- and teacher-developed assessments.

Adding to this assessment and accountability emphasis on national and local platforms, international comparisons of American students’ scores with countries like Japan and Finland on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) rankings drew national attention in the media headlines. Specific to the impact on writing
instruction, the 2015 PISA report explicitly stated, “The PISA 2015 survey focused on science, with reading, mathematics, and collaborative problem solving as minor areas of assessment” (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2016, p. 3). Of note is the exclusion of writing and the implications for instructional focus in a high-stakes accountability educational climate.

Though there was national consensus on the need for school accountability, heated debates ensued on the rapidly rising volume of mandated assessments and the impact on schools and students, especially as NCLB’s benchmark of 100% student achievement in reading and math by 2014 loomed. Loveless (2012) cited research that exposed the practice of some states manipulating cut-scores on their state assessments to inflate achievement levels, where students receiving fewer than 50% of test items correct scored proficient on the exams. Arne Duncan, then Secretary of Education, verified these practices when he testified before the U.S. Senate in 2013. He stated:

NCLB’s goals were the right ones—holding all students to the same, challenging standards; closing achievement gaps; and providing transparency and accountability for the proficiency and graduation rates of all students. But, the closer we have gotten to 2014, the more NCLB has changed from an instrument of reform into a barrier to reform. …Because, in practice, NCLB unintentionally encouraged States to lower their standards so that more students would appear to be proficient, even though they weren’t—and many States did. …The exclusive focus on tests, and disregard for other important measures of success, forced teachers to teach to the test. And, subjects such as history and the arts were pushed out. (U.S. DOE, 2013, para. 5)
On April 10, 2015, more than 178 administrators and teachers from 56 elementary and middle schools in the Atlanta Public School System were found guilty of institutionalized corruption of standardized tests. It was reported that, “Teachers and administrators gave children answers, erased incorrect answers, hid and altered documents, offered monetary incentives to encourage the cheating, and punished employees who refused to cheat” (Georgia Public Policy Foundation, 2015, para. 1). Similar allegations were made in Baltimore; Washington, DC; Pennsylvania; and New Jersey. These reports evidenced the catastrophic impact of the culture engendered by a neo-liberal focus on high-stakes assessments as the predominant indicator of student achievement (see Hart et al., 2015; Vogt, 2013), and gave an informed view of the national context through which instruction was taking place. The push for results in grades, and subjects, with high-stakes assessments has the potential for instructional impact in kindergarten classrooms preparing students for these tested subjects.

Assessment of teachers. The NCLB Act also required that states ensure all teachers possess credentials showing they were highly qualified to teach, representing the first national legislative effort to set teacher-quality benchmarks and ensure appropriate training for teachers. In 2009, Race to the Top funding requirements initiated yet another educational paradigm shift. An acknowledged goal of Race to the Top was the restructuring of teacher evaluation policies, shifting the evaluative determination of teacher-quality from teachers’ credentials to objective data on student growth (Akiba, 2017; Aldeman, 2017; Danielson, 2016; Ford et al., 2017; Strauss, 2013). This significant shift in what Bandura (1997) called “markers of performance attainment” (p. 27) that affect self-perceptions, became one of the most contested educational policy issues in
America (Cohen & Goldhaber, 2016). Research has documented high-stakes teacher evaluations’ dual effect—inducing ineffective or unmotivated teachers to leave teaching (Doherty & Jacobs, 2013; Firestone, 2014) and the unintended decline in effective teachers’ morale, self-efficacy, and retention (Achinstein, Ogawa, & Speiglman, 2004; Ford et al., 2017; Konstantopoulos, 2014; Lavigne, 2014; Richards, 2012; von der Embse et al., 2016).

Though this section may seem inapplicable to the lifeworld of kindergarten teachers, the DOE’s guidelines for defining student growth made the distinction between student growth in tested and non-tested grades and subjects (e.g., kindergarten writing), explicitly including both categories in the language of the reform (U.S. DOE, 2009). For the non-tested grades and subjects, Race to the Top guidelines permitted “alternative measures of student learning and performance such as student scores on pre-tests and end-of-course tests; student performance on English language proficiency assessments; and other measures of student achievement that are rigorous and comparable across classrooms” (U.S. DOE, 2009, p. 14). By 2014, 39 states had revised and implemented new teacher evaluation systems in an attempt to increase the rigor of their standards for quantifying a teacher’s influence on student achievement (Steinberg & Donaldson, 2016). The number of states requiring the inclusion of these objective measures in teacher evaluations rose from 15 states in 2009 to 43 states in 2015 (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2015). Increasingly, these evaluative models supported high-stakes personnel decisions about pay increases, sanctions, and dismissals for teachers in both the tested and non-tested grades (Aldeman, 2017; Baker, Oluwole, & Green, 2013; Doherty & Jacobs, 2013; Firestone, 2014; Hill, Kapitula, & Umland, 2011; Smarick, 2011).
Among the more controversial teacher-evaluation systems adopted are valued-added measures (VAMs). VAMs operate under the premise that, if all other factors were held constant (e.g., individual ability, socio-economic factors), it would be possible to determine the value added by an individual teacher’s instruction and so accurately detect a teacher’s impact on student learning (Moran, 2017). Though widely adopted by states, many researchers questioned the validity and reliability of VAMs (American Educational Research Association, 2000; American Statistical Association, 2014; DiPaola & Hoy, 2008; Green, Baker, & Oluwole, 2012; Haertel, 2013; D. N. Harris, 2010; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2014; Papay, 2011; Schochet & Chiang, 2010) and, as a result, questioned their use in high-stakes decision-making.

Amid highly publicized scrutiny and a growing body of research questioning the use of VAMs, states, including Virginia, adopted Student Growth Percentiles (SGP) as teacher-evaluative measures. The SGP model compares students’ current test performance in the context of their prior test performance (Castellano & Ho, 2015), though statisticians and researchers have also questioned the use of this model as an evaluative tool (see Baker et al., 2013; Castellano & McCaffrey, 2017; Ehlert, Koedel, Parsons, & Podgursky, 2016). Interestingly enough, even the developer of the SGP model (Betebenner, 2009) acknowledged that SGPs allow for descriptive, not causal, analysis.

Another evaluative measure widely adopted was the use of classroom observational data. Though observations have been a part of administrative practice since the 1950s (Cohen & Goldhaber, 2016), their use in consequential personnel decisions is relatively recent. Researchers have questioned the fairness of these observations for high-stakes decision-making—as opposed to informing practice—as classroom assignments
are often made by nonrandom processes. Specifically, they found that classroom composition significantly influenced teachers’ evaluative scores and, as a result, classroom observations may lead to unfairly misidentifying and mislabeling teacher performance (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012; Steinberg & Garrett, 2016; Whitehurst, Chingos, & Lindquist, 2014). Specific to language arts, Steinberg and Garrett (2016) found that teachers with high literacy achievers in their classroom were twice as likely to be rated as highly effective, and these ratings were independent of classroom instructional strategies. In addition, there is a lot of variability in how teacher observation protocols are constructed (Cohen & Goldhaber, 2016; Grossman, Loeb, Cohen, & Wyckoff, 2013), further calling their utility into question. Other recommended measures—Student Learning Objectives (SLOs); state developed assessments; collective performance models—have also received intense scrutiny as to their objectivity, fairness, and effectiveness for high-stakes decision-making (see Marion, DePascale, Domaleski, Gong, & Diaz-Bilello, 2012; Prince et al., 2009; Reform Support Network, n.d.).

Though many researchers, educators, and educational organizations agreed that ensuring teacher quality is an essential requirement in any educational system, they argued that new evaluative models did not adequately provide ways to identify or support effective teachers and build capacity (Danielson, 2016; Darling-Hammond et al., 2012; Ford et al., 2017; Fullan, 2011; Strauss, 2013). They proposed that, instead, these accountability standards were more punitive than supportive, undermined teachers’ professionalism, and had adverse effects on teachers’ pedagogy by narrowing the curriculum with a focus on tested items (Aldeman, 2017; Berliner, 2011; Danielson,
In 2015, provisions of the ESSA reflected this pushback from the educational community and eliminated federal oversight of teacher evaluation systems. States and districts, however, were still mandated with ensuring teacher accountability and were given the freedom to determine how this is defined, the models implemented, and the consequences attached to evaluation results.

These major changes in standards, assessment, and evaluation policies politicized and dictated the direction of the nation’s literacy agenda, significantly influencing the classroom contexts of early literacy teachers and the lifeworld through which they teach. Policy decisions and legislation determined the dominance of mathematics and reading instruction and assessments while, again, writing seemed neglected. For example, a report by the Education Commission of the States (2014) looked at high-stakes testing across states and showed that the only states with mandated state writing assessments were Tennessee (Grades 3 through 11), Texas (Grades 4 and 7), Virginia (Grade 8 and an end-of-course assessment in high school), and Wyoming (Grades 3, 5, and 7). The District of Columbia also mandated writing assessments in Grades 4, 7, and 10. All states had mandated reading and math assessments in Grades 3 through 8, and at least one end-of-course assessment in high school.

Specific to writing instruction, a critical analysis of these shifts in standards and assessments necessitates equal consideration of the federally mandated practice of tying teachers’ evaluations to assessment results. This practice can create dissonance between the written and taught curriculum for writing. That writing instruction and assessment is not predominant on the national policy agenda likely influences the “weight” that
teachers assign to writing instruction, as it can be subsumed in relation to instruction in tested subjects (Bisland, 2015; Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Mo et al., 2014).

National Context: Implications for Kindergarten Teachers’ SPWI

The implications of the national discourse for kindergarten teachers’ SPWI (self-efficacy and outcome expectancy) are varied. The shift in epistemology on kindergarteners’ emergent literacy needs, a shifting focus on the importance of the literacy block, layered with messages about what should specifically be taught during the literacy block in kindergarten classrooms, created continuously shifting expectations for teachers’ instructional and assessment competencies.

Explicit federal oversight of states’ adherence to legislative changes meant that kindergarten teachers received multiple and recurring professional development opportunities for structuring reading instruction for phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension. Though recent legislative changes have included writing instruction as a necessary component of literacy in the classroom, teacher preparation programs and professional development support have not kept pace with changes in standards (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011; Korth et al., 2017; National Commission on Writing, 2006; Norman & Spencer, 2005; Troia, Shankland, & Heintz, 2010). As a result, there have been consistent reports from teachers across the elementary grades that they lack confidence about their writing instruction (see Al-Bataineh et al., 2010; Galligan, 2011; Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Korth et al., 2017; Ritchey et al., 2015), especially when discussing the implementation of developmentally appropriate writing instruction (Applebee & Langer, 2006). This is concerning as mastery experiences are strong
mediators of teachers’ beliefs in their ability to successfully carry out future instructional tasks and to accomplish desired instructional outcomes (Gilbert & Graham, 2010; M. Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011; M. Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009).

In a 1998 survey about writing instruction conducted by NAEP (Solomon, Lutkus, Kaplan, & Skolnik, 2004), the majority of fourth grade teachers (the lowest grade surveyed) responded that they spent between 1 and 3 hours a week in explicit writing instruction, though this fluctuated depending on the task. In 2010, researchers reported that teachers in Grades 4-6 across the U.S. spent about 15 minutes a day on writing instruction (Gilbert & Graham, 2010). As previously discussed, in 2014, Puranik and colleagues (2014) found this lowered to an average of 6.1 minutes in the fall and 10.5 minutes in the winter, with an instructional focus on handwriting exercises. The steady decline of instructional time and a focus on the mechanics of writing is especially concerning given teachers’ tendency to use self-created writing curriculum in their classrooms (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Puranik et al., 2014; Solomon et al., 2004). This pedagogical-trifecta of low self-efficacy, limited instructional time, and variability of instructional material clearly delineates the potentially negative influence of the continuously shifting contexts in which kindergarten teachers’ self-perceptions are being shaped.

In addition, teacher-evaluation reform efforts have substantially affected this shifting and changing. A recent example of this was played out in the District of Columbia, where 241 teachers (5% of the teacher workforce) were fired, most scoring the lowest on newly implemented evaluation reforms, with an additional 737 employees rated minimally effective (Lewin, 2010). Researchers have documented the negative
consequences of what many teachers deemed punitive and unfair evaluative practices, showing overall declines in working conditions, teacher morale, teacher self-efficacy, as well as school climate and trust of administrators (Achinstein et al., 2004; Ford et al., 2017, Konstantopoulos, 2014; Lavigne, 2014; Richards, 2012; von der Embse et al., 2016). A recent study supported these findings, reporting a direct causal relationship between performance ratings and teachers’ job satisfaction (Koedel, Li, Tan, & Springer, 2017). The researchers also noted that ratings of job satisfaction were largest at the threshold between performance labels of above expectation and significantly above expectation, and lowest at the threshold between performance labels of below expectation and at expectation.

Fullan (2011) argued that a misguided reliance on accountability over capacity building is counterproductive and can never lead to instructional improvements. Others, however, have argued that the primary role of evaluations is to remove underperforming teachers’ insulation from accountability and ensure all students have access to high-quality instruction (e.g., Edwards, 2014; Thomas, Wingert, Conant, & Register, 2010). What this study sought to understand is the influence of these constantly shifting and changing debates about high-stakes accountability and evaluative models on kindergarten teachers’ movements through self-perceptions (self-efficacy and outcome-expectancy) of writing instruction.

Vagle’s (2014) illustration of intentional meanings of phenomenon allows a clear visual conceptualization of this constantly shifting lifeworld (see Figure 4). He explained that post-intentional phenomenological research is an exploration of the constantly shaping and re-shaping of the overlapping gray areas. He stated, “I imagine the lines of
this image being permeable and malleable; they are not rigid, nor are they infinite. Like intentional meanings, they shift and change in and over time, through ever changing contexts” (pp. 40-41).


These overlaps and shifts are very evident in the lifeworld of kindergarten teachers, even with just an analysis of the movements in the philosophical and national policy contexts within which kindergarten teachers teach writing. The major purpose of this present study’s inquiry was to seek an understanding of how teachers’ movements through SPWI take shape, shift, and overlap to create new and unique gray areas as they move through their life-world of kindergarten writing instruction.

Researcher’s Journal Entry: Slowing Down Through Post-Reflexivity 3

As I was watching a news report on Betsy Devos, the recently appointed Secretary of Education under President Trump’s administration, I kept thinking of the influence of popular media on teachers’ SPWI. I decided to do a cursory “historical” internet search and, very quickly, noted several headlines: Viadero’s (2005) article titled, “Panel Urges U.S. Push to Raise Math, Science Achievement;” a front page New York Times article titled “Schools Cut Back Subjects to Push Reading and Math” (Dillon, 2006); Manzo’s (2006) Education Week article titled,
“Schools Urged to Push Beyond Math, Reading to Broader Curriculum,” reporting on a symposium of approximately 200 leaders of influential organizations, educators, and policy analysts debating the need for more history, social studies, arts, literature, and character lessons in the curriculum. Writing, once again, was neglected. Recent news reports were much more disturbing. In 2014, both The Los Angeles Times and The New York Post made available evaluation results for every teacher, by name, throughout their cities, an example of what some claimed was public shaming (Harvey, 2014).

This line of thought makes me aware of the vast and unique scope of contextual influences, not specifically addressed in this study, which each participant and I bring to our dialog. It also reminds me of Vagle’s (2014) urging to remain sensitive to participants’ intentional relations with the phenomenon “as it becomes seen,” not relying on a priori understandings. I find myself continuously thinking about this different and nuanced understanding of context—not just external/social context, but also internal/personal context.

State Context for Writing Instruction in Kindergarten

The participants in this study were kindergarten teachers in Pleasantville County Schools (pseudonym), a district in central Virginia. In 1983, the same year of the release of the Nation at Risk report, Virginia’s state school superintendent pushed for more rigorous state instructional standards and accreditation requirements. This reform initiative included: (a) a literacy test in Grade 6—dubbed the literacy passport—and required summer tutoring for students who failed the end-of-year test; (b) standards for the inclusion of literacy instruction in all subjects from kindergarten to Grade 2; (c) early reading remediation, and (d) school accreditation requirements that shifted from schools having to show capability to provide high-quality education to showing actual provision of high-quality education (Snider, 1987). Despite these reforms, Virginia students’ 1994

**Virginia and the Standards of Learning.** In 1995, the Virginia Board of Education (BOE, 1995) developed and implemented rigorous and comprehensive state standards called the Standards of Learning (SOL). These standards provided instructional frameworks and assessments for reading, writing, math, science, and history/social science. In 1998, assessments tied to the standards were administered in Grades 3, 5, 8, and end of course assessments in high school (Virginia Department of Education [VDOE], 2013). Students were not administered writing assessments in Grade 3—writing assessments were administered in Grades 5, 8, and an end of course assessment in high school. The SOL results established a system for defining student proficiency in these content areas and a system for assigning accreditation ratings for schools. Publicly accessible publications of annual school report cards outlined schools’ aggregate levels of student achievement based on these assessment results (“Virginia Standards,” 2014).

The kindergarten English language arts (ELA) standards included objectives organized around four strands: oral language, research (*how* and *why* questions), reading, and writing. The kindergarten writing standards were limited in scope, requiring students to recognize and print letters of the alphabet, use basic phonetic principles, identify story elements, and communicate ideas through pictures and writing (BOE, 1995; see also Appendix C).
Virginia Early Intervention Reading Initiative. In 1997, the General Assembly reinforced the Commonwealth’s focus on reading instruction when they approved the Virginia Early Intervention Reading Initiative (EIRI). This initiative provided early reading intervention for kindergartners and first graders, supporting an emergent literacy philosophical approach to literacy instruction. A provision of the EIRI was the use of the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), diagnostic assessments developed by the University of Virginia to aid in the early identification of students demonstrating reading deficiencies (VDOE, 2017b). Over $28 million was allocated to student remediation and for teachers’ professional development of remedial strategies (Thayer, 2000). In 2000, EIRI services expanded to include all eligible students in kindergarten through third grade. Thayer (2000), a policy analyst for the VDOE, noted that this focus on remediation and accreditation exerted some pressure on teachers to use small group instruction and tutoring “during the school day, after school, on Saturdays, and in the summer” (p. 72).

Virginia and the Reading First initiative. In 2002, the VDOE revised the ELA SOLs in the primary grades to “parallel the reading skills emphasized in the Reading Excellence Act and Reading First which included: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary/concept development, and reading comprehension” (VDOE, 2003, p. 2). Virginia was awarded $16.9 million in Reading First federal funding in 2003, and implemented the Virginia Reads: Every Minute Counts reading program, a state-level Reading First initiative (VDOE, 2003). Instructional contexts for teachers in kindergarten through Grade 3 changed in schools eligible for funding. The major changes implemented were as follows:
- Schools had to select new scientifically based comprehensive reading programs with instruction and assessment components.
- Scheduling changes included 90 minutes of uninterrupted reading instruction daily.
- Teachers had to implement screening, progress monitoring, diagnostic, and outcome assessments to guide reading instruction.
- All teachers in kindergarten through third grade had to receive professional development in reading instruction and intervention strategies. (VDOE, 2003)

In addition, funding allowed the VDOE to hire and train reading specialists for building level support and to collaborate with the University of Virginia’s School of Education to provide training for K-3 teachers (VDOE, 2003).

A noteworthy addition to the 2002 revision of the ELA SOL was the inclusion of this introductory statement: “In kindergarten through third grade, the primary goal is to teach all students to read fluently and to comprehend a variety of fiction and nonfiction selections that relate to all areas of the curriculum” (BOE, 2002, p. 1). This statement of purpose is included in all ELA SOL revisions to date. The revisions to the kindergarten writing standards were minor, adding only distinctions between first and last name, printing of upper- and lower-case letters, and writing with directionality (see Appendix C).

A major adjustment was made to the SOL assessments in 2006 in compliance with NCLB requirements for annual testing in reading and math in Grades 3 through 8, and once during high school. Beginning that year, reading and math assessments were included in Grades 4, 6 and 7, with increased expectations across all assessments. Writing
assessments were still only administered in Grades 5, 8 and in end of course assessments in high school (VDOE, 2013).

**Virginia and the Common Core State Standards.** As stated earlier, Virginia was one of four states that did not adopt the CCSS as state educational leaders argued that the SOLs were as rigorous as the CCSS (see VDOE News, 2010). For reading and math, the Virginia BOE had already initiated collaborative efforts with the College Board and the American Diploma Project to increase rigor in these content areas. The Virginia BOE stated:

> The Standards of Learning are clear and rigorous and have won the acceptance and trust of Virginia educators. Whatever adjustments might be warranted to ensure alignment of the SOL with the Common Core State Standards can be made within the process through which the Board of Education exercises its constitutional authority to establish standards for the Commonwealth’s public schools. (“Virginia Standards,” 2014, p. 17)

In keeping with the plan for adjustments, the SOLs were revised in 2010 accompanied with extensive documentation showing alignment with the CCSS (see VDOE, 2010, 2011). Revisions to the kindergarten writing standards were more extensive than the 2002 revision. For the first time, the standards included an instructional focus on writing for a variety of purposes—an instructional goal outlined in the CCSS. The standards also emphasized writing as a way to share experiences, implicating a movement away from a sole instructional focus on mechanics (BOE, 2010; see also Appendix C). Virginia’s ELA standards, however, still evidenced the
Commonwealth’s literacy emphasis on reading instruction. For example, the Superintendent for Public Instruction stated:

    The 2010 revisions to the English SOL place increased emphasis on strengthening adolescent literacy and equipping students with the reading skills they will need during their first year of college or in the work force. As schools implement these more challenging standards and state tests, I expect to see an improvement in the performance of Virginia middle and high school students on national reading assessments. (VDOE, 2013, p. 42)

Assessments were revised to align to the more rigorous standards, with new math assessments administered in 2012 and revised assessments in reading, writing, and science administered in 2013. As part of Virginia’s reform efforts, the BOE raised the benchmarks necessary for SOL pass rates by increasing the number of items students must answer correctly to pass. By the fall of 2013, the impact of the Commonwealth’s revised standards and assessment benchmarks were evident as the number of schools accredited dropped from 93% to 77%; the number of schools accredited with warning nearly quadrupled, and six schools were denied state accreditation because of chronically low achievement (VDOE, 2013; Ward, 2013). Increased focus on raising the Commonwealth’s reading and math scores ensued.

    A new era of instruction, assessment, and accreditation standards. Several key pieces of legislation fully demonstrated this “shifting” in the Commonwealth’s conceptualization of standards, instruction, assessment, and accreditation. In a bold move to reinforce accountability, the Virginia BOE passed a bill in 2013 that allowed them to develop an A-F school grading system based on students’ achievement on the SOLs.
Significant weight was assigned to students’ reading and math SOL scores in the calculations of a school’s grade, implementation was slated for 2014, and assigned grades were to be made publicly accessible (BOE, 2013).

In response to the increasingly vocal national and local debates about the influence of excessive high-stakes testing on teachers, students, instruction, and school culture (Chandler, 2014), the VDOE implemented a four-year plan in 2014 for adoptions to high-stakes testing requirements (VDOE, 2017a). One line item was the looming implementation of the school grading system. Both chambers supported postponing implementation (Hulette & Hieatt, 2014), and in 2015, the bill was repealed amidst concerns about stigmatization of students in schools assigned an F (Wagner, 2015).

In addition, Virginia’s Governor signed a unanimously supported bill that eliminated the social studies and science SOL tests in Grade 3, the SOL writing test in Grade 5, and two U.S. History tests in Grade 5, replacing these high-stakes mandated assessments with district-created alternative assessments (Chandler, 2014). For the first time since the start of the SOLs, there were no SOL assessments in writing at any elementary grade: the first SOL writing test was administered in Grade 8.

Specific to this study, changes to the kindergarten writing standards in the 2017 revisions were also noteworthy. The revised standards included explicit mention of instruction focused on narrative and descriptive writing and also included language that required students to share their writing with others (BOE, 2017; see also Appendix C). Interestingly enough, these changes were made after the 2014 bill eliminated the only state-mandated writing assessment in the elementary grades.
These many iterations of standards- and assessment-focused discourse in Virginia elucidates the purpose of this portion of the literature review: to critically analyze the unique contexts in which participants’ movements through SPWI are continuously being shaped. The need to explore the messages sent to teachers by this constantly shifting political and legislative culture is critical, especially when considering the influence of this contextual flux on teachers’ conceptualizations of writing instruction. This exploration becomes even more nuanced, however, when layered with an understanding of Virginia’s own story of the movement away from school accountability to a micro focus on teacher evaluations.

**Virginia guidelines for teacher evaluation.** Virginia joined the national reform movement focused on teacher evaluation. In 2010, the same year more rigorous standards were implemented, VDOE initiated a statewide initiative to revise the performance standards and evaluation criteria for educators (VDOE, n.d.). One recommendation the Board of Education made for teacher accountability was to “develop a model policy that includes growth in student achievement as a significant factor in evaluating the effectiveness of teachers, principals, and other administrators” (“Virginia Standards,” 2014, p. 19). A stated purpose of the policy was to provide an objective, performance-based compensation system (“Virginia Standards,” 2014), and this explicit linking of student performance to teacher effectiveness and accountability mirrored the national agenda spurred by the Race to the Top initiative.

Virginia law requires that local districts make decisions about teacher evaluations, and the VDOE provided very specific guidelines for structuring these evaluations. The VDOE acknowledged the complexities of the teaching task and the role of evaluations to
provide “teachers with the support, recognition, and guidance they need to sustain and improve their efforts” (VDOE, 2015, p. 1). Within the document, the BOE also cautioned about validity concerns with evaluation instruments. However, the guidelines, revised in 2015, outlined very specific procedures for documenting teacher performance. The document suggested evaluations should be based on multiple data sources including formal observations, informal observations, student surveys, teachers’ portfolios/document logs and self-evaluations, and math and reading achievement data (VDOE, 2015). The 2015 revisions also outlined seven standards for teachers’ assessments to include:

1. Professional knowledge,
2. Instructional planning,
3. Instructional delivery,
4. Assessment of and for student learning,
5. Learning environment,
6. Professionalism, and
7. Student academic progress.

Standards 1-6 accounted for 10% each of teachers’ evaluations, and Standard 7, student academic progress, accounted for 40% of teachers’ evaluation. As previously discussed, Virginia used SGP to quantify students’ academic progress. For student academic progress, 20% of the SGP score is accounted for using math and reading SOL data for Grades 4 through Grade 8, and the other 20% using one or more of the alternative measures of student achievement in math and reading.
SGP evaluations were also required for teachers in non-tested grades, directly impacting all teachers, including this study’s participants. The evaluative framework adopted was designed to track students’ academic performances back to kindergarten. Distinctions were also made about how to weigh students’ test scores in this evaluative equation based on whether or not scores were directly representative of the current grade taught (VDOE, 2015). Again, the understanding is that this study did not seek to weigh the merits of the different models used for teachers’ evaluations but, instead, attempted to understand how these statewide discussions and policy reform measures affect kindergarten teachers’ SPWI in their daily lifeworld.

**State Context: Implications for Kindergarten Teachers’ SPWI**

Changes in standards link directly to changes in teachers’ instructional contexts, and reform initiatives require teachers to “rethink their own practice, to construct new classroom roles and expectations about student outcomes, and to teach in ways they have never taught before—and probably never experienced as students” (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011, p. 81). As previously discussed, research shows a direct link between a teacher’s perceptions of self-efficacy and his or her ability to adapt effectively to constantly changing instructional contexts (Bandura, 1997; M. Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). Gregoire (2003) proposed that a teacher’s reaction to instructional reform is mediated by whether or not the reform is seen as threat or a challenge. She explained that teachers with perceptions of low self-efficacy might see instructional reform as a threat, while those with high self-efficacy may see reform as a challenge, though this perception of challenge is also mediated by beliefs about the availability of time, resources, and support necessary to implement the proposed changes.
This contextual climate of change merits another mention of M. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy’s (2001) questions that explore:

What kinds of challenges or changes are strong enough to provoke a reexamination of established efficacy beliefs?...To what extent would a change in grade level or curriculum generate such a reexamination? How much does a change in context...arouse a reassessment? (p. 802)

This study sought to determine if national policy agendas and legislative changes to Virginia’s standards, assessments, and teacher-evaluation policy provoked, generated, or aroused movements in kindergarten teachers’ SPWI. Bandura’s (1997) discussion of a teacher’s sense of control over external factors and the influence this has on self-efficacy warrants attention as teachers are continuously adapting instruction to meet mandates.

Additionally, the culture of accountability and the SOL changes to kindergarten English standards is creating a new and unique culture for kindergarten teachers. Increased pressure to ensure students’ reading performance filtered from the state to districts directly to kindergarten classrooms, and this had a direct impact on time spent on writing instruction. As Strickland and colleagues (2001) observed, “although the tests often serve as gatekeepers at grades 4, 8, and 11, the pressure to prepare students for them exists at all grade levels” (p. 386), and many teachers felt high-stakes test preparation and authentic writing experiences were “mutually exclusive” (p. 386). Also of note is the state’s elimination of the only elementary high-stakes writing assessment and the impact this can have on teachers’ decision-making about devoting instructional time to writing, which is not tested, or to reading, which is.
Layered with these complex state contexts for literacy instruction and assessment, is the changing ideological landscape of teacher accountability, bringing to mind Vagle’s (2014) gray areas (see Figure 4). As research on the impact of teacher evaluations is a relatively nascent field, there has been no publicly available data collected on the impact of teacher evaluations on Virginia’s teachers in the lower-grades. Teachers in Virginia, however, did express concern with teacher evaluation data being publicly accessible and, in 2016, the Virginia General Assembly passed a bill to preserve confidentiality of teacher performance data (see Virginia Education Association, 2011, 2016).

Moran (2017) interviewed first grade teachers in Louisiana, specifically to see how teacher evaluations affected teachers in non-tested grades. She found that many teachers were unsure of how scores were calculated and that most teachers agreed that teachers in lower-grades should be held accountable for students’ upper-grade scores. One teacher voiced, however, that school-wide data “created an inaccurate view of her teaching ability” (p. 188), due mostly to the weighted system. This teacher in Moran’s study explained that upper-grade teachers received higher scores because their total percentage evaluation was based on current scores while, for lower-grade teachers, the scores were a composite of 3 years of school-wide data.

The political pendulum-swing of standards, assessments, and evaluations can significantly affect teachers’ pedagogical decisions. Vacca and Vacca (2001) argued that tests and other forms of assessment must be used as tools to help us see students’ needs more clearly, not as weapons in a struggle between policy makers and professional educators for control of the curriculum, with students caught in the middle. This study attempted to catch a glimpse of Virginia kindergarten teachers’ movements through this
political and ideological minefield in an effort to understand how it shapes their self-perceptions (self-efficacy and outcome-expectancy) of writing instruction.

**District Context for Writing Instruction in Kindergarten**

Though guided by state standards, each district’s curriculum articulates the models guiding instruction and assessments, and curriculum can differ from district to district. The distinction between state standards and district curriculum is a distinction between *what* and *how*. While standards outline agreed upon intended learning outcomes, the curriculum determines how those standards will be taught by outlining the plan for achieving educational aims, goals, and objectives. These aims, goals, and objectives provide guidelines for: (a) developing lesson plans, (b) determining teaching materials, (c) providing professional development of approved instructional strategies, and (d) designing assessment protocols (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013). Kindergarten teachers in the PCS district taught through three major literacy frameworks that guided the interpretation of state-mandated standards into curriculum. These literacy frameworks were: (a) phonics-based approach, (b) a whole language approach, and (c) balanced literacy approach.

The succeeding section describes each literacy approach, as implemented in PCS, by drawing on personal experience as a PALS tutor in the PCS district, communication with Ms. Adams (pseudonym), the District’s Instructional Specialist for Elementary Language Arts, and on relevant research. The purpose of this section is not to debate the effectiveness of any one approach but, instead, to delineate the specific pedagogical changes kindergarten teachers in the PCS district have adapted to from 1987 to the present time. This goal aligned with the purpose of this post-intentional
phenomenological study: to uncover kindergarten teachers’ movements through SPWI in their unique contexts.

**A phonics-based approach to literacy instruction.** In 1987, Virginia’s state school superintendent proposed literacy standards implementing a phonics-based approach to teaching reading, writing, and spelling, and required schools to prepare formal plans for writing instruction in all grades (Snider, 1987). The PCS district focused on a phonics-based reading and spelling curriculum, however, with writing instruction in kindergarten conceptualized as developing handwriting skills. The district adopted a synthetic phonics approach (Adams, personal communication, June 19, 2017). Synthetic phonics is a part-to-whole phonics approach focusing on decoding through grapheme–phoneme correspondences that link letters to their individual sounds, blending to link sounds to words, and then explicit emphasis on sentences (Morris, 2015; National Reading Panel, 2000). Critical to this reliance on building students’ decoding skills is an acknowledgement that there are many common words not spelled or pronounced phonetically. As a result, PCS’ kindergarten curriculum also incorporated a whole-word strategy approach and included a list of high frequency words that students were required to memorize by sight.

Instruction using a phonetic approach is typically teacher-centered and explicit, and instructional strategies for kindergarten literacy included the use of letter-sound drills and rote memorization, drawing heavily on a behaviorist framework of education that saw learning as best taught using conditioning and reinforcement practices (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013). Specific to teaching writing, phonics-based curriculum outlined teacher-directed lessons on discrete skills using contrived writing assignments, a focus on the
conventions of writing (e.g., punctuation, spelling), and emphasis on writing products over idea development, composition, and the writing processes (Troia, Lin, Cohen, & Monroe, 2011). Teaching materials popularized to help with this type of instruction were teacher manuals with highly prescribed and scripted lesson plans. Decodable texts, flashcards, decodable worksheets, and the use of worksheets for tracing the letters of the alphabet were staples of the kindergarten classroom, and these materials supported an instructional focus on reading and spelling. A decodable text type popularized for this type of instruction was the basal reader (Allington, 2013; Hoffman, Sailors, & Patterson, 2002). Basal readers were typically written with carefully controlled vocabularies using a large percentage of words that could be read by applying phonetical skills and with a repetition of high-frequency words (Hoffman et al., 2002).

**A whole-language approach to literacy instruction.** In 2002, the PCS district followed state mandates and adopted the *Virginia Read: Every Minute Counts* reading program, using a whole-language approach to literacy education. Whole-language instruction is a whole-to-parts approach based on the Vygotsky’s constructivist philosophy of learning (Morrow, 2005; Moustafa & Maldonado-Colon, 1999). This instructional approach is designed with an understanding that children learn by connecting new knowledge to previously learned knowledge (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013) and places the instructional emphasis on meaning-making (Morrow, 2005). Text is introduced as a whole, and then “taken apart” through phonics instruction as one of the cueing systems, but also includes the use of syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic cues during reading and writing (Goodman, 1986; Holdaway, 1979; Morrow, 2005). This embedded phonetic approach incorporated phonics instruction with the other four literacy
skills recognized by the Reading First Initiative—phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension.

Instruction shifted from a teacher-centered approach to a child-centered approach, using a blend of explicit and exploratory instructional strategies, and incorporating student choice, self-regulation, and teacher- and peer-interactions. Nationally, researchers argued against the use of phonics readers that were mechanical and did not focus on meaning or natural language use. Whole language advocates called, instead, for connectivity of all aspects of literacy that combined speaking, listening, reading, and writing in literature-rich classrooms, and that linked classroom instruction to real-world experiences (see Holdaway, 1979; Morrow, 2005). Spelling and word knowledge were taught in context and not in isolation, texts were read for meaning, and writing in response to reading became a highly utilized component of instruction (Brooks-Harper & Shelton, 2003).

A whole language approach, then, depended on an integration of literacy into all content areas and the PCS district adopted a thematic instructional framework as a mechanism for student learning (Adams, personal communication, June 19, 2017). The goal of a thematic approach is to teach literacy and content-area knowledge together in an interesting way (Morrow, 2005). Science and social studies themes were often supported with relevant literature to teach reading, and thematic writing prompts continued this instructional approach. Additionally, assessments under a thematic approach were continuous and included observations, student work-samples, and student conferences (Morrow, 2005).
A balanced approach to literacy instruction. Nationally, many teachers interpreted whole-language as a departure from phonics instruction and debates raged about the effectiveness of phonics vs. whole-language approaches (see Groff, 1991; McNee & Coleman, 2007). An aptly named literacy framework that emerged in response to dissatisfaction with this dichotomization was a balanced literacy approach, an approach adopted by PCS in 2007 (Adams, personal communication, June 19, 2017).

Balanced literacy integrated key elements of both phonics and whole-language through a combination of direct instruction and authentic reading and writing experiences (Cooper & Kiger, 2003; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Research supported an increased understanding of the interrelated nature of language processes—reading, writing, thinking, speaking and listening—as opposed to thinking of each element as a discrete skill set. A balanced literacy approach also incorporated prescribed organizational frameworks and instructional strategies for teaching reading, word development, and writing. Daily instructional activities included shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, writing, and word study, and students’ progress was monitored using both formative and summative assessments (see Appendix D for an explanation of these instructional strategies and assessment approaches).

Specific to writing instruction, a balanced-literacy approach emphasized the need for balanced instruction in both the processes and products of writing (Tompkins, 2012). A process approach to writing teaches students strategies for idea development, organization, writing drafts, revising, editing, and publishing. In addition, these processes are taught as recursive and not linear (Strickland et al., 2001). The district mandated 2.5 hours as the minimum daily instructional time for kindergarten literacy instruction, with
writing instruction required for a minimum of 30 minutes daily (see Appendix E for a full description of the literacy block requirements). PCS’ writing curriculum—aligned with the CCSS and the Virginia SOL—also emphasized writing for a variety of purposes. In the kindergarten curriculum, this included narrative, informational, and functional writing (see Appendix F). To help structure these goals for writing instruction, the district adopted two instructional models that supported a balanced literacy approach and supported writing for a variety of purposes: writing workshop popularized by Lucy Calkins (2010, 2011) and the 6 + I Traits of Writing for Primary and Upper Elementary writing program developed by Culham (1989, 2005).

Calkins’ (2010) writing workshop includes five major instructional strategies that incorporate teacher-led mini-lessons (explicit and direct instruction) and group and independent activities (student-centered), following a model/apply/share sequence. Teachers were expected to (a) use mentor text to show the craft of writing; (b) work with the whole class modeling writing strategies using think-aloud and interactive writing as instructional techniques; (c) explicitly teach the stages of the writing process; (d) include active engagement (e.g., turn-and-talk); and (e) conduct teacher conferencing with each student about their writing. In addition, peer-collaboration is a crucial strategy of this instructional model, accomplished in kindergarten with peer-feedback on written products through sharing circles. Though the writing workshop provided a structure for the writing block, Culham’s (1989, 2005) trait crate provided curricular focus on what is taught—organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions—and included mentor text and materials that addressed each trait by grade level, including kindergarten.
Administrators, literacy specialists, and teachers in PCS were provided with professional development opportunities when the balanced literacy approach was adopted by PCS. These opportunities were extensive and sustained for the incorporation of instructional strategies needed to structure and implement shared, guided, independent reading groups, and word study. Though teachers were provided professional development opportunities for writing instruction, they were not as comprehensive nor were they sustained.

District Context: Implications for Kindergarten Teachers’ SPWI

As discussed previously, the purpose of this section was to provide the backdrop against which teachers make meaning of their self-efficacy (perceptions of ability) and outcome expectancy (expectations of self-satisfaction) of writing instruction as they take shape in their unique contexts. The philosophical underpinnings of the three predominant literacy frameworks described above are unique and distinct enough that teachers’ movement through these instructional contexts have the potential for significant influence on this shaping of their self-perceptions. This is especially applicable as operating at a perceived level of high self-efficacy calls for “continuously improvising multiple subskills to manage ever changing circumstances, most of which are ambiguous, unpredictable, and often stressful elements” (Bandura, 1986, p. 391).

Though the paucity of research on kindergarten writing instruction limits knowledge of the influence of curricular changes specific to kindergarten teachers in their unique contexts, Al-Bataineh and colleagues (2010) conducted research with twenty-one first- through eighth-grade teachers in a district that had recently implemented a new writing curriculum. Teachers reported declining self-efficacy due to insufficient training.
with the new curriculum and increased pressure for student progress in writing. The teachers also expressed a need for professional development that was ongoing and practical and, interestingly enough, many teachers reported that “pressure to cover content, especially in tested subject areas, squeezes writing out of the day” (Al-Bataineh et al., 2010, p. 445). Similarly, Landon-Hays (2012) documented the concerns of secondary teachers about their ability to teach writing amid curricular changes and increased performance demands, and found a link with these heightened expectations to teachers’ declining self-efficacy.

When M. Tschannen-Moran and Johnson (2011) surveyed 478 elementary and 150 middle school teachers in Virginia, their findings supported this influence of Bandura’s (1997) vicarious experiences as a mediating factor of self-efficacy. M. Tschannen-Moran and Johnson (2011) found that the quality of teachers’ preparation programs and professional development experiences had a direct, positive correlation with perceptions of their ability to teach literacy successfully. Similarly, Troia and colleagues (2011) worked with second- through fifth-grade teachers in urban elementary schools who had received extensive professional development on implementing writing workshop. Though the teachers incorporated the critical elements of writing workshop, the researchers found teachers varied considerably in classroom management, student engagement, and use of materials. Other researchers have also documented teachers’ concerns about curricular changes in writing and about how these changes influence fidelity of implementation. This was especially evident with respect to their ability to cover objectives in the prescribed time, effectively manage small-group instruction, and

These reported findings are concerning as research has also documented that teachers’ beliefs in their ability to accomplish a task influences their pedagogical choices and instruction (Guskey, 1988; Troia et al., 2011; M. Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). When curriculum changes, teachers may doubt their instructional choices when teaching the affected content, which in turn can lower their self-efficacy beliefs and negatively affect instructional choices. This relationship between self-efficacy and instructional choices can create what M. Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) called a “self-reinforcing cycle of either success or failure that tends to become quite stable unless a jarring experience provokes a reassessment” (p. 229). This cycle is especially relevant as teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to implement new teaching techniques (Bandura, 1997; M. Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). Graham and colleagues (2001) documented this phenomenon specific to writing instruction and found that teachers with higher perceptions of self-efficacy tended to change writing instruction to incorporate a process-approach in their classrooms.

The implications for more research that addresses all aspects of teachers’ self-efficacy (instructional strategies, student engagement, and classroom management) and outcome-expectancy (likely consequences on teachers’ self-satisfaction) with writing instruction are crucial, especially as they apply to kindergarten teachers. This section has clearly delineated the scope of curricular changes in PCS’ kindergarten classrooms. Also clear is the substantive amount of instructional changes required to implement these new models, strategies, and techniques of instruction to fidelity. When the constantly
changing demographics of kindergarten classrooms is also taken into consideration—
especially with respect to students’ placement and pace of movement on the emergent
literacy continuum—the dense, thick, rich, and nuanced tapestry of kindergarten
teachers’ lifeworld emerges with greater clarity. A teacher who feels self-efficacious in
writing instruction with one class may have a different experience the following year
based solely on the placement of incoming students on the literacy development
continuum (Steinberg & Garrett, 2016). Even more pertinent in kindergarten, a teacher’s
self-perception of writing instruction may change within the same year based on students’
unique progress.

This chapter has provided a surface overview of the some of the more impactful
philosophical and contextual factors that have influenced the lifeworld of kindergarten
writing instruction (see Appendix G for an integrated contextual timeline). What this
study sought to understand was how kindergarten teachers’ movements through SPWI
may take shape in these complexly interconnected contexts.
CHAPTER 3
Research Methodology

*It is not failure of others to appreciate your abilities that should trouble you, but rather your failure to appreciate theirs.*

—Confucius c.551–c.479 BC, from The Analects

The policy, curricular, and pedagogical changes affecting writing expectations in kindergarten are multi-layered and complex. These complex changes make the paucity of research on writing instruction in general, and on kindergarten writing instruction specifically, especially problematic. An underlying expectation for this study was to add to the early-writing research base. The ultimate purpose of inquiry, however, was to gain an understanding of how kindergarten teachers’ movements through self-perceptions of writing instruction (SPWI) take shape in their unique contexts. This understanding brought clarity to the types of curricular and leadership supports, and policy reform, that can support teachers as they nurture early authorship in students. The lens of this inquiry was strength-based, using an appreciative focus on teachers’ past successful experiences with writing instruction to serve as the frame for exploration and understanding.

**Positionality**

My positionality as a researcher-practitioner informs the purpose and approach of, and motivation for, this study. In my capacity as a literacy intervention specialist working in an elementary school, I witnessed the fluidity of teachers’ SPWI, evidenced by
celebrations during perceived brilliant moments with writing instruction and dissatisfaction expressed during moments perceived as less than brilliant. I also noted the influence of a strong writing foundation on students’ cross-content academic achievement in the elementary grades, and the continuing challenges faced by students who struggled with writing in kindergarten. It was not until I saw how teachers’ personalities shaped their meaning making, however, that I was able to fully appreciate how all three contexts—my professional experiences, past experiences, and personality—shaped my own meaning making. These contexts are the cornerstone of my axiological stance valuing a proactive approach to nurturing writing competencies at the beginning of children’s literary experiences instead of a reactive approach once students were already disengaged with writing.

The practice of making my paradigmatic positions clear and my transparency in acknowledging how my biases, beliefs, and perspectives influenced this inquiry are both crucial in ensuring the authenticity of my methodological approach. As discussed in Chapter 2, Vagle (2014) identified the practice of post-reflexivity as a major tenet of post-intentional phenomenology. Post-reflexivity involves the researcher making explicit any uncovered ingrained biases and interrogating them so they do not “dominate or determine what is possible to see” (p. 75). Vagle argued it is not possible to suspend these biases, but they can be opened up, and the “opening up” allows them to “become important parts of the work.” (p. 75). As I opened up my biases when interacting with this phenomenon, I saw how they affected the work and I made the decision to include excerpts of my post-reflexive journaling as points of data. It is my wish that this level of transparency captures the reader as moments of agreement and moments of dissonance
will, hopefully, nuance involvement with the text. Vagle (2014) layered the complexity of transparency even further when he theorized:

Whatever understanding is opened up through an investigation will always move with and through the researcher’s intentional relationships with the phenomenon—not simply in the researcher, in the participants, in the text, or in their power positions, but in the dynamic intentional relationships that tie participants, the researchers, the produced text, and their positionalities together.

(p. 30)

I was able to “live” that quote as the dialogic nature of research, the relationships formed with teachers, and the complexities of perspectives as teachers “brought me to” the phenomenon, were integral to the richness of the data gathered.

**Research Design and Choice Moments**

Acknowledging my positionality was also important in making transparent my decisions about the research design guiding this study. Crotty (1998) explained that a research design “shapes our choice and use of particular methods and links them to the desired outcomes” (p. 7). For this study, decisions about the research design included

- the research approach chosen,
- the questions asked,
- the most appropriate way of conceptualizing the phenomenon under investigation,
- the choices made about the methods and lens for gathering and analyzing data to answer the questions, and
- my role in the creation of this text crafted as a result of this inquiry.
Research Design

I appreciate the word design as it brings to memory a trip to Thailand where I witnessed the hand-made creation of a beautiful and delicate silk tapestry woven on a loom. I sat in awe as three craftswomen worked in tandem, weaving individual, silken threads to create a beautiful and intricate design crafted with skill and care. I hope my carefulness in crafting this manuscript honors the brilliant tapestry of kindergarten teachers’ movements through SPWI for this period in time. Vagle (personal communication, April 27, 2017) articulated this dynamic well when he envisioned the threads of this research as each individual teacher’s rich and thick accounting of their lived experiences that continuously shape the phenomenon, the rich and thick contexts within which teachers teach, and the impact of an appreciative lens during interactions between the researcher and teachers.

Choice Moments

The series of choices made when developing the design guiding this study can be described as “choice moments” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 36)—critical points in a research design that set a course of action into motion. Each choice affects the next, linking conceptually similar sets of options. This allowed the research study to be personalized and unique and, ultimately, enhanced the outcome of this inquiry.

An important foundational choice was to use a qualitative approach for data gathering and analysis, as this approach provided methodological coherence with the study’s purpose, the questions asked, and the answers sought. Qualitative research is innately complex, but can weave an intricate and intimate understanding of human behavior that explores how meaning comes into being through generative and dialogic
relationships among self, socially situated relations, and the phenomenon studied (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Rich, 2017; Saldaña, 2011; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). This initial choice provided the foundation for this study’s research design framework represented in Figure 5.

**Figure 5.** Appreciative Phenomenology: research design. This funnel design is deliberate as the breadth of the phenomenon is narrowed and focused by the theoretical and methodological frameworks. Additionally, the methods of data gathering and analysis allowed further narrowing of the exploration in order to uncover tentative manifestations of the phenomenon in its unique context.
The literature supports this interwoven web of choice moments, and noted methodologists have described it artistically:

- Dahlberg and colleagues (2008) claimed it is a form of “methodological creativity…a multiplicity of methodological means in research” (pp. 176-177);

- Savin-Baden and Major (2013) called this approach an example of a “philosophical mash-up” (p. 31), where this blending and blurring of boundaries leads to new insights and perspectives;

- Vagle referred to it as “moving across theoretical lanes” (personal communication, April 27, 2017) to find the best approach for uncovering how intentional relations with the phenomenon studied might be shaped in their unique context;

- Lincoln and Guba (2000) described it as an interbreeding of paradigms where the researcher’s transparency makes clear “where and how paradigms exhibit confluence and where and how they exhibit differences, controversies, and contradictions” (p. 164).

Specific to this study’s design, Vagle acknowledged that, “what becomes thinkable when we look at the entangled relations among the various theories [social-cognitive theory, post-intentional phenomenology, and appreciative inquiry]…is richer, as what is produced is something that neither theory could have done on its own” (personal communication, April 27, 2017). In the following sections, I hope to demonstrate how methodological coherence among these approaches—Social-Cognitive Theory (SCT), Post-Intentional Phenomenology, and Appreciative Inquiry (AI)—provided a rich
platform for fresh and new understandings and pushed the boundaries of what became thinkable.

**Phenomenon and Theoretical Framework**

The design outlined in Figure 5 made it possible to acknowledge the dynamic nature of teachers’ SPWI. For this study’s participants, this framework facilitated a nuanced understanding of what influenced, supported, and slowed the movement of SPWI in the multiple, varied, and constantly shifting contexts of kindergarten writing instruction.

**Theoretical Framework**

As discussed in Chapter 2, this study focused on two aspects of self-perception—self-efficacy and outcome expectancy—embedded in Bandura’s (1997) SCT. In this study, a teacher’s SPWI referred to the combined impact of self-efficacy and outcome-expectancy on how teachers make meaning of their writing instruction. Writing instruction self-efficacy (WISE) reflected a teacher’s perception of his or her ability to teach the mechanics and compositional processes of writing, to engage students during writing instruction, and to maintain an efficiently managed classroom during writing instruction. Writing instructional outcome expectancy (WIOE) explored the degree to which self-efficacy influenced a teacher’s anticipation of self-satisfaction with their ability to accomplish their intended learning outcomes for writing instruction.

**Research Questions**

Bandura’s (1997) constructs of self-efficacy and outcome-expectancy provided a rich, thick, and nuanced exploration of the intentional relations (meaningful connections to the phenomenon) of kindergarten teachers’ self-perceptions as they moved through
writing instruction in the lifeworld of kindergarten classrooms. As stated in Chapter 1, the research question and research sub-questions (RSQ) explored were:

How might kindergarten teachers’ movements through self-perceptions of writing instruction take shape as they teach in their unique classroom contexts?

RSQ(a): What experiences shape kindergarten teachers’ self-efficacy of writing instruction?

RSQ(b): How do kindergarten teachers respond to their perceptions of students’ engagement with learning to write? and

RSQ(c): What does it mean for kindergarten teachers to experience self-satisfaction in the pursuit of instructional goals for writing?

The question and sub-questions that guided this study aligned with a post-intentional phenomenological approach to research and provided a contextualized way for participants to bring us to, and then open up, their experiences of the phenomenon. Consequently, asking how might allowed a post-intentional sensitivity, flexibility, and openness of approach to the unique shaping of the phenomenon (M. Vagle, personal communication, April 27, 2017).

Pilot Study

In order to ensure the feasibility of this study’s design and analytic processes, a pilot study was conducted. This pilot study was a small-scale version of this current study, and was embarked upon specifically to test the processes for data gathering and analysis. The site was one school in a suburban district in Virginia, and all four kindergarten teachers at the school agreed to participate in the study conducted from April 2017 to May 2017. The teachers’ experiences in teaching kindergarten ranged from
3 to 28 years, and this provided a great demographic spread that helped me understand the importance of these nuanced perspectives when uncovering the phenomenon.

Each teacher was interviewed initially for approximately one hour and then a 30-minute follow-up interview was conducted. I held two focus groups in the pilot study and realized that the focus group held during the research process did not yield new data. The focus group held at the end of data analysis to report out the findings of the research and to get teachers’ feedback yielded excellent ideas for strengthening teachers’ SPWI, and these will be discussed in Chapter 4.

One method of gathering data that I was particularly interested in piloting was asking teachers to complete journal entries about their writing instruction. van Manen (1990) was particularly supportive of journals, diaries, and logs as forms of data as they provide “reflective accounts of human experiences that are of phenomenological value” (p. 73). As I could not physically observe the shaping of teachers’ SPWI on a daily basis, this method seemed to be an effective and efficient way to gain access to the continuous movements in teachers’ lifeworld of kindergarten instruction. The lessons learned from the pilot study had significant influence on the structure of this main study, and they are outlined in the data gathering section below.

Methodological Framework

Chapter 2 provided an analysis of the philosophical coherence among post-intentional phenomenology, the phenomenon, and the theoretical constructs chosen for this study. As previously stated, post-intentional phenomenology is both a philosophy and a methodology, and this section outlines how the methodology provided a cohesive way to organize this current research with a lens that allowed rich, thick, and nuanced
answers to the research question, and cohered with SCT and AI’s methodological processes.

Vagle (2014) outlined a five-component methodological process for research:

1. Identify a phenomenon in multiple, partial, and varied contexts.
2. Devise a clear, yet flexible process for gathering data appropriate for the phenomenon under investigation.
4. Read and write your way through your data in a systematic, responsive manner.
5. Craft a text that captures tentative manifestations of the phenomenon in its multiple, partial, and varied contexts (p. 121).

The importance of post-reflexivity (Component 3) has already been discussed and demonstrated throughout this manuscript. In the following sections, I specifically address Components 1, 2 and 4 of Vagle’s (2014) methodological processes, and show how they informed data gathering and analysis.

**Identifying a Phenomenon in Multiple, Partial, and Varied Contexts**

This study was conducted in a large, suburban, public school district in central Virginia that is referred to as Pleasantville County Schools (PCS). The district is one of the largest in the state and every school has a full-day kindergarten. There are 38 elementary schools (Grades K-5) in this district and, in the academic year that this study was conducted, there were 194 kindergarten teachers. To identify the phenomenon in multiple and varied contexts, participants were selected using purposeful sampling. Creswell (2013) explained that purposeful sampling allows the researcher to achieve
representativeness of the context and to capture heterogeneity of the population—both important considerations for this inquiry. This strategy was used to facilitate the careful selection of teachers across instructional orientations, school demographical profiles, and experiences.

**Teachers’ instructional orientations to writing.** Researchers have found that teachers spend writing instructional time focused primarily on mechanics, composition, or a balance of both (e.g., Puranik et al., 2014; Ritchey et al., 2015). Additionally, Ritchey and colleagues (2015) reported that teachers’ instructional focus might not always align with their theoretical writing orientation as many mitigating factors, like self-efficacy, may intervene. In order to adequately capture the diversity of these instructional dynamics in the sample for this study, an electronic survey was delivered to the 196 kindergarten teachers in PCS, using publicly accessible district email accounts. The survey had two sections: One section asked participants to respond to, “When teaching a lesson during writing workshop on a typical day, about how much instructional time do you spend on the following,” and the other section asked, “How would you describe your enjoyment of implementing the following instructional tasks.” The 20-item survey used the same 10 instructional tasks in each section (for 20 possible responses). These items were adapted from Troia and Olinghouse’s (2013) compilation of evidenced-based practices for writing instruction and the Traits (Culham, 2005) definitions incorporated into PCS’ pacing guide. Respondents were asked to rate the items on a 4-point Likert-type scale for time spent on instruction (A lot—None at all) and for enjoyment of implementation (A lot—Not at all). Instructional tasks included items focused on mechanics (e.g., working with students on handwriting skills—writing name,
letter formation, directionality, neatness; teaching students to use punctuation and capitalization appropriately) and items focused on composition (e.g., working with students to develop their own ideas for writing; teaching students to incorporate voice in writing—humor, emotion, persuasion).

**School demographic profile.** Another avenue of identifying the multiple, partial, and varied contexts for PCS’ teachers movements through SPWI, was accomplished through an analysis of a report produced by the Virginia Assembly Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (Virginia Assembly JLARC, 2004). The report categorized the performance levels of schools in Virginia, across districts, by looking at (a) SOL scores, (b) the number of students eligible for Free and Reduced Priced Lunch (FRPL) as a proxy for the poverty level, (c) the proportion of minority students in each district, and (d) the educational attainments of adults in each district. As this study was being conducted in one district, the schools in PCS were analyzed across the first three criteria. The percentage of students on FRPL and the minority make-up of schools were closely aligned, so the first two criteria were used to assign a demographical profile to each of the 38 elementary schools in PCS. For the purpose of this study, the demographical profile was determined using the percentage of students passing the Virginia Standard of Learning (SOL) in reading as, since 2014, SOL assessments for writing started in Grade 8 (see Chandler, 2014) and the number of students eligible for FRPL. The district had a pass rate of 83% for the 2016-2017 reading SOL and this benchmark was used to categorize each school’s literacy performance. The benchmark set for FRPL was at or above 50%, as this percentage was used by the U.S. DOE’s Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development (2016) and the Virginia Assembly
JLARC (2004) to classify a school as mid- to high-poverty. Both the SOL and FRPL benchmarks were used to classify each elementary school’s demographical profile as: a) Successful—83% or above of students passing the reading SOL and a FRPL below 50%; b) Successful Challenged—83% or above of students passing the reading SOL and a FRPL of 50% or above; or c) Challenged—a pass rate below 83% for the reading SOL. Within PCS, 16 elementary schools were identified as Successful, six as Successful Challenged, and 16 as Challenged. On the survey, teachers were also asked to provide the number of years they had taught in kindergarten and to identify the school in which they taught.

Survey respondents. There was a 31% response rate to the survey (61 responses), with 80% of the responses having complete data (49 surveys). Of the incomplete surveys, five respondents completed the first half of the survey (instructional time), and seven completed only the biographical information. The 49 completed surveys were used to recruit participants, and their profiles are represented in Table 1. Each respondent was randomly assigned a number and then further coded to represent an instructional focus on mechanics (M), composition (C), or a balanced approach to writing instruction (CM)—for example, #23CM or #6M. I then contacted survey respondents within each cell represented in Table 1, using criterion sampling based on demographic and instructional data. Email invitations were sent using a staggered approach asking for further participation in the study. These sampling strategies fit the research design and the experiences sought, and this level of intentionality ensured representativeness of PCS’ kindergarten teachers in the final sample.
Table 1

Number of Survey Respondents by Demographic and Instructional Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Demographic</th>
<th>Experience Teaching in Kindergarten</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Early-Career 0-3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>8 2 = CM 3 = M 3 = C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>3 0 = CM 3 = M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenged</td>
<td>10 0 = CM 9 = M 1 = C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Total number of respondents = 49; Instructional Orientation: C = Instructional focus on Composition; M = instructional focus on Mechanics; CM = instructional focus on CM Mechanics.

Participants. Creswell (2013) cited Polkinghorne’s recommendation of a sample size of 5 to 25 participants for phenomenological research. Vagle (2014), however, stated there is not necessarily any magic number of research participants and encouraged, instead, openness and “sense-making” as each phenomenon studied is different. He advised that the number of participants should “make sense” with the type of phenomenon studied. To adequately uncover teachers’ experiences and answer the research questions, the goal was to have 10-12 participants in order to offer a feasible yet representative sample across Table 1’s matrix. Using the sampling approaches previously outlined, 12 survey respondents agreed to participate further in the study, and are represented in Table 2.
The participants were 12 teachers from 11 different schools in PCS. Teachers were all female, as PCS had only one male kindergarten teacher; 83% (10 teachers) were White, and 17% (2 teachers) were African American. This racial profile reflected PCS’ demographic profile for kindergarten teachers (88% White, 9% Black/African American). It also reflected the national demographic for all teachers, as during the 2011-2012 school year, 82% of public school teachers were White, with the percentage similar for elementary and secondary schools teachers (U.S. DOE, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, 2016). Table 2 also shows the range of experience in kindergarten from a teacher in her first year teaching to a teacher with 24 years of experience. Gabby, Autumn, and Joanne* had Master of Education degrees and Lucy had previously worked as a literacy coach in another state.

Table 2

*Participants by Demographic and Instructional Profiles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Demographic</th>
<th>Early-Career 0-3 years</th>
<th>Mid-Career 4-9 years</th>
<th>Veteran 10+ years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful (n=4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gabby: 4 years (C)</td>
<td>Rachael: 14 years (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Amanda: 4 years (M)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Joanne: 9 years (C)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful Challenged (n=3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Susan: 2 years (M)</td>
<td>Lexi: 24 years (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ruth: 20 years (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenged (n=5)</td>
<td>Dawn: 3 years (M)</td>
<td>Lucy: 9 years (CM)</td>
<td>Lydia: 17 years (CM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April: 1 year (M)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Autumn: 2 years (M)</td>
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*Note. n = 12 participants; Instructional Orientation: C = Instructional focus on Composition; M = instructional focus on Mechanics; CM = instructional focus on composition and mechanics. * All participant names are pseudonyms assigned by the researcher
Once the sample was finalized, I created a document that listed each respondent by their numbered code (without the instructional-orientation code), their school (without any demographical data), and their email address. This allowed initial interaction with teachers without any biases or preconceived ideas about their instruction or school-specific performance. Though PCS is considered a suburban district, the size of the district and the geographical spread of the schools allowed participants to represent schools from diverse geographical contexts. To demonstrate, one teacher taught at a school located on a busy intersection in a commercial district (where she could not leave the building after dark unless escorted), two taught in schools located in the middle of very affluent neighborhoods, and one taught in a school surrounded by farmland. These 12 kindergarten teachers’ multiple and varied experiences allowed a rich, thick, and representative exploration of teachers’ movements through SPWI. The sampling strategies used to select participants also supported the robust nature of this inquiry and increased the potential for generalizability of the findings.

The following section outlines the lens of AI that was used for data gathering and analysis. This lens was integral to the bright hues and intricate patterns of experiences that evolved during dialogic exchanges with the 12 teachers, and engendered a culture of respect and authentic communication between the researcher and teachers. Teachers graciously agreed to share their time and expertise, and this generosity allowed me to capture tentative manifestations of the fluid and amorphous movements through SPWI represented in kindergarten classrooms.
Devising a Clear, Flexible Process for Gathering Data: An Appreciative Lens

I have coined the term *Appreciative Phenomenology* as a way to describe this approach to phenomenological research. The current zeitgeist of much educational research has been gap- or deficit-based, an approach aligned with the crisis- and curative-centered language of educational reform (Calabrese, Hester, Friesen, & Burkhalter, 2010; Guess & Bowling, 2014; Harrison & Hasan, 2013; King, 2003). For example, in 2010, Calabrese and colleagues (2010) reported, “A cursory Google Scholar search using the terms ‘problem based research,’ ‘education,’ and ‘critical nature’ resulted in over a million hits. Substituting ‘asset’ for ‘problem’ and deleting ‘critical’ as terms resulted in a million fewer hits” (p. 253). This proliferation of deficit-based approaches to research has focused on educational problems and can lead to “downward spirals of blame and negative energy” (M. Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011, p. 423).

In educational circles, unfortunately, this blame is usually assigned to teachers (Harvey, 2014; Jones, 2015), and is often couched in curative language: for example, processes to *fix* vs. *support*, *intervene* vs. *engage*, or *diagnose* vs. *understand* (Hammond & Zimmerman, 2012). This type of dialog has a dual, almost contradistinctive effect of disempowering teachers while also invoking resistance to approaches they see as disconnected from their work and critical of their efforts (Swanson, Allen, & Mancabelli, 2015). Understanding the potential problems associated with a deficit approach to qualitative research underpinned my choice to use AI as a lens for gathering data.

The origins of appreciative inquiry. Popularized by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987), AI is a “conceptual refiguration” (p. 129) of action research that departs from action research’s iterative processes of diagnosis, problem solving, and remediation.
Instead, this approach was developed as a methodology for conducting organizational research that focuses on strengths and Bandura’s (1997, 1986) mastery experiences. The approach is grounded in the traditions of positive psychology and learned optimism (Seligman, 1998), and pushes against conventional heuristics by focusing on what people do well in order to encourage and support an increase of those practices. Watkins, Mohr, and Kelly (2011) envisioned AI’s influence as heliotropic, analogous of plants turning towards the energy of sunlight and evidenced by an anticipatory shift in practice away from what is with a leaning towards the energy of what can be.

An important understanding when using an AI framework is that the approach does not deny or ignore the problems or issues that drive research but, instead, suggests that by inviting participants to envision a future state in which the problems have been resolved leads to more effective and empowering change efforts (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; M. Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Watkins et al., 2011). An appreciative lens, then, was integral to uncovering the curricular, policy, and leadership supports necessary for strengthening the writing pedagogical competencies of kindergarten teachers without alienating or disempowering teachers during, or with, the research process.

**The framework of appreciative inquiry.** Appreciative inquiry has been used in districts, schools, and classrooms as a generative and creative approach to professional development, planning, improving school culture, and developing classroom projects that increase student engagement (see Aronson, 2010; Calabrese et al., 2008; DiPaola, & Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Harrison & Hasan, 2013; Hummel, 2007; Pill & Hastie, 2016; Scott, 2014; B. Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010; M. Tschannen-Moran &
Tschannen-Moran, 2011). As a pedagogical perspective, AI fosters a shift in thinking and exploring through the questions asked. An often cited quote by Cooperrider is: “the questions we ask, the things that we choose to focus on, the topics that we choose determine what we find” (as cited in Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros 2003, p. 85). This approach proved to be an excellent structure for honoring teachers as they “brought us to” the findings of this inquiry.

AI is underpinned by five interconnected principles, described as the DNA of AI—the positive, simultaneity, anticipatory, poetic, and constructionist principles (Watkins et al., 2011). These principles provided appropriate lenses for this present study’s methodology and served as guidelines for all choices when gathering, analyzing, and reporting data.

**The positive principle.** The positive principle permeates all aspects of an appreciative perspective and holds that “the energy and emotion associated with identifying, celebrating, and building on strengths enable people to transform systems and get them moving in new directions” (M. Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011, p. 423). For this study, the positive principle was grounded in the assumption that every teacher has effective instructional practices and framed data gathering with this assumption. This approach challenged assumptions of normality by emphasizing the smallest examples of self-perceptions of high performance.

**The simultaneity principle.** Another facet of AI is that change starts with the very first question asked— inquiry is change and not a prelude to change (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; M. Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Watkins et al, 2011). As teachers engaged with the positive focus of the questions asked, the dialogic culture of
gathering data became affirming and supported the potential for teachers to immediately begin thinking of how they can increase or restructure pedagogical practices.

**The anticipatory principle.** This specific component of AI relates to earlier discussions about the agentic nature of human action. Bandura’s (1997) constructs of self-efficacy and outcome expectancy are both based on the assumption that humans have autonomy and have some control over their environment. This lends itself to developing a habit-of-mind acknowledging that “behavior and decisions about actions are based not only on what we were born with or learned from our environment, but also on what we anticipate” (Watkins et al., 2011, p. 73). In asking teachers to anticipate what instruction can be, teachers were challenged to anticipate and “lean towards” more successful pedagogical practices—to anticipate, with hope, movements and shifts in their SPWI. This principle frames AI, like SCT, as a future-focused approach, characterized by movements away from explaining the past towards generative attention to future possibilities (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). This movement was fascinating to observe and reinforced the temporal, shifting, and overlapping nature of the phenomenon studied.

**The poetic principle.** The poetic principle values participants’ lived experiences through the medium of story, and acknowledges that storytelling provides “holistic information that includes not only the facts, but also the feelings and affect that a person experiences” (Watkins et al., 2011, p. 74). The poetic principle cohered well with Bandura’s (1997) construct of outcome-expectancy as it supported a valuation of an affective exploration of teachers’ self-satisfaction with their ability to accomplish the intended learning outcomes for writing instruction. The principle also aligns with Vagle’s (2014) insistence on the researcher’s commitment to sensitivity, openness, and
engagement with the phenomenon as it becomes known through meaningful and authentic dialog.

*The constructionist principle.* The paradigmatic foundation of the constructionist principle is that research is collaborative (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). The focus is on social discourse that guides what we accept as reality (Watkins et al., 2011). The constructionist epistemology may initially seem in dissonance with Bandura’s (1997) SCT, which is situated in a social constructivist paradigm. Crotty (1998) explained the distinction between the two paradigms in this way:

This constructivism is primarily an individualistic understanding of the constructionist position. …It would appear useful, then, to reserve the term *constructivism* for epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on the “meaning-making activity of the individual mind” and to use *constructionism* where the focus includes “the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning.” (p. 58)

According to Savin-Baden and Major (2013), the distinction resides in knowledge-generation as a social process (constructionism) as opposed to individual cognition through social processes (constructivism). What is important to note is that both paradigms explore social processes that hold foundational an understanding of reality as multiple, varied, shifting, and unpredictable (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Creswell, 2009; Crotty, 1998; Rich, 2017; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Watkins et al., 2011). Cook and Reichardt (1979), when discussing these two paradigms, argued, “there is nothing to stop the researcher, except perhaps tradition, from blending perspectives, to receive the combination which is most appropriate for the research problem and the setting at hand”
Vagle agreed and viewed post-intentional phenomenology as sitting outside of constructivism and constructionism, as either, or both, can be drawn on to uncover the phenomenon studied (personal communication, April 27, 2017). Bandura (1997) himself posited that perceptions of high self-efficacy sometimes allow people to act collectively to “circumvent institutional constraints or change them by collective action” (p. 6)—action he viewed as collective agency. Fullan (2001) explained the connection of the individual to the collaborative change effort well when he stated, “It is individual commitment, but above all it is collective mobilization” (p. 9).

For this study, the constructionist principle informed data gathering through two processes: interviews and focus groups. The dialogic nature of an interview makes it a constructionist process between the researcher and participants (M. Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). The use of focus groups is described later in this chapter, but it is important to note in this section that it is a widely accepted constructionist data gathering tool in educational research that has been adopted into many constructivist theoretical frameworks (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

**Appreciative phenomenology.** Appreciative phenomenology can be described as an appreciative approach to understanding how humans make meaning of a phenomenon as it becomes manifest through social interactions in constantly shifting contexts. Framing an understanding of lived experiences with a strengths-based approach requires an appreciative attitude-of-mind about teachers’ dignity, capacities, rights, and uniqueness. It pushes against a taken-for-granted deficit-based approach to research and taken-for-granted assumptions about the phenomenon studied. Appreciative phenomenology, then, builds a foundation for authentic, rich, and thick dialog,
observations, reflections, and reflexivity, as researchers savor, through care, how participants bring them to unique and temporal understandings of the phenomenon studied.

In this study, appreciative phenomenology was facilitated with the use of AI as a lens for gathering data on constructs embedded in SCT, using post-intentional phenomenological methodology. This philosophical mash-up is supported by Vagle (2014) who encouraged researchers to think beyond traditions and claimed that sometimes, this may entail going “outside of phenomenological texts to see what data gathering tools and strategies might be of use” (p. 78). Interestingly enough, AI proponents, Watkins and colleagues (2011), also encouraged qualitative researchers to “use a number of different research lenses—philosophical, personal, theoretical, strategic—to understand the phenomenon they choose to investigate” (p. 46).

Gergen (1978) wrote that AI “has the capacity to challenge the guiding assumptions of the culture, to raise fundamental questions regarding contemporary life, to foster re-consideration of that which is ‘taken for granted,’ and thereby to furnish new alternatives for social action” (p. 1346). This focus on challenging taken-for-granted assumptions of normality is a tenet of post-intentional phenomenology (Vagle, 2014). Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) also supported this quest of uncovering hidden assumptions as, when they are revealed, there is the potential to provide insights that are multiple and incomplete. Though this paragraph continuously changed theoretical lanes, the paradigmatic coherence explicated is evident, tightly woven, and supported the rationale for using SCT, post-intentional phenomenology, and AI as the frameworks that guided this study. More important, the evidence in the data collected shows the
effectiveness this multiplicity holds for opening up a rich, thick, and contextual understanding of how kindergarten teachers’ movements through SPWI may take shape.

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**Researcher’s Journal Entry: Through Post-Reflexivity 4**

*I am in awe of the POWER of AI!

I met with the Chair of PCS District’s Research Committee, Dr. Carter. Prior to our meeting, I provided him with documents framing the study, including the interview protocol crafted with the principles of AI (see Appendix H). One of the very first comments Dr. Carter made at this face-to-face meeting centered on his appreciation of the conversational prompts. He said that while reading them he had a true appreciation for this approach with teachers. In addition, his body language was fascinating to witness. He described, and physically demonstrated—sitting taller and taller—his reaction as he read each additional prompt. Dr. Carter’s comment was, “I can only imagine how teachers would react to these interviews” (personal communication, April, 2017).

In wondering why this moment was so impactful, I am thinking of the many times I heard teachers complain about being told what they were doing wrong and the frustration and negativity that fostered. To know that my positionality as a researcher allows me to “flip this script” is truly validating.

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**Data Sources and Data Gathering**

This study used a combination of data sources that cohered with qualitative research, methodologically fit the research question and sub-questions asked, and aligned with the principles of AI. The sources included the survey (already discussed), face-to-face interviews, artifacts, classroom observations, teachers’ reflections on instruction captured through journaling, and the researcher’s post-reflexive journaling. In addition,
teachers were invited to participate in a focus group meeting at the end of analysis to share out the results and solicit their feedback.

Data were gathered from October 2017 to January 2018. Vagle (2014) supported the use of the term *data gathering* as opposed to *data collection*, as the former alludes to the intersecting, interacting, coinciding, and dynamic nature of understandings that emerge from qualitative inquiry. These multiple avenues of access to kindergarten teachers’ lived experiences provided rich opportunities for glimpses into how movements through SPWI take shape.

**Interviews.** Post-intentional phenomenologists suggest the use of dialogic, open, and conversational interviews. Though Vagle (2014) suggested unstructured interviews as the most popular way to accomplish this, he also acknowledged that a variety of interview strategies and techniques can be utilized as long as the interviewer adopts a phenomenological attitude and remains open to “exciting opportunities to potentially learn something important about the phenomenon” (p. 79). For this current study, semi-structured interviews with teachers were conducted as this allowed an appreciative focus in gathering data.

Interviews were guided by five overarching reflective prompts asking teachers to (a) focus on successful writing-instructional experiences, (b) explore what their instruction entailed at that time, (c) recall their perceptions of the engagement levels of students during that instruction (d) reflect on how their perceptions of students’ engagement affected their own self-satisfaction with teaching writing, and (e) brainstorm ways to encourage more of those experiences. These prompts were adapted from AI frames for interviews developed by Watkins and colleagues (2011; see Appendix H).
Initial interviews were face-to-face and audio-recorded and ranged from 40 minutes to 1 hour, 15 minutes in length. One follow-up interview was also scheduled with each teacher to provide any clarification needed after listening to the audio recording of the initial interview and reading through the transcript of the initial interview. Follow up interviews were typically scheduled approximately two months after initial interviews and typically lasted about 30 minutes. As this study involved practicing teachers, all interviews were conducted either before school or after dismissal, and teachers chose which time they preferred. Intentionally, I did not connect any teacher to their survey results before the initial interview, nor did I attach any school to its designated demographical profile. I made initial contact with the information from the list created that listed a teachers’ name school, and email address. This allowed me to approach each teacher without any preconceived ideas of her instruction or experiences, a necessary approach when conducting a post-intentional phenomenological interview (Vagle, 2014). This also allowed me to remain open to how a teacher’s experiences opened up the phenomenon. Before every interview, I reminded myself of Vagle’s (2014) advice, that my “role as a craft-person is to move into the phenomenological attitude—to look at what we usually look through” (p. 80). After the first interview, survey results were used to inform the interview notes and to help guide and inform the initial observation.

**Artifacts.** As stated previously, a major premise of AI is that change begins at the first question asked (simultaneity principle). An appreciative technique often used for data gathering asks participants to bring an artifact to the initial meeting that represents a satisfying or successful experience related to the phenomenon under study (see Appendix
H). For this study, teachers were asked to bring an artifact that represented a successful experience with their writing instruction and the very first conversational prompt asked teachers to explain the significance the artifacts held. When scheduling the initial interview, teachers were provided with examples of artifacts—poems, songs, art, teachers’ writing samples, or a student’s writing sample (without identifiers to protect student confidentiality)—but were encouraged to choose an artifact that was feasible and meaningful. Artifacts allowed teachers to begin the interview and lead the dialog and were instrumental in establishing a positive tone that was maintained for the remainder of the interview. It was interesting that teachers kept providing me with artifacts throughout the study. They sent them via email, or provided them during follow-up interviews and classroom observations. This became a rich, and fun, source of data.

**Classroom observations.** Classroom observations are fundamental tools of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Kawulich, 2005; Silverman, 2014). Specifically, observations allow researchers to explore phenomenon in natural settings and provide access to the phenomenon as it is lived and not as conceptualized (Vagle, 2014). Observations also allow the documentation of non-verbal behavior (Charmaz, 2014) and provide access to “events that informants may be unable or unwilling to share when doing so would be impolitic, impolite, or insensitive” (Kawulich, 2005, para. 8).

Observations were conducted during writing workshop, and lessons typically ranged from 30 to 45 minutes. One observation lasted 1 hour and 10 minutes, but the teacher did acknowledge that this was atypical. Two observations were conducted: one close to the beginning of the school year and one close to the end of the second nine weeks (mid-year). This allowed the researcher to capture the *movements* inherent in the
passage of time in kindergarten writing development. It was not feasible to collect data at the end of the school year due to constraints of a dissertation timeline. Most observations were scheduled within days of interviews to better connect both data sources. The one exception was Lexi, who was ill and out of school when her initial observation was scheduled.

For both observations, I took the role of a passive participant with minimal involvement, not directly interacting with the teacher or students (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013), so as not to hinder the writing lesson. Both initial and follow-up observations for this study used a combination of structured and unstructured techniques. Kotula, Aguilar, and Tivnan, (2014) conducted a study for the U.S. DOE in six school districts on writing instruction in elementary schools—Grades 4 and 5. They found that there was not any developed protocol for observation of writing instruction, and they developed and validated a protocol as part of the 4-year project. This study used an adapted version of their protocol, using PCS’ kindergarten standards and curriculum to guide adaptations. I also followed Spradley’s (1979) suggestions for observational notes and kept three sets of notes: (a) short notes made on the protocol form (Appendix I), (b) expanded notes made as soon as possible after each session that built on short notes, and (c) an electronic document with expanded notes and analytic notes (explained in the section on data analysis) for each teacher. Notes made on the protocol form (Appendix I) included both etic observations (actions I observed) and emic observations (descriptions of behavior) (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). In addition to this structured approach, a more unstructured approach, aligning well with post-intentional phenomenology, was used to
record unplanned observations based upon what stood out to the researcher at the time of the observation.

**Teachers’ journal entries.** Teachers were asked to record journal entries a minimum of once weekly for the entire proposed timeline of 12 weeks (mid-October 2017 through February 2018; excluding Thanksgiving and Christmas breaks). Teachers’ journal entries served as an excellent tool for the researcher to gain insight into their affective reactions to their instruction and to capture the nuances of *movements through* instruction. This reflective practice of teachers is a useful source of phenomenological data (Vagle, 2014; van Manen, 1990), and was structured using an adaptation of van Manen’s (1990) Lived Experience Description (LED) protocols (see Appendix J).

Based on observations from the pilot study, weekly prompts were emailed every Sunday evening to teachers as a guide for their upcoming weekly reflections (see Appendix J). In the pilot study, I did not send weekly prompts to teachers and found that I would have to send reminders about journaling. I also noticed that entries tended not to be as targeted to their writing instruction as I imagined. For example, teachers would sometimes journal about reading instruction or would detail lesson plans for writing. I felt my lack of focused direction devalued teachers’ time, so I was especially pleased with how the weekly prompts a) served as a gentle reminder for teachers to journal, and b) focused the direction of the entries specific to their writing instruction. Though I had a list of prompts predetermined, I was able to change some of the weekly prompts based on classroom observations or journaling “threads” that I needed to clarify. For example, during my classroom observations I noticed that some teachers had students write first, and then complete an illustration, while in some classes teachers asked students to draw
their illustrations first and then do their writing. The following week I sent this prompt to teachers, *What are your thoughts on scaffolding students' writing with illustrations first and then writing, or writing first and then illustrations? Can you provide your rationale and an example of how your approach has helped a student?*

A choice was given in the mode of entries, as entries could be hand written and collected by the researcher, or electronically documented and transmitted. Eleven of the 12 teachers used a Google document that they allowed me to view: one teacher preferred hand-written journal notes, and she contacted me to collect those on a regular basis.

Another way the pilot study informed the design of this research was in determining the best incentive for journaling. When asked, all four teachers involved in the pilot study agreed that monetary compensation would be an incentive. In this study, I provided $3 for every entry, with compensation provided for a maximum of three entries weekly, but teachers were encouraged to provide additional entries if desired. This monetary amount was approved by PCS’ Research Department, as the maximum possible compensation of $117 over the course of the study did not constitute undue influence to journal. At the end of the study, teachers were emailed a ledger with the number of entries and the compensation amount owed for verification. Once verified, this was delivered to teachers’ schools in the form of a VISA gift card.

Compensation allowed teachers to understand that I valued their time and effort in this collaborative process. Due to school closings because of inclement weather, the number of journal entries was impacted. I was very pleased, however, that at the end of the study I received journal entries ranging from 9 (once weekly) to 31 entries (three times weekly). Four teachers had over 25 entries; seven teachers had at least 20 entries;
three teachers had 14 entries; and two teachers had 9 entries. The richness of the data received more than compensated for the cost incurred.

**Focus groups.** Savin-Baden and Major (2013) defined a focus group as “a gathering of a limited number of individuals, who through conversations with each other, provide information about a specific topic, issue, or subject” (p. 375). Researchers acknowledge that focus groups serve many purposes, and one such purpose is to verify data gathered from other methods (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). For this study, each teacher was invited to attend one focus group session the first week in February 2018. These meetings were scheduled for two locations central to most teachers, and six invitations were sent per group. Both group sessions were held in meeting rooms of local restaurants and teachers were provided a meal. One focus group had five teachers attend (the sixth emailed to let me know she had been out of school with the flu): the other focus group had four teachers attend (one had a prior engagement and the other had a death in her family).

These sessions served two purposes: (a) they served as a method of sharing out tentative manifestations of the strengths, challenges of, and hopes for writing instruction uncovered by the study, and (b) they facilitated collaborative, anticipatory steps towards what can be within kindergarten classrooms. The outcomes of these conversations are discussed in Chapter 4. My initial role was to lead the discussion with a reporting on results about the phenomenon, not about individual participants. All results shared by the researcher protected the confidentiality of teachers, and all specific examples used were from teachers in the alternate focus group session. Once the data were shared, I served as a facilitator. As a facilitator, I was cognizant of my role to: (a) discuss, and stress,
confidentiality, (b) explain that there are no right or wrong answers, (c) ensure all teachers understand that only one person shares at a time, (d) provide prompts when needed, (e) encourage all teachers to share, and (f) help all teachers understand that the goal is to hear all views (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

During this part of the meeting, I loosely structured the discussion and asked teachers to respond to the following prompts:

1. What surprised you the most about the study’s findings? (prompts: strengths, challenges; teacher’s feelings of self-satisfaction)
2. What finding was not surprising? (prompts: strengths, challenges, teachers’ feelings of self-satisfaction)
3. Share your views on the shared wishes for writing instruction. (prompts: instructional, engagement, small group writing, professional development)
4. Share your views on teachers’ proposed curricular changes for writing instruction. (curriculum, rubric).

Focus group sessions were audio-recorded, and used to support the crafting of this study’s implications, specifically for policy, curricular, and leadership changes necessary to strengthen kindergarten teachers’ movements through SPWI.

Data Analysis

Data analysis represents a critical stage of the research design. It is the fourth component of the methodological framework used, and involved the systematic investigation of data with a goal of providing fresh insight into how participants make meaning of the phenomenon observed. Vagle (2014) explained that, when looking across branches of phenomenology, there is quite a bit of consistency when analyzing data, with
the most routinely practiced branches using a whole-parts-whole process for data analysis. A whole-parts-whole process was used in this current study to uncover unique temporal and contextual themes and understandings that provided insight into kindergarten teachers’ movements through SPWI. Traditionally, phenomenologists differed on how data should be analyzed: descriptively (describing lived experiences) or interpretively (interpreting descriptions and observations of lived experiences). Vagle (2014) decried the tight boundaries of the descriptive-interpretive dualism when deciding on analytic approaches to phenomenological research, and proposed instead a way to move across boundaries by supporting adaptations with analytic approaches that best fit the research question and the phenomenon observed.

Vagle (2014) outlined a six-step whole-parts-whole process for post-intentional phenomenological data analysis: (a) a holistic reading of the entire text, (b) an initial line-by-line reading, (c) follow-up questions, (d) second line-by-line reading, (e) third line-by-line reading, and (f) subsequent readings. To facilitate the whole-parts-whole process of analysis, an inductive approach to data analysis was used to move the telling from the particular to the general and to generate probable conclusions (Saldaña, 2011). Two specific inductive approaches were used—hermeneutic analysis and thematic analysis.

**Initial “whole” of the whole-parts-whole analytic process.** The first step of this process attends to the initial *whole* in the whole-part-whole process, and involved a holistic reading of all data collected after all initial interviews and observations were completed. The purpose of the first holistic reading is to become attuned to the data, so Vagle (2014) suggested not taking notes during this initial reading. I completed this holistic “reading” by listening to each audio recording as I read the transcript, getting a
sense for the data while also checking for accuracy of the transcription. I then read all observation notes, teachers’ journal entries that were submitted to that point, and all post-reflexive journal entries. When that was completed, I listened to the audio recording a second time. This allowed me to understand the nuances of voice and tone that a reading of the transcript alone could not accomplish, and gave me a way to get an overall pattern of the phenomenon as it was taking shape. This was time-intensive, but provided a sensitivity to the data and to teachers’ experiences that I appreciated. It is also my opinion that my follow-up interviews were more targeted and productive because of this approach.

**Attending to “parts” of the whole-parts-whole analytic process.** Once the holistic reading was completed, I followed Vagle’s (2014) suggestions of subsequent readings using line-by-line analytic notetaking for each teacher’s data set. For each teacher, I made careful analytic notes and identified powerful excerpts that might be important in describing, interpreting, or representing how teachers make meaning of the phenomenon in their unique contexts. These initial analytic thoughts were framed with a hermeneutic inductive approach to data analysis. Hermeneutical analysis involves interpreting social interactions in ways that uncover the contexts within which recurring understandings become evident (Gadamer, 1975; Vagle, 2014). Gadamer (1975) warned that the purpose of the analysis is “not to develop a procedure of understanding but to clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place” (p. 263), emphasizing the contextual and temporal nature of the shaping of teachers’ meaning making. This emphasis on context during notetaking coheres with post-intentional phenomenological methodology, and these notes were developed and refined in subsequent readings.
Vagle’s (2014) suggestion to put each data source “into dialog” with each other fascinated me, so I created a master document for each teacher (using their coded identifier), and this approach resulted in the creation of an electronic document that was data-rich. Teachers’ initial transcripts with initial hermeneutic analytic notes (color-coded in red) served as the foundation for this document. Additionally, the initial transcript had significant phrases and statements describing self-efficacy, outcome expectancy, and elements of context highlighted in yellow so that they stood out in re-readings. Layered into this document were excerpts from teachers’ journal entries that addressed, triangulated, or challenged something said during the interview. These notes were placed alongside transcribed comments using text boxes (color-coded). Also put “into dialog” with these data were any post-reflexive journal entries from my own journaling, classroom observation notes, and survey results that triangulated, challenged, and/or supported thoughts, ideas, and classroom practices discussed and elucidated movements through the phenomenon. These data were also color-coded and placed alongside transcribed comments using text boxes. This one document, then, contained all the relevant, intersecting, overlapping, and nuanced richness of each teacher’s experiences as shared and as observed. This document also served as the basis for follow-up interviews, as teachers were asked to clarify or expand upon the initial interview, classroom observation, their journal entries, or to bring clarity my own post-reflexive thinking and/or analytical notes.

Once follow-up interviews and observations were conducted, they were “folded in” to this master document and excerpts placed in relevant sections that noted the need for follow-up or clarification. Again, the use of text boxes helped with inputting this data.
All re-readings of this document were accompanied by a reiterative process of analytic notetaking. This *master document* was compiled for each teacher, and then used to produce Vagle’s (2014) suggestion of a *second document* per teacher, extracting powerful excerpts and analytic notes that uncovered each teacher’s tentative manifestation of SPWI as they emerged from the data. This intimate, extensive, immersion into each teacher’s lifeworld attended to the *parts* of the whole-parts-whole process. After a third line-by-line reading across each teacher’s *second document*, I started developing initial codes.

**Final “whole” of the whole-parts-whole analytic process.** I then re-read across all 12 *master documents* to ensure sensitivity of the initial coding to the triangulation of experiences, observations and analytic notes. This allowed me to further refine my initial codes and supported the development of focused codes using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis recovers evolving and recurring patterns of meaning across data and identifies connections and interconnections between concepts and themes (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; van Manen, 1990). For Step 6 (subsequent readings) in Vagle’s (2014) methodological process, I adopted van Manen’s (1990) detailed approach for isolating thematic statements that help to mark or label how teachers attached meaning to the phenomenon. This technique allowed me to look at sentences and sentence clusters developed during analytic notetaking and ask, “What does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described?” (p. 93). van Manen (1990) also encouraged researchers to think of developing themes, not as a rigid following of rules, but as a way to see meaning. Figure 6 provides a visual representation of how these processes came together and informed this study’s data gathering plan.
Figure 6. Data analysis plan: whole-part-whole process. Journal entries represent teacher’s journal entries following van Manen’s (1990) LED Protocol and the researcher’s Post-Reflexive journal entries.

Vagle (2014) proposed that during data analysis, a post-intentional approach necessitates that the researcher remains open and sensitive to meanings as they become manifest. He claimed, “Sometimes a single statement, from one participant, at one moment in time, is so powerful that it needs to be amplified” (p. 97), while at other times there is convergence across multiple moments in the data. This contextual variation—
attention to both single and multiple moments—allows for crafting a unique understanding of phenomenon in ways that are not yet thinkable. This sensitivity is supported by exploring spaces that require dogged questioning of assumptions of normality, analytic questioning of moments of shock, and a dogged pursuit of unclear meanings, as these uncertainties are “the richest space for explosive insights, a true opening up of what the phenomenon under investigation might become” (Vagle, 2014, p. 136).

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**Researcher’s Journal Entry: Slowing Down Through Post-Reflexivity 5**

*When I first read about post-intentional phenomenology’s insistence on exploring spaces that are inhabited by uncertainties and the not-yet-thinkable, I was very intimidated because I was thinking of this concept with a macro lens. I kept wondering, “What if I miss this big idea the data were trying to explicate?” In thinking about data collection, and with the help of the pilot study, I am also now thinking on a much more micro-level. This idea of the not-yet-thinkable makes sense when layered with an understanding of personal context, as my limited experiences, thoughts, and prejudices constrain my “seeing.” Doggedly questioning ideas, thoughts, and themes that do not seem to fit makes sense if I understand they do not seem to fit my contexts as a researcher. This realization will enrich my data analysis, as I embrace authentic exploration over arrogance. How else will I understand beyond the boundaries of my limited context? In so many nuanced ways, context matters.*
Credibility and Trustworthiness

Traditionally, the terms validity and reliability described the quality of the research process and findings in quantitative research. Many researchers debated their appropriateness when applied as a standard for qualitative research as they represent objective measures used to judge subjective inquiry (e.g., Charmaz, 2014; Crotty, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Others thought the debate was inconsequential, as the arguments surrounding their use are only linguistic semantics (e.g., Lecompte & Goetz, 1982; Long & Johnson, 2000). Most qualitative researchers, however, use the terms credibility and trustworthiness as measures for the rigor of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), or to answer the question, “Did I get it right?” (Crotty, 1998, p. 134). Credibility refers to the unity or believability of the study’s findings and trustworthiness provides credibility by informing the reader about the research process (Saldaña, 2011). For this study, multiple measures were used throughout the research process to attend to credibility and trustworthiness.

Post-Reflexivity

The phenomenological researcher’s habit of post-reflexivity is an integral practice that supports credibility and trustworthiness. My journaling increased the study’s credibility as it assisted in developing a post-reflexive habit-of-practice that acknowledged and questioned my preconceived understandings throughout all aspects of the study—choice moments, literature review, interviews, observations, data analysis, focus groups, descriptions, and interpretations. Post-reflexivity also allowed me to slow down, savor, interrogate, and dwell with the data (Wertz, 2015) in order to craft a rich, nuanced, and appreciative accounting of kindergarten teachers’ movements through
SPWI in their unique contexts. By including excerpts of my post-reflexive journal and also “putting it into dialog” with the teachers’ data sets, I was able to read the data with a level of sensitivity that allowed me to see my own growth as a novice researcher. As previously stated, the inclusion of post-reflexive excerpts into the text also allowed a level of transparency with the reader.

**Literature Review**

Crotty (1998) suggested the inclusion of a comprehensive literature review that cites key authors in the field, and this measure has been applied throughout Chapters 1-3. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) added a level of specificity to the quality of a literature review and said the review should be organized, relevant, and go “beyond summary to both criticality and drawing connections and conclusions” (p. 113). The use of the section headings helped with the organization of the comprehensive nature of the literature discussed, and the inclusion of the sections titled, “Implications for Kindergarten Teachers’ Self-Perceptions of Writing Instruction,” allowed me to intentionally connect the relevance of the literature reviewed to the research question asked.

**Pilot Study**

A pilot study serves as a method of trustworthiness and is recommended as a way to inform research (Crotty, 1998; Saldaña, 2011). As outlined above, the pilot study strengthened the design of the dissertation study by allowing me to check the soundness of the research design, better structure the processes for teachers’ journaling, practice the planned analytic procedures of the study, determine the time needed for interviews, and verify the appropriateness of the interview, observation, and focus group protocols.
Participant Selection

The careful and intentional processes used to determine participants increased the credibility of the study as the data collected from these participants provided rich, varied, and multiple perspectives in order to answer the research question. This front-loading with a multiplicity of perspectives is especially important to this study as participants’ diversity brought us to the complexity of the phenomenon. As the phenomenon is movements through WISP, multi-layered perspectives of this movement provided multi-layered glimpses of the phenomenon, and were necessary for adequately answering the research question.

Additionally, as I met with teachers for our initial interview, I stressed to them that the study was not focused on them or on their individual practice, but that the intent was to understand how teachers across kindergarten classrooms experienced SPWI. This perspective seemed to relax teachers and allow a degree of honesty and openness when sharing their experiences.

Multiple Data Moments

Inclusion of many types of data in the research design allowed exploration of how teachers make meaning of the phenomenon from multiple and varied lenses, and increased the credibility of findings. This is usually described in qualitative research as data triangulation, a method of credibility that compares the themes derived from different kinds of data to see whether they corroborate (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Saldaña, 2011; Silverman, 2014). As discussed earlier, Vagle (2014) conceptualized gathering data from multiple sources as a “convergence across multiple data moments” (p. 97) and argued that this conceptualization is much less mechanistic.
than triangulation and more open to the lived experiences of participants. This approach
acknowledges and honors when “a single statement, from one participant, at one moment
in time, is so powerful that it needs to be amplified” (p. 97). In this current study, the
creation of the *master document* and the repeated readings of the data allowed emerging
themes and understandings to become evident and provided a nuanced understanding of
teachers’ meaning-making, brought to light powerful singular moments, clearly
elucidated teachers’ unique contextual environments.

**Increasing Rigor through an Explicitly Stated Audit Trail**

Transparency of the processes employed and the ability to demonstrate a clear
decision trail when gathering and analyzing data are necessary to support rigor in
qualitative research (Sanders, 2003). Three well-utilized tools for creating an audit trail
are member-checking, the use of peer-reviewers, and verbatim quotes.

**Member checking.** The practice of member-checking is encouraged by many
renowned qualitative researchers as it lends credibility and trustworthiness to a study’s
findings (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Saldaña, 2011; Vagle,
2014). Member checking reduces the potential for researcher bias when analyzing data by
involving participants in checking and confirming results (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell
& Walter, 2016). I conducted member checks at three points in this study. First, during
each interview I repeated or summarized what a teacher shared as a way to ensure, in the
moment, that my understanding aligned with the teacher’s experience.

Second, all interviews conducted were transcribed and teachers were provided an
opportunity to check summaries and any included verbatim accounts of the interview.
This approach was especially important to the study’s research design as the
constructionist principle is especially relevant during this process. Teachers were given the opportunity to “have a say” in the interpretation and description of their experiences, and to ensure their experiences were not distorted by the researcher’s agenda or biases (Birt et al., 2016). Birt and colleagues developed a member-checking protocol that was adapted and used in this study (see Appendix K). This protocol gave each teacher the option to make changes to the summary of the interview (not verbatim quotes) and to add comments. The protocol provided an opportunity for teachers to add further comments “if the meaning of their experience had changed over time, thereby recognizing the temporal nature of lived experiences” (p. 1807). This sensitivity to movement over time methodologically coheres with a post-intentional phenomenological approach to research.

Of the 12 teachers, 3 made changes and/or additions to their initial summaries. Two teachers made additions to my summary of their experiences and added comments to further emphasize experiences shared during the interview. One teacher did not change her summary but added comments. For example, under the section titled, “Challenges for Writing Instruction,” Joanne added, “I would also like to see a kindergarten writing rubric tailored to each nine weeks, that grows and progresses with the child instead of the same rubric and a one to four scale.” This was important in three significant ways:

1. It brought to light the intensity of the sentiment, as Joanne felt strongly enough to add this to her document.

2. It was important to the dialogic nature of this inquiry, as we were able to “textually” continue the conversation.

3. It allowed Joanne to have a voice in what the findings said and to know that her feedback was solicited and valued.
Third, during the focus group meetings I provided teachers with a handout that summarized my findings and asked for their feedback. This provided a more macro-check as to the credibility of the global findings, not specific to any participant.

**Peer reviewer.** Savin-Baden and Major (2013) called this an external audit, where a peer reviews a specific phase of the research process to ensure findings are supported by the data and, thus, strengthen both credibility and trustworthiness. A peer who recently received her doctorate degree, and conducted a phenomenological study, was asked to review my data analysis processes. This reviewer and I had a collegial relationship and she was not previously familiar with my work. She was provided with documents (that protected the teachers’ identity, the identity of the district, and the identity of the specific sites) and was asked to: (a) check my focused codes against verbatim excerpts for accuracy, and (b) check the development of focused codes to themes for sensitivity. She provided feedback on my coding, and asked for clarification on certain contextual frames since she did not have access to the complete study. This layer of scrutiny supported the rigor of my processes and helped support my tentative manifestations of the phenomenon as believable and trustworthy. I also asked that she send an email to the Chair of my dissertation committee about her review to provide another audit trail.

**Verbatim quotes.** The use of verbatim excerpts helps readers decide on the applicability and accuracy of the themes developed and provides a necessary level of transparency (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2011). In addition, Vagle’s (2014) processes for data analysis include explicit structures during hermeneutical and thematic analysis that allow a high level of transparency when moving from analytic notes to initial codes, to
focused codes, to themes. I also followed Sanders’ (2003) suggestions and, in Chapter 4, I have included examples of verbatim quotes that made transparent my movement from verbatim quotes to themes to tentative manifestations in table format, and verbatim statements were included within the text to support findings.

**Ethical Responsibility**

Specific procedures for coding and protecting data were followed according to guidelines set out by my institutions’ review board and by PCS’ Department of Research (see Appendix L). During the first interview, teachers were promised confidentiality and not anonymity, and the researcher ensured that the distinctions were clear. As a way to provide another layer of confidentiality, teachers were given the option of meeting for interviews off-site from their schools, but all 12 teachers agreed to meet on their campus. As previously stated, two of the teachers were from one school, and the first teacher who accepted the invitation was asked if a second potential participant (no name given) could be accepted as a part of the study, as the potential for confidentiality significantly decreased if I was seen in the building but was not scheduled to meet with her. She assured me that her team had collectively talked about participating, and they already know she had agreed to participate, and gave her consent to include another team member. The identity of the other team member was never released from me, however, as I still had an ethical responsibility to protect all participants’ identity.

To respect the sensitivity of data and teachers’ confidentiality, all member-checking documents were hand-delivered in sealed envelopes to the teachers’ schools and not delivered electronically using county email accounts. Teachers were given the option to return any comments electronically or hand-written on the document. One teacher
returned her document with added comments electronically, and the other two teachers wrote handwritten notes and asked for them to be collected personally. The other nine teachers responded via email with the sentence, “I agree with the summary of my interview.”

For the focus group meeting, teachers were reminded in their email invitations that their confidentiality as a study participant would be compromised if they attended, and the researcher ensured all teachers had signed the informed consent form agreeing to participate in a focus group session. Additionally, during the meeting, teachers were reminded about the items addressed in the protocol, and the impact on confidentiality of identity and confidentiality of information shared during the focus group session was reiterated.

Another layer of ethical responsibility was added due to the provision of compensation for journal entries. The ledger created made the payment process transparent and provided teachers with the option of challenging the total compensation owed. Teachers responded to my email and said they agreed with the amount; none challenged the amount owed. Though the accounting was time consuming, by providing teachers with compensation for journaling, I acknowledged my valuation of the time and expertise teachers were willing to share.

Across all processes in framing the study and in data collection and analysis, my personal commitment was to ensure that honesty and a valuation of teachers’ experiences were the foundation for all interactions with teachers and with their data. The whole-part-whole process was an excellent strategy for systematically interacting with the data, and allowed me to uncover the shifting and fluid nature of the phenomenon in PCS’ context.
As I intentionally and analytically read and wrote my way through the data, I also learned to adopt a phenomenological attitude of openness and flexibility when thinking, describing, and interpreting. This attitude supported my approach to the succeeding chapters as I attempted to “transform lived experience into a textual expression” (van Manen, 1990, p. 36) and not just code data and report findings.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

As with all qualitative research, one limitation is that participants self-select to share their experiences (Savin-Baden & Major, 2014). That only 61 teachers, of the 196 in PCS, responded to the survey has implications. Eleven teachers emailed with reasons why they could not participate: retirement, time commitment, moved at the beginning of the year to a different grade, and maternity leave were the predominant reasons provided. Others who did not respond could have low SPWI so would not want someone observing their classrooms, or could have high SPWI and did not see a personal benefit in the study. The teachers who did agree to participate shared that they felt strongly about advocating for changes in the curriculum and rubric, and thought this could be a good opportunity to do so. Other teachers in the county may not have shared their view, and this “bias” of the participants could have influenced the findings. Another limitation was the timeframe of the study. It would have been very helpful to collect data at the end of the school year as a point of comparison for teachers’ SPWI. This was not feasible with the nature of this study serving as partial requirement for graduation.

The term delimitation refers to an inherent boundary, and a delimitation of this study was that the location of PCS bounded the findings. Though the spread of the schools ensured a perspective from different geographical locations, PCS is a large
suburban school district. The findings of this study may not generalize to schools in rural or urban districts, or smaller school districts.
CHAPTER 4

Findings

*There is so much more to [writing] than letters on a page. It takes fine motor, penmanship, concentration, phonetic knowledge, ideas, mechanics, and confidence. As a kindergarten teacher, I get to see students at the beginning of their educational journey. It is important to build confidence and foster a love of learning. With writing as a foundation, it creates a great place to build upon.*

—Gabby, participant, Journal Entry

This inquiry exposed me to the intricate beauty of teachers’ valuation of emergent writing. Like Gabby, they were each committed to nurturing students’ foundational skills for writing. This was not surprising, as they had voluntarily agreed to participate in a study on kindergarten writing instruction. What was intriguing, however, was how the use of Appreciative Phenomenology allowed me to uncover the multiplicity and diversity of teachers’ experiences that brought them to that valuation. I was afforded a glimpse of how teachers’ experiences shape their intentional relations with self-perceptions of writing instruction (SPWI). Additionally, this appreciative approach gave me the tools to explore and uncover with sensitivity and a true appreciation for teachers that were willing to invite me into their lifeworld.

I adopted Blackmon’s (2015) approach when exploring the phenomenon of SPWI, understanding that “I could not provide a full description of this human experience
but only an opportunity to come into closer contact with the phenomenon” (p. 246). This contact was facilitated through teachers’ lived experiences, and it is the intent of this chapter to share those experiences that brought me into closer contact with the phenomenon, as lived.

The tentative manifestations of SPWI were framed using Bandura’s (1997) constructs of self-efficacy and outcome expectancy. As previously discussed, writing instructional self-efficacy (WISE) was defined as a teacher’s perception of confidence in his or her ability to teach the compositional (e.g., idea development, writing for a purpose) and conventional (e.g., spelling, punctuation, handwriting) skills of early writing. Writing instructional outcome expectancy (WIOE) described a teacher’s perception of the likely outcome of self-satisfaction if writing is taught at anticipated levels. The research question that guided this inquiry was: How might kindergarten teachers’ movements through self-perceptions of writing instruction take shape as they teach in their unique classroom contexts? For this study, the research sub-questions (RSQ) questions were (a) What experiences shape kindergarten teachers’ self-efficacy of writing instruction? (b) How do kindergarten teachers respond to their perceptions of students’ engagement with learning to write?, and (c) What does it mean for kindergarten teachers to experience self-satisfaction in the pursuit of instructional goals for writing?

Two themes emerged from the data and helped in answering these questions and uncovering the tentative manifestations of SPWI. They were:

1. The influence of instructional decisions on WISE and WIOE.
2. The influence of instructional management on WISE and WIOE.
For this study, instructional decisions refer specifically to teachers’ choices of strategies and techniques for teaching the compositional and conventional processes of emergent writing. Strategies are defined as models that structure students’ learning (Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, & Stone, 2012) and techniques are the specific activities that students engage in to support this learning (Lemov, 2010).

The concept of instructional management is distinct from, but related to, the construct of classroom management. As discussed in Chapter 2, research has linked a teacher’s perceptions of self-efficacy to beliefs about abilities in the domain of classroom management (Shoulders & Krei, 2015; M. Tschannen Moran & Johnson, 2011; M. Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998; von der Embse et al., 2016). Stronge, Ward, and Grant (2011) conducted research that looked specifically at the qualities of effective teachers. They found that teachers identified as more effective scored significantly higher in dimensions related to classroom management, and identified some of these dimensions as establishing routines, monitoring student behavior, effective use of time, and the organization of the classroom.

The domain of instructional management was specific to changes in *instructional groupings* during instruction. The instructional groupings used most commonly in elementary classrooms are whole group, small group, and individualized instruction (Hollo & Hirn, 2015). In this study, instructional management was defined as a teacher’s ability to structure, effectively transition, and manage students’ learning activities from one type of instructional grouping to another. For the 12 teachers in this study, their perceptions of student engagement during writing instruction were situated within the context of instructional management. A glimpse of how the contextual themes of
instructional decisions and instructional management emerged from the data is made transparent in Appendix M.

When I witnessed the fluidity of SPWI in the classroom contexts within which they were situated, I thought of a quote that fully explicated everything that follows in this chapter:

If we decide to craft reflective lifeworld research we need to explicitly situate the phenomenon, the research question, and the data gathering strategies in context. This means that the context matters—that when we describe or interpret the phenomenon, the description/interpretation will be contextualized. The contextual aspects that surround those living the phenomenon will need to be illuminated and explored. (Vagle, 2014, p. 62)

As I explored teachers’ experiences in kindergarten, I realized that their SPWI were fully situated in context, and was reminded of Vagle’s conceptualization of the nature of phenomenon discussed in Chapter 2 and represented in Figure 7.

![Figure 7. Post-Intentional Phenomenology: The nature of phenomenon. Reprinted from Crafting Phenomenological Research (p. 41), by M. D. Vagle, 2014, Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press. Copyright 2014 by Taylor and Francis. Reprinted with permission.](image-url)

The diagram acknowledges the complex and fluid nature of phenomenon creating many “grey areas” of overlap, a reality that became evident when exploring how SPWI take
shape in their unique contexts. It soon became clear that, in this study, the interactions between the phenomenon, and the contexts within which the phenomenon was situated, were not neat and linear but very much the web of interconnectedness Vagle conceptualized. In the following section, I will answer the research questions by sharing the experiences that brought me to the phenomenon, and then by showing how teachers’ SPWI take shape in their unique contexts.

**RSQ(a): Experiences that Shape Kindergarten Teachers’ WISE**

For the 12 teachers who partnered with me on this inquiry, the experiences that shaped their movements through WISE included the district, student, personal, and professional contexts of teachers. Like the phenomenon, these contexts had many points of overlap—grey areas—that nuanced the uncovering of SPWI. When “getting to” a sense of teachers’ WISE, I explicitly asked teachers:

*As you think ahead to the end of the fourth nine weeks, how confident are you in your ability to teach writing in a way that allows your students to meet the goals for writing?*

I left the idea of *goals* undefined in order to determine if teachers made any distinction between PCS’ goals and their own personal goals. All 12 teachers answered this question with a focus on PCS’ curricular goals. To fully gain an appreciation for teachers’ WISE, however, I also used statements from their journal entries and interviews, and from my own observations, to add another layer to my understanding of this construct.

**District Influences**

The district’s curriculum and assessments for kindergarten were global constructs that “sat outside” of the present fluidity of the classroom context, but exerted significant
influence on all kindergarten classrooms represented in this study. A curriculum provides a set of intended learning outcomes for students (Gareis & Grant, 2015), and some level of diffusiveness is expected between any district’s written curriculum (district documents) and the taught curriculum (teachers’ implementation of the written curriculum; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013). Teachers in this study, however, felt challenged by a perceived lack of clarity and specificity of the written curriculum for kindergarten writing and by the assessments required. This lack greatly affected what was observed about the taught curriculum across the classrooms represented in this study, and had significant influence on teachers’ SPWI. Dawn, a teacher in her third year, provided a nuanced view that allowed me to “uncover” this aspect of teachers’ experiences well. During our initial interview in October, she shared:

Because I guess a lot of them, at this point, a lot of them still aren’t writing the words and they are just drawing the pictures. I have a few who will scribble on the bottom and write a random letter. So, I’m just trying to get them to understand the ideas of thinking about words and what they want to say so they can have that and not so much remembering things like spacing. I think once they get more into it and as I see each child doing it then I will remind them. But I haven’t really talked about using spaces yet. I guess I could for those who are farther along.

Dawn outlined many knowledge-gaps an early-career teacher may have: (a) what is the developmental progression from scribbles to random letters to a concept of word, (b) when should students move to trying to label illustrations, (c) what is the appropriate balance between idea development and mechanics, and (d) how to differentiate writing
instruction? These types of questions were the threads that ran throughout the tapestry of teachers’ SPWI.

**Curriculum: Knowing what to teach.** The intended learning outcomes of instruction underpin the plethora of instructional decisions teachers make every day, and a teacher’s WISE is dependent on the level of confidence with which those decisions are made. A major point of discussion across all 12 teachers was the writing curriculum’s level of invariance across the first nine weeks to the fourth nine weeks of the academic year (see Appendix F). For example, Joanne explained that the curriculum outlined that they teach students “how they should grip their pencil, letting them know how print is organized.” As with all 12 teachers, she felt the broad scope of these intended learning outcomes was confusing. Joanne was also not clear as to how those learning outcomes related to having students develop a love for writing or to developing their ideas for writing a story. This confusion stemmed from what she perceived as a lack of alignment between a very broad curriculum and a nebulous pacing guide.

As explained in Chapter 2, PCS purchased Ruth Culham’s *Trait Crate* for each grade level that outlined what to teach for writing. The crates are grade-level specific instructional materials that provide lessons and mentor texts to support teaching six writing traits—ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions. These traits are written into PCS’ pacing guide and made up the grading rubric for each nine-week period (discussed in detail under “Assessments”). The traits of voice and ideas were listed in the first nine weeks but not in the succeeding three quarters. The trait of *presentation* was listed in all four quarters. Presentation was listed
as “using uniform spacing, legible handwriting, and appropriate white space to make the writing neat and appealing” (PCS’ pacing guide).

When I interviewed Lexi, she opened the language arts curriculum framework on her laptop and pulled her chair closer to mine, growing more and more agitated as she showed me the differences in the reading and writing curriculum framework on her laptop. She eventually pointed to the writing framework and asked very pointedly, “Do you see ANYTHING [capitalized to show how stressed] that changes from first quarter to fourth quarter?” I thought of Vagle’s (2014) comments about noting the embodied reactions of participants as points of data, and Bandura’s (1997) conceptualization of these embodied reactions as physiological states that provide information for self-efficacy. Lexi’s embodied reactions truly opened up her frustration with the kindergarten writing curriculum, as this was the crux of the complaints across all teachers. They felt the invariance of the curriculum across the four nine-week quarters, and the broadness of the writing tasks outlined, made it difficult to have any consistency in what was taught from classroom to classroom.

The interview with Lexi was also pivotal as it brought to light a thread running through teachers’ context. Of the 12 teachers, 10 referred to the more structured guidelines provided for math and reading, and used these content frameworks as points of comparison to the writing framework. I thought of the subconscious message sent to teachers about writing in kindergarten, and wondered if what was lacking could be thought of as PCS’ hidden curriculum. While interviewing Gabby, I asked if she had three wishes to support her writing instruction, what she would change (AI lens). She shared, “I think the first thing is there would be a more structured model for us of what it
means. … There needs to be a thing that says this is what it means and these are our expectations.” This lack of clarity on the expectations allowed teachers to adapt their instruction to fit their own philosophy of what constitutes writing instruction in kindergarten, and teachers shared that this lack of clarity influenced their WISE.

Lydia’s classroom observations come to mind. As I explained in Chapter 3, the tenets of appreciative inquiry framed the interviews, and I asked teachers to bring an artifact that represented a successful experience with writing instruction. Ten teachers brought students’ writing samples as artifacts: Amanda brought a book titled, *Teaching Writing in Kindergarten*, and Lydia showed me folders she had created for each student (see Figure 8).

![Figure 8. Lydia’s writing folders](image)

Lydia stated that she uses a method called *Fundations*, a handwriting program. She explained:

*Fundations* really teaches the format of writing, the format of letter formations. They teach them the top line is the skyline, the middle line is the plane line, and there’s the grass line, there’s the worm line. Something to get them to learn the verbiage of just that.
During both observations in Lydia’s classroom, her whole group instruction focused on handwriting, sight word memorization, and the *rules* for writing. She conceptualized and taught the rules as: (a) making sure sentences start with an uppercase letter, (b) putting a space between words, and (c) remembering to punctuate each sentence. She spent a considerable amount of time teaching the rules, with students called on to recite them. During our second interview, Lydia explained she was focusing on having students stay on topic when writing, but also continued emphasizing handwriting. She explained the reason for her approach, stating that she had taught third grade, the grade where SOL testing starts in Virginia. She shared her frustration that students in third grade had terrible handwriting and could not stay on topic, and her goal was to get them started in kindergarten. She added, “people don’t realize that as long as the kids stay on topic with the SOL’s they will blow it out of the water. …As soon as you go off topic, they lose points.” Lydia also explained in a journal entry that she was teaching *Fundations* because it was required by PCS. I spoke to the Curriculum Director of PCS and she explained that, though some schools had adopted this program, the district did not endorse any handwriting program. The lack of clarity PCS’ curriculum, however, had Lydia spending a considerable amount of instructional time on a program adopted by an administrator that she felt was endorsed by the district. As the instructional outcomes aligned with the broadly defined curriculum, this misconception had never been corrected.

In a journal entry, Lydia shared her perception of her WISE. She said she had a “high class” the previous year (a term many teachers used to describe the collective incoming literacy skills of their class, usually associated with PreK attendance), but this year her students were struggling to remember and incorporate the rules. This had a
negative impact on her perceptions of WISE, but interestingly enough, she outlined some very specific strategies that she was planning to implement to address students’ struggles. This persistence in the face of challenge could be a result of her mastery experiences the previous year. She shared that her principal had given her an exemplary on her portfolio because of her students’ writing (another grey area of overlap with positive feedback as a source of self-efficacy). She directly tied her WISE to feedback linked to students’ handwriting.

Lucy had previously worked as a literacy coach and became very agitated when discussing the distinctions between handwriting and writing. She said that during a training session, she would ask teachers to bring a writing sample and they would bring her handwriting samples. She emphasized she always spent a lot of time educating them on the differences. When talking with Rachael, she candidly admitted, “It took me a couple of years before I got my head around it, and I was sort of embarrassed when it finally clicked, but handwriting and writing are two completely different things.” April, however, shared during an interview that she doesn’t necessarily think knowing how to write a sentence is important in kindergarten, and that she personally placed more emphasis on the correct formation of the letters and on letter/sound knowledge. Again, I witnessed a diverse spread of views on foundational concepts on the what of writing instruction. Each teacher’s WISE was interpreted differently as each one judged their ability to teach writing on different learning outcomes, a direct result of what all 12 teachers described as an ill-defined curriculum.

Though this discussion with Lydia showed that this focus on what to teach did not negatively affect her WISE, other discussions across teachers uncovered how the
diversity in understandings of the aims for students’ writing competencies was problematic. On my first visit to Rachael’s class, I noticed she had a different set of intended learning outcomes for her students. She started her whole-group mini-lesson on the carpet and recapped a story she had previously read about a gingerbread boy who was being chased. Students then collaboratively brainstormed about where their gingerbread person would be chased. Rachael modeled an illustration with her gingerbread girl with no details, then the class provided ideas for another illustration with her gingerbread girl being chased inside a zoo. She asked for feedback from students as they worked collaboratively to develop her story, explicitly using the language of the story elements (character, setting, time, and plot) to add details to her illustration (see Figure 9).

![Rachael’s Illustrations—Teacher](image1) ![John’s Illustration—Student](image2)

*Figure 9. Rachael’s classroom illustrations*

Students were then sent to their seats to independently complete their illustrations. Rachael proudly showed me John’s illustration, who had shared on the carpet that his four gingerbread men were going to be chased through New York City in a plane (note his Statue of Liberty in Figure 9). Another gingerbread boy was chased in Food Lion; one
gingerbread girl was being chased in Target (complete with a brilliant red bull’s eye on her paper).

Both Lydia and Rachael used their own philosophy about what writing instruction should “look like,” and interpreted the pacing guide based on this philosophy. During the first quarter, Lydia, Amanda, Susan, and April focused predominantly on presentation (spacing; handwriting; neatness) and conventions (capitalization, punctuation, and spelling); Rachael, Joanne, Gabby, and Autumn focused primarily on idea development; the other teachers in the study had a more balanced approach. The students in these classrooms received different approaches to instruction and, thus, writing products across classrooms were vastly different. This difference is where the shaping of WISE became nuanced. In my follow-up interview at the end of the second quarter, when discussing the practice of focusing on the illustrations to develop students’ ideas, Rachael admitted:

But then I get worried. [voice drops significantly and shoulders droop] Like when they go to first grade and they are not doing that, it may look like I’m not teaching writing the way that I should. But I really think you have to spend the time and encourage those ideas first.

When Rachael mentioned, “not doing that,” it was in reference to a conversation we were having about kindergarten writing samples (across classes) displayed in the hallway. It was very eye opening to me that, after 14 years in kindergarten, her WISE was negatively influenced by the lack of consensus on what to teach: handwriting skills that display well in the hallway or time spent on developing stories through illustrations. The lack of clarity as to the expectations, and uncertainty in how these undefined expectations had an effect on how her peers viewed her capability to teach writing,
resulted in an embodied reaction, much like Lydia’s agitation over students not learning the rules.

Knowing the correct balance between a focus on the conventions and a focus on the compositional processes for writing instruction was an often-voiced consequence of this perception of an ill-defined curriculum. Gabby described this dilemma well:

It is challenging to figure out what is more important. Oh it’s so good that you wrote so many things but I don’t know what it says because it has no space between the words. And you want to praise them when they spell words out wonderfully, but you look at it and you think, did I teach these things well enough because it’s neat and spelled beautifully, and has great spacing, but it does not make any sense. And I spent all this time teaching spacing, you know.

**Strategies: Knowing how to teach.** The word used most frequently to describe teachers’ reactions to the curriculum’s ambiguity was *frustration*. During her interview, Amanda used it 18 times in 50 minutes. Dawn found it difficult to articulate her strengths for writing instruction, and replied, “I never really know where to start or what to do.” During my second interview, I asked Dawn about her perception of WISE. She said:

I feel somewhat confident, I guess. Not all kids are there yet. …But that is kind of what they need to be doing, so I expect them to keep progressing. It is just frustrating because I’m not always sure how to get them there. Or like the best way. Because I want them to love writing real stories. Not just the simple sentences, like *I like* or *I can.*

The weak “link” between her instructional decisions and her students’ progress had a significantly negative effect on her WISE.
Gabby, when asked about her WISE, said “Most of the time I think, yeah, I am confident in my abilities to teach writing,” in a somewhat skeptical tone. She kept sharing about her uncertainty with how to teach the rather broad guidelines provided by the county, and explained:

Like, if this week we are working on introducing beginning sounds. But HOW [word stressed as her movements became more agitated] do you want us to introduce beginning sounds? What works for me might be different from what works for you, but what is the most effective? So I know different subjects they will say, like math for instance, this is the SOL and these are the expectations and these are how we are going to achieve these expectations. But with writing…here it is… [she threw up her hands] take it for what you want and do what you can with it. So things look different amongst the six teachers here. My writing instruction is totally different from hers, [pointing to classrooms across the hall as her volume and pace of speech slightly escalates] hers really looks different than mine….so even, what about across the county?

I included this lengthy excerpt because these were important questions asked. In the short time that I was able to visit 16 classrooms (including the four classrooms during the pilot study), I could answer that question: Kindergarten writing instruction looked very different across the county. Gabby’s questions about “what is the most effective” rings out as the core of the issue, as teacher were unclear as to what were the best strategies to use to develop students’ writing competencies, and this in turn had a negative effect on their WISE.
**Writing traits.** As explained earlier, PCS used the writing traits for each grade level to outline what to teach for writing. The trait, *voice*, is defined as “adding energy to the writing by matching personality, style, and emotion with purpose” (PCS Pacing Guide). On the kindergarten rubric it is assessed on a 4-point scale using a progression from 1 = does not use pictures or words to express feelings, to 4 = effectively uses pictures and words to express feelings and shows that the writer has something important to say. The traits represented an area of confusion about *how to teach* a required component of the curriculum. Rachael, who had been teaching for 14 years, said in our first interview, “Talking to students about, like voice and conventions in kindergarten? That is a little much I think…I mean, I guess they can show voice in their pictures.” Two days later, I interviewed Amanda, who had been teaching for 4 years. She also mentioned the lack of clarity of the curriculum, but used the rubric as a way to clarify the writing skills to be taught. Interestingly enough, she also used the trait of voice as a point of reference. She said, “So, for example, we are grading them on voice and ideas? …I just think that that is so vague, I don’t know. I feel like if they get words on the paper with spaces then that is their voice.” These teachers both interpreted the same writing skill for a kindergarten classroom in different ways. Consequently, their instruction, and assessment, of the Trait of *voice* would differ.

These reactions to teaching voice made me curious, so I checked the results of the survey. Though I had 49 completed responses to the survey, I received five additional surveys that had the first section completed, and seven that had only demographical data. Of the 54 responses to the section on instructional time spent teaching students to incorporate voice in writing (during the first half of the school year), close to one-third
(32%) of the respondents reported Not at all, and a little over one-half (54%) reported A little. Most teachers reported an incremental increase in focus by the end of the year. I started asking teachers if they used their crates, and only Lucy had. She explained it was only because she had previously worked in another state as a reading coach and had trained teachers on the use of the crate.

All of the early-career teachers said they had never received training on the Trait Crate, but they had seen them in their classrooms. The lack of clarity on how to teach a skill that they were required to teach and assess influenced teacher’s instructional decisions especially with respect to the strategies they used in their classroom. The lack of confidence in knowing how to teach the traits (WISE) like voice, ideas, and word choice was consistently discussed and observed. This may be why some teachers’ instructional decisions relied more heavily on the less ambiguous concepts like presentation and conventions.

Creative play. Lexi shared an incident that informed this discussion about the strategies for teaching writing. She explained that a previous administrator insisted that she remove her kitchen center from her classroom (another area of grey that will be discussed under Professional Influences). Lexi strongly believed in creative play as an excellent strategy for teaching writing, and tried explaining the importance of the center to her administrator, especially given the high number of students identified as ELL in her classroom. She explained to me during her interview that she used “grocery lists” as ways for them to learn vocabulary. Lexi shared:

And I stood in my door and I said, “No. We are going to have to agree to disagree, because that is important. If you want me to find a way to make it more
academic, then great, I’ll find a way to do that. But I'm not taking it out of my room.” And now, all of a sudden, they’re talking about play again. And especially with our population with ELL students. The vocabulary!

As a veteran teacher, the long-view in her statement “And now, all of a sudden, they’re talking about play again,” is an interesting lens for this concept of movements through, as Lexi had lived through many instructional approaches that had the potential to re-shape WISE when first introduced. Lexi, responding to the question about her WISE said:

  I am very confident of my ability to get my students to where the need to be in their writing by the end of the 4th nine weeks. I closely monitor them throughout their processes and have the ability to focus upon the skill that they need strengthened. That can span from still learning to copy a prompt, beginning to use ending and medial sounds in their writing, to continuing to encourage them to use the word wall words in their sentences correctly. My goal is to have them able to independently create at least three sentences about a topic. This will get accomplished by incorporating authentic writing experiences throughout their day.

Her detailed list of what she wanted to accomplish and how she planned to accomplish it supported her perception of high WISE. This discussion also pointed to the influence of mastery experiences (years of experience) on WISE.

Interestingly, Ruth shared that she had voluntarily asked for her kitchen center to be removed from her classroom. She said, “We don’t have time for it. I mean I really held back in getting rid of my housekeeping stuff. I held onto my kitchen stuff for years and
then I realized that I was never really using it.” Autumn also shared that her first day at her school, the kitchen center had been removed from her classroom.

I am going to ask the reader to slow down with me to savor, and spend a little time with Autumn’s experiences. Autumn had a graduate degree in literacy and was surprised that creative play was not a part of the kindergarten curriculum. She expressed frustration with the difference between her training and the reality of her classroom and explained she envisioned being able to incorporate many creative activities into her instruction. This is an excerpt from our interview:

It’s really hard because I feel like they are able to do what the county sets out for them. They are able to transfer letters, that knowledge into their writing. If you set the bar high then they can achieve it. But I just wish there was more wiggle room within the curriculum that would allow for us to do some more creative thinking. We push it in where we can but there is not as much time for that, and nowhere in the curriculum is it even a priority. I just had this vision of what the classroom is going to be like based on all the best practices that I was learning at [name of university] and it is not…it just is not. Especially in kindergarten, you would think there is play, where they should be having dramatic play, getting to authentic collaboration.

She shared that the challenge for her was time and pacing, and knowing how to incorporate the strategies she had learned about, in theory, into her writing lesson. During my second observation in Autumn’s classroom she proudly showed me her mailroom. She had found a way to include play and creativity into her writing lesson, a definite testament to the power of the simultaneity principle with AI—change started
from the moment we first discussed this dissonance between training and practice. Autumn’s writing lesson that day had students writing a letter to a classmate. They had stamps and envelopes, letters went into a mailbag, and students sorted the mail from classmates into their cubbies (see Figure 10).

![Figure 10. Autumn’s mailroom and a student’s letter to a classmate](image)

I emailed Autumn and asked her to include a journal entry that week about the impact of the mailroom. She wrote:

I dared to call this Literacy Station the “Play Station.” I want my class to know that it is okay to play and have fun at this station. They know what the expectation is at this station, and they are doing it, while learning and having fun. I often get a
guilty feeling because my personal teaching philosophies and educational experiences are not represented in my classroom. That changed with my Classroom Post Office. It has been phenomenal and rewarding to watch my students enjoying a Literacy Station so much and enjoying writing through a more authentic experience. This is what Kindergarten should be and it is possible. Autumn’s agency, personal philosophy, persistence, and training resulted in instructional decisions that had a significant positive effect on her WISE. Additionally, I witnessed her instructional management during this rotation of the mailroom. She had structured it well and the students were engaged with writing their letters and sorting their mail.

**Sharing circles.** Sharing writing is a whole-group strategy situated within a collaborative learning approach to instruction, involves students sharing their writing products with peers, and was added to the Virginia English SOL for Kindergarten Writing for the first time in 2017 (see Appendix C). Teachers shared that they had never received training or direction on how to incorporate sharing into their 30-minute writing block. Though teachers referred to the *Author’s Chair* where, typically, students will sit and share their story (written or illustrated) with the class, most admitted to not having the time to include this strategy into their writing block.

When I visited Lucy’s classroom she had all students take turns sharing their writing whole-group on the carpet, and the lesson—from mini-lesson to sharing—lasted approximately an hour and 15 minutes. On my second visit, Dawn had students sit at their desks while she picked one student to share at the front of the class. That student then picked a friend to share, and she had four students share their work. When I asked Dawn about her use of this strategy she said:
I’ve been trying to be more creative because I felt like we always run out of time to get to that part… Last year, whoever would share would sit in the big chair and would read it but I have taken that out this year because it’s easier to put the journals away and then move to the next thing.

Most teachers circulated the classroom, stopped at students’ desks, and had them read their writing or share their illustrations. Some teachers sat at a table at the back or side of the room and had students come to them to share their writing once they were finished, but did not attempt whole group sharing. Gabby had students read their work to her when they sat with her during their small group time. Most teachers admitted this was an area of weakness in their writing instruction. Rachael said, “I haven’t as much this year. But, typically, I used to…just the time,” and Susan admitted she started having them share at the beginning of the year about once a week, but recently, they did not always have time. Gabby admitted, “Now that is something I will say that I don’t do as often as I would like to.” Though teachers realized the importance of students sharing their work, they felt the push of time and a lack of training on how to implement this writing strategy negatively affected WISE.

**Knowing when to move on.** Knowing *when to teach what* was a major topic of discussion during interviews, as many teachers, across years of experience, acknowledged this as an area of least knowledge. The underlying confusion voiced in these discussions centered on the developmental progression of instruction. I noticed the significant diversity of instructional decisions across the 12 teachers because of this amorphous landscape of kindergarten writing instruction. It was noteworthy that Amanda
referenced a book on kindergarten writing as an artifact during our first interview. She said:

I think the book explains that you teach students where they are, and it pushes them at just the right pace. It just makes sense. I feel like developmentally, the book is good about explaining where they are. …I mean, there is a pacing guide [for PCS] but it is very vague, and it is not laid out like math is.

Amanda felt she needed support that was not in the curriculum to add to her knowledge base and, again, this comparison with math seemed to send a tacit message to teachers about the importance of writing instruction. Additionally, the developmental progression of instruction Amanda mentioned alluded to the confusion teachers referred to in interviews and journal entries of knowing when to move on in a developmentally appropriate way, so as not to keep using strategies that were “too easy.” For example, teachers wondered, should students start with illustrations and then move to labeling their illustrations, or should they start with writing using sentence stems? If they started with sentence stems, teachers seemed unsure as to when to move on to more authentic writing activities. This lack of clarity lessened teachers’ WISE.

The diverse use of sentence stems was a consistent way this confusion was exhibited in classrooms. For example, when I visited April’s classroom in November, I noticed her lesson relied heavily on the use of sentence stems and she admitted to using this technique quite frequently. In November, April explained that at that time, students were still copying a sentence she created on the whiteboard. She said, however, “later down the road I expect to see their own writing, not direct copies.” During my second observation on January 24, 2018, the class worked on an anchor chart (see Figure 11),
where April filled in the chart with ideas from students, writing the ideas without much think-aloud about her own processes for spelling or much prompting from the students (e.g., beginning sounds, ending sounds; using supports in the room—like the chart listing the colors).

Figure 11. April’s January writing lesson using an anchor chart to help students develop sentences.

Students then went to their seats and worked independently on a worksheet on which the stems were already written: Penguins can ___, Penguins have ___, Penguins are ___. What had changed in April’s instruction was that she now allowed students a choice in how they completed the stems. The anchor chart remained displayed in the classroom as students used this support to complete their sentences.

To provide a point of comparison, Ruth wrote this journal entry on November 9, 2017 (approximately three months before my end-of-January visit in April’s classroom):

Today in class, we read about different kinds of Indians from the book *Buried Secrets*. For the prompt the students were to fill in:

Indians can ___, Indians have ___, Indians are ___ in their journals.
This kind of activity we do about once a month to get the students to use their word wall words in sentences. I really do not like this activity because my students love to write their own sentences and do not like the sentence starter prompts.

For Ruth, this activity was used closer to the beginning of the year, though not an activity she relied on even then. April shared why she used the sentence stems frequently:

I’m torn between direct instruction and cooperative learning for kindergarten writing. …So I like direct instruction actually, which I feel like is frowned upon in a lot of settings. When I do direct instruction, my kids do better. Once we work on forming the letters together, they look at writing with me.

When I asked April about her WISE, she referenced a change in her WISE due to a student-specific influence that will be discussed later in this chapter. Based on other conversations and my observations, however, April displayed a high perception of WISE, especially for a first-year teacher. I wondered if this healthy perception was due to the nature of her instruction. If learning activities depended on low-cognitive skills to complete, and they are successful, this may serve as a way to bolster WISE.

Susan’s writing lessons serve as another point of comparison. During my first observation of Susan’s writing lesson, she introduced the sight word “this” and modeled writing two sentences with the stem, “This is _____,” with input from students on finishing the sentence. Finally, four students “shared-the-pen” and came to the whiteboard and wrote the sentence, “This is my menorah” (see Figure 12). A labeled picture of a menorah was already in the room. After this whole group lesson, students
returned to their seats, and copied the sentence “This is my menorah” independently, then illustrated with a picture of a menorah.

![Menorah Drawing]

*Figure 12. Susan’s writing lesson in December*

During my second visit at the end of January, students worked on another stem. Students provided endings for “My favorite animal is” and helped Susan sound out endings using invented spelling. They then went to their seats and worked on this independently, with the stem displayed on the whiteboard as a support. When I asked Susan about her WISE, she replied:

I feel pretty confident in that just simply because I feel like my kids are so far along at this point compared to last year, my little babies. They are sounding out and I have them labeling more and I feel like they are really progressing. I feel like I have more experience. Last year I feel like I was really just trying to do, not that I was trying to survive, but also do the best that I could. But I feel like I know so much more now.

The movement in students’ progress was the source of WISE. Additionally, she acknowledged movement in her own instruction as she was requiring invented spelling to
complete the stem. The comparison from last year also pointed to the development of mastery experiences that supported WISE.

During my first classroom visit in late October, Lucy also used a sentence stem to support writing. Students brainstormed ideas on the carpet then completed a worksheet using invented spelling, similar to Susan’s lesson. When I visited approximately two months later, students wrote a story independently. I asked Lucy about the change in her instruction and she stated, “I told them, after a while we can’t do I can and I see sentences. Those are baby, beginning sentences. Now we’ve got to move on.” She had started teaching students about writing stories with different punctuation styles to show voice. The student in the sample asked a question, “What do we do in winter?” and answered it, “We can play in snow. We can play and make a snowman. I play in the snow” (see Figure 13).

![Figure 13. A writing sample from a student in Lucy’s class (What do we do in wi-tur?)](image)

Lucy demonstrated very high WISE and said, “I know they will get there.” The issue, for most teachers, seemed to center on having confidence in knowing when to move on with a curriculum that provided little guidance. From a macro-view, I started to wonder about the diversity of instruction I was seeing and had to rely more on my post-
reflexivity. Let me explain.

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**Researcher’s Journal Entry: Slowing Down Through Post-Reflexivity 6**

*How is writing structured so differently from classroom to classroom? . . . This is where the lens of AI has really helped. Before I started collecting data, I valued the approach as a “frame” for interviews only. Now I truly appreciate it as a habit-of-practice, and I see the close alignment with a phenomenological attitude. These lenses allow me to look deeper at teachers’ motivations and uncover that teachers genuinely want to see their students grow and develop as writers, and a huge underlying thread, so to speak, is their honest and invested work in developing their “babies” love of writing. I am paying attention to the personal investment of money teachers are making to buy spacers for students, or the dry erase circles I’m seeing on desks in classrooms. To be honest, that instruction looks significantly different is almost guaranteed without clear curricular guides. These continuous recalibrations to my own lenses are eye opening as they are truly bringing to light my instructional biases. I find myself stretching and growing as a researcher. Appreciative phenomenology is making me see “what is” but also “what can be” IN ME!*

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**Assessments.** As previously discussed in Chapter 2, the role assessments play in instruction has significantly increased, so I was eager to hear teachers’ views on how assessments affected writing instruction in kindergarten. The district used state benchmark/diagnostic assessments for kindergarten (mentioned in Chapter 2—like the PALS assessments given twice a year and the DRA assessments given three times a year). At the end of every nine weeks, students also completed a writing sample that was scored with a rubric and placed in students’ portfolios. During the first interview, and
usually very early in our time together, all teachers mentioned some form of discontent with the writing rubric and its impact on WISE.

**Writing rubric.** The “static” nature of the curriculum for kindergarten writing in PCS was accompanied by a rubric that did not change from the first nine weeks to the fourth nine weeks. The grading *scale* changed, but the items scored stayed the same. As previously mentioned, students’ writing samples were scored on a 1 to 4 scale, and teachers expressed concern that there were no examples of what these scores “looked like” across the year. As Dawn shared during a focus group meeting, “Having an example of what a 3 looks like at the beginning of the year and what a 3 looks like at the end of the year would be helpful.” At that same meeting, Joanne shared that there were examples of writing samples on the district’s website, and of the five present, only one other teacher, Lexi, was aware that they were available. The other teachers present had only taught 4 years and less. Lexi did qualify, however, that the samples were not current and needed to be updated. Amanda made a very compelling personal observation in a journal entry about the rubric’s lack of developmental appropriateness. She wrote:

> The county’s quarterly writing rubric expects students to be writing a complete sentence in order to earn a three—meeting grade level expectation—for the 1st quarter. That’s insane. The majority of my students are just learning to apply letter sounds to writing at this point in the year—single letter spellings for words, detailed pictures with labels, etc. I understand setting the bar high, but not so high that students feel defeated, as well as teachers, before they begin.

This entry made me slow down as I felt there was so much contained in that last sentence. The view of the rubric as developmentally inappropriate at the beginning of the year was
again reinforced. This impact on students—and teachers—was explicitly stated and revealed the angst the rubric engendered.

Ruth also discussed the confusion with the rubric and its lack of clarity when scoring, with respect to whether or not illustrations and words are included in a student’s score. She said:

The other day, one of the teachers was saying something about the picture/drawing, and she was like, “Well they have to have a picture to get a four.” And I was like no, and she was like, “well that is what it says.” And I went back and looked at it and they made a mistake on the rubric. I don’t think anybody has ever corrected it because for one, two, and three it says picture and/or words, but when I get to four it just says picture and it doesn’t say picture and words. It doesn’t say and/or words, because once they get into the first and second [nine weeks] they start to get away from the pictures.

This obvious confusion among teachers about how to score a sample was a common complaint. What I also heard teachers saying repeatedly was that there was no consistency in scoring from teacher to teacher. Many teachers recounted times when they asked a teammate to score one of their student’s writing sample as a point of comparison, and the teammate had vastly underscored or scored much higher than they had. Dawn nuanced this discussion, saying she was not even sure about her consistency from student to student. She explained:

Well I can grade a child’s paper and another teacher could grade the same paper and we could end up with very different scores…So sometimes I will go through and grade and then feel, “Wait a minute. Maybe I need to go back and see what
this was.” So I usually grade in pencil so I can make changes on a score to keep it as equal as possible.

Amanda discussed the potential problems of this inconsistency, looking at the rubric’s potential impact on parents and expressing anxiety with how scores across grading periods may be received. She said:

But the rubric is confusing, because it is not clear what a one, two, three, or four is. …It makes me anxious, because when I have conferences, if I ever have to explain this, and if a parent was ever to ask why their child got that score, or how can she improve, it is hard to defend. …But I think it sets us up for failure, and we’re on the front line. And I feel like the county should have to answer for that.

This lack of clarity and inconsistency created stress and anxiety, which has a negative effect on self-efficacy. When Amanda and I spoke during her second interview, it was interesting how the concept of movement was reinforced. Amanda’s response to her perception of WISE was that she was able to adjust her perception of WISE to the broadness of the curriculum and the nebulous nature of the rubric. She shared:

I mean, I think all things considered, with the lack of the support in the curriculum, and the rubric not aligning, I think I feel fairly confident teaching writing, all things considered. Because they don’t have a lot to go on, and that takes the pressure off. And I see my kids’ progress, so I can see them meeting the benchmarks, and some going beyond that.

This was another moment to slow down to understand the nuances of the phenomenon. During the middle of the year, the concept of “ease of expectations” surfaced. As students were progressing, the pressure of unrealistic expectations at the beginning of the year was
mitigated by anticipation of students’ continued growth. I started looking for these threads of adjustment across interviews, journal entries, and observations.

Joanne felt so strongly about incorporating changes into the rubric, she added a comment into the summary of her initial interview under *Challenges for Writing Instruction*. She said, “I would also like to see a kindergarten writing rubric tailored to each nine weeks, that grows and progresses with the child instead of the same rubric on a one-to-four scale.” Lexi succinctly summed up teachers’ thoughts on the district’s kindergarten writing curriculum and rubric when she said, “with SOLs that are as broad as they are, and a rubric that is crazy as it is, and the pacing guide as monotonous as it is, I don’t know.”

**Diagnostic assessments.** Diagnostic assessments in kindergarten are predominantly one-on-one, so they are very time-consuming. As Amanda commented, “I feel like I teach for six weeks and test for three.” All 12 teachers interviewed, however, articulated an understanding of the importance of diagnostic assessments guiding their instruction. What teachers were also very candid about was the impact of these assessments on writing instruction. April, a first year teacher, commented in her journal entry just before the end of the second nine weeks, “I’ve been rushing to finish up assessments this week, so writing time has been minimal.” I started seeing an increased number of this type of journal entry in January, so became more intentional about asking teachers’ views on this dynamic during follow-up interviews. I met with Dawn just after schools in the district had lost a number of instructional days due to inclement weather, and students’ writing samples were due in two weeks. This is an excerpt of a conversation between Dawn and me:
Interviewer: So, if you did not need a writing sample at the end of the second nine weeks, do you think you would have placed priority on the writing?

Dawn: Probably not. I will focus more on catching up with guided reading and math.

Interviewer: Why do you think?

Dawn: Because those are tested so we need to make sure we cover the materials.

This excerpt from April’s journal entry, also during this time, was enlightening. She wrote:

This was an interesting week with the snow days that were missed! On Friday, we had a two-hour delay after being away for the three previous days. I find that in a modified schedule, writing instruction is the first thing to go! To an extent, I don’t personally like this approach much because I enjoy writing and even writing instruction for the most part. …I also find that during a time when we are assessing, writing instruction gets somewhat overlooked and left out as well.

The reality of testing and pacing intrigued me, so I asked two veteran teachers about the impact of interruptions to instructional time on writing instruction, and both confirmed this negative impact. Though teachers did not tie these instructional decisions directly to their WISE, they did tie them to the level of frustration they felt when students seemed to revert in their writing progress when any substantial time was taken away from instruction. As Susan said, “sometimes it feels like we are back to September,” and I thought of the possible mediating effects of these instructional decisions on WISE if linked to frustration and anxiety.
Student Influences

The reach of PCS’ curriculum and assessments on teachers’ classrooms was broad and extensive. The movements through concept of this study, however, were dramatically seen within the constantly shifting and changing micro-classroom contexts of the phenomenon. Students’ progress was the most significant positive influence on WISE observed and discussed by teachers. This progress was closely tied to kindergarten readiness. I have used the term kindergarten readiness as an umbrella term to represent three distinct student contexts: PreK experiences, parental involvement, and the school’s demographical profile. Students’ progress and kindergarten readiness were student-specific contexts that emerged from the data and demonstrated the concept of movements through.

Student progress. The influence of students’ progress in kindergarten teachers’ lifeworld elicited the most affective responses from teachers and from me. Throughout all interviews and journaling, teachers shared that the most unique part of kindergarten was witnessing the amazing progress of students. I noted two interesting things during interviews. First, 10 of the 12 teachers had students’ writing samples as artifacts to represent a successful writing experience, and many had students’ journals to show this growth. Gabby shared that she loved to show students how far they had progressed by showing them samples from the beginning of the school year to when she met with them, and that many wanted to erase and “fix” the mistakes they saw. She excitedly shared she would explain to the student that the mistakes are great because they show their growth.
Ruth had a similar perspective and shared that she had not had a chance to look at the journals up until my initial interview, but reviewed them before our interview. This excerpt from Ruth’s interview tied students’ progress to WISE beautifully:

But the journals are my favorite. I like how we looked back to September and I can see the progress in this book. …So it was really good for me to, this is the first time I've sat down and looked at these journals from the beginning. I'm seeing what I'm doing in the classroom and fostering that and making them grow…especially when you see the lightbulb come on…I love when the lightbulb is fully glowing and it’s just all bright. That’s a neat thing to see.

Second, not only was the comparative lens important, but all of the 10 teachers started with a sample from a “struggling” student to show that growth. Susan shared the progress of a student who started kindergarten not knowing the letters in his name nor displaying any letter/sound knowledge. She excitedly shared, “and he didn’t do anything like that [pointing to the sample], so that is huge in just a month and a half.” This growth had a direct effect on her WISE, and she shared that seeing students developing a love of writing, knowing it “instills that love of learning and writing for the long haul,” validated her instruction. This was a main thread running throughout this study. Teachers were all very invested in trying to support the struggling students in their classroom.

A December journal entry made by April, in her first year teaching, was particularly helpful in uncovering how students’ progress was intricately linked, and integral to, teachers’ WISE. She wrote:

I am pleased with a great number of my students’ growth since the start of school.

One particular student has shown much growth going from only
knowing/identifying about half of the lowercase letters to knowing all of them and the sounds they make. He has been able to use his knowledge of letter sounds to write words he has not yet been taught. The fact that through—in my eyes—such little instruction, that he is able to do that is an amazing feeling for a first year teacher.

Autumn made a similar comment in our initial interview as she showed me students’ artifacts and explained:

And I really see the growth. More than in any other subject, I see it with writing. To have these writing samples and to be able to compare from where they were to where they are. …That gives me confirmation that I am doing the right thing, that my students are retaining what I want them to learn and what they should be learning. And it makes me feel good, especially as a second year teacher where I’m still learning how to properly do everything. My students are learning, so it feels good to see the comparisons and, the confidence.

Teachers also discussed that, right after the December holiday break, students get over “the kindergarten hump” and the concept of movement became very applicable in their classrooms. Eleven of the teachers, excluding April, discussed that this is when students usually showed remarkable progress as the concepts, letter/sound recognition, and invented spelling allowed them to really focus their instruction and, according to Susan, “relinquish control.” During this inquiry, I noticed that the concept of student progress and the reality of movement were central to all discussions and were the lenses through which teachers’ viewed their SPWI.
Kindergarten readiness. The term kindergarten readiness was used to represent the influence of PreK experiences, parental involvement, and a school’s demographic profile on the skills students had already acquired as they transitioned into a kindergarten classroom—either at the beginning of the academic year or if they transferred into the classroom during the year.

PreK experiences. In Chapter 2, I discussed the effect of the rising national trend in preschool enrollment on kindergarten expectations, but I admit I did not fully understand the impact. This was an unforeseen benefit of conducting this current study across the district, as this was mentioned, but not a major factor, during the pilot study. Across the teachers in this study, however, this was one of the most discussed negative influences on kindergarten writing instruction, equal only to the curriculum and the rubric. Dawn shared her feelings about this in a journal entry, explaining that she felt “very overwhelmed” with writing instruction because the students represented so many varied levels and abilities. Teachers’ referred to distinctions in incoming students as “a diverse range of abilities,” “low babies,” “having a good class this year,” or having a “high class,” based on the balance in PreK experiences for incoming students. Teachers all articulated that educators outside of kindergarten classrooms did not truly appreciate what is currently happening in their classrooms due to changes in this national demographic.

When I asked Dawn about her wishes for structuring writing instruction in any way to meet her end-of-year goals, she indicated she would “figure out how to meet the needs of all the kids. That’s always a struggle because they’re all at different places.” When Ruth shared a writing sample of a “struggling” student as her artifact at our first
meeting, she admitted she had a “high class” that current year, and the student she was discussing may be considered a “high” student in a teammate’s class.

This diversity created a different dynamic for teachers with knowing how to meet the needs of the various skill levels represented in their classroom. The feelings teachers expressed were mostly ones of frustration. Gabby explained:

I guess one of our big frustrations with kindergarten in general is you are given varying abilities. …Some have gone to [name of a local prestigious academy] and some, nothing. Every year is different because each year we have a new group of kids with different abilities.

Teachers all shared experiences that were reflected in Ruth and Gabby’s comments, and this movement from year-to-year was mentioned by 11 of the 12 teachers, with the exception of April. April, however, admitted that the variety of learners that were currently in her class was her biggest challenge. She explained, “I have some that know no letter sounds and the name of letters, and I have some who are forming words and reading words.” April made an interesting comment, however, that was not repeated by any other teacher in the study. This is an excerpt of that conversation:

Because, like I say, I wouldn’t care if I had a whole class like this [points to a writing sample of a student with low-preparedness] because I could teach all of them the same thing and they would make growth. They would be able to all slowly grow together into forming letters and forming words.

Her comments demonstrated that her frustration was not with having students that were struggling with writing: The frustration stemmed from the diverse spread of abilities and her lack of knowledge on how to meet those diverse needs. Susan and Joanne added
another layer to these observations by explaining that the challenge of the diversity was compounded by the lack of time for writing instruction to adequately meet those diverse needs. Teachers all articulated the negative effect this spread of diversity had on instructional decisions and instructional management, and thus, negatively shaped WISE.

During my mid-January visit, Autumn had completed her whole group mini-lesson and was “walking the room” checking on students. I observed as she pulled up a chair and sat next to one student who was clearly struggling with the independent assignment. At the end of my observation, she showed me two writing samples (see Figure 14).

![Image of two writing samples](Mark’s writing sample Kisha’s writing sample)

*Figure 14. Students in Autumn’s class*

Mark, the student she had been working with, illustrated a story about a tree (in green), that was by the water (in blue), that was about to be burned during a fire (in red/yellow). Mark was still working on fine-motor skills. Kisha wrote, “I LOVE Gumnasixs because I do crat-wese,” (I love gymnastics because I do cart-wheels) with invented spelling that showed strong letter/sound competency. These samples represented
the spread of diverse writing abilities I observed in the classrooms I visited across the county. Autumn’s perspective on this diversity was especially informative as she shared about a student the previous year that needed a lot of support: “This is one where I had to show him how to hold the pencil and he barely had any fine motor and he didn’t know how to read his name.” Susan, predicting a continuously increasing trend in PreK enrollment said, “Once it is there it will be easier.”

While reading journal entries during my initial holistic reading, I read this reflection that Joanne shared, referring to twenty years ago. “If they knew all of their letters and sounds by the end of the year, they were good to go to first. Now, they need to know letters and sounds before they come in or they are considered behind.” I highlighted this quote and analytically noted that this comment helped to uncover the phenomenon, as it began to explain why SPWI did not have an “essence” as it is situated in contexts affected by movement—movements that teachers were living through.

This trend of diverse abilities in teachers’ classrooms affected each teacher in the same way: they all expressed frustration. As discussed in Chapter 2, a negative affective reaction has a negative impact on self-efficacy.

**Parental involvement.** Connected to this movement in PreK enrollment were teachers’ assumptions that PreK had subsumed parents’ involvement in students’ preparation for writing in kindergarten. When I asked teachers about parental involvement, they acknowledged different levels of parental involvement based on their collaboration with parents after their students had started kindergarten, but expressed little expectations, outside of being able to write their first name, for any writing competencies developed at home. What they did express concern about, and wished
parents understood more, was the importance of students’ fine-motor skill development. This developmental context underscores the unique nature of kindergarten classrooms. As a result, parental involvement did not seem to influence the WISE of 11 of the 12 teachers in this study.

The one exception was Lydia. When asked about her WISE, she tied it directly to home involvement, including the participation of siblings and grandparents. Lydia said:

I know where they need to be in the end. But from my experience I’ve had some help...some help. Parental support. Some of these guys in here I don’t see that parental support and that has an effect…I want to try to get them to where they need to be, so I’m going to do a little bit more of that, where I have more of a one on one. Because I told the parents last night that we have two more nine weeks to go and I need your help. So from what I’ve seen over the years, even in the city, I had some support. Whether it was big sister, big brother, Grandma, or somebody! Now I don’t see that. So it’s a battle.

However, Lydia outlined very specific strategies to overcome these challenges. This is an indication of high WISE for, as discussed in Chapter 2, teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy tend to expend extra effort and persist in the face of challenges.

**School demographical profile.** This contextual influence surprised me, as an educator, in many ways. First, the commonality of teachers’ experiences across all kindergarten classrooms represented in this study was informative. Regardless of demographic population, and hence location, teachers in this study, and in the pilot study, all articulated the same victories with, wishes for, and challenges with their writing instruction. This finding also surprised teachers. During both focus group meetings, when
I asked teachers what surprised them the most about the findings, this was a lengthy topic of discussion. Lexi, who taught at a Successful Challenged school admitted, “Well, I think you have a perception, especially if you don’t work in that school. Because you think, the have and the have-nots. And I guess you put on things on the ‘haves’ that may not be accurate.” Lucy, working in a Challenged school, and in the other focus group said, “You always think teachers over there in those [italics added to show emphasis] neighborhoods have it easier, or that their kids are all coming in knowing everything.” After Lucy said that, two other teachers spontaneously chanted, almost in unison, “Kindergarten is its own world!”

Teachers seemingly bonded over the knowledge that, as kindergarten teachers, they were unique, and that uniqueness united them. Interestingly, April told me after her focus group met that she felt so much better knowing that the challenges she faced as a first year teacher were also faced by teachers with much more experience. April’s admission was exciting, as I imagined that this realization could have a positive impact on her WISE. This was one of my purposes for the focus groups—for teachers to hear about the shared experiences of the lifeworld of kindergarten writing instruction.

Student mobility. Another moment of shock for me personally was when teachers shared about the transience of students in many kindergarten classrooms. Dawn was in a school with a high ELL population and explained that, in her school, not many students who started kindergarten attended Grade 5 at her school. When I conducted her second interview at the end of January, she had received a new student that week, had a new student who was identified as ELL start just before the December break, and already had four students in her class who had moved. She also explained a similar difficulty when, as
a first year teacher, she had two students placed in her classroom mid-year who had just moved into the country and spoke very little English. Since student progress was a strong support for teachers WISE throughout this study, the reality that Dawn may not see the progress of her students across the year, and that she may always have students that are early-literacy learners, had a negative impact on her WISE.

I conducted my second interview with Lexi on January 16, 2018, and she described her frustration with the level of support for ELL students in the classroom. She explained:

In my class, only one child out of my seven that I have that are ELL get ELL support. That is for 20 minutes in the morning. She [the ELL teacher] is now starting to do her assessments and just sent an email that she is not going to pull students until maybe March. So therefore it is all on me.

Lexi talked at length about this dynamic in her classroom. When conducting my observations, I noticed her level of agitation grow as she tried to meet the needs of all her students. From my own observations, I saw this having a negative influence on her WISE, though this was obviously mitigated by her extensive cache of mastery experiences. This was an important nuance for me to understand as I moved forward in the study and started to realize the layers of WISE. Lexi had many mastery experiences so, though her level of frustration was maybe just as high as Amanda’s, negative influences did not seem significant enough to lower WISE, though it did seem to eventually re-shape it. When Lexi enthusiastically mentioned in our focus group that she was considering retiring the next year, I thought of an analogy of water consistently flowing over rocks and eventually changing its shape.
April experienced a similar dynamic with transience in her classroom. When I conducted my second interview in January, she had also just received two new students before the holiday break. As a first year teacher, she expressed her concern with how this will affect her instruction and said:

I feel I am facing a challenge with my new students. It makes it a little bit more of a challenge because I feel like I lose instructional time with the ones that have been here, because I have to find where that person is. Therefore they pull a little bit more of my attention when they first get here for the first couple of weeks. Because I have to hone in on their abilities and I have to find out where they are.

These dynamics showing movement were the nature of the phenomenon. As teachers moved through the school year, as students moved in their development, and as the classroom dynamic changed with new students enrolled and students leaving the classroom, SPWI also shifted and changed.

*Collaborative classrooms.* Gabby and Lexi also had the added dimension of teaching collaborative classes with students with identified disabilities. Gabby expressed her frustration with the curriculum in this way:

More so, I think when we get things from the county or things from the state, well whatever you say the curriculum is, it’s like, “Okay that’s what you say what we need to do, but this is really how it’s happening. And realistically, I’ve had a collab class for three years and what you keep putting out there is not going to work with some of my friends.”

Gabby, referring to a specific student in her class with a disability, succinctly expressed how this influenced her WISE:
Most of the time I think, yeah I am confident in my abilities to teach writing. …So for me to be able to teach HIM [capitalized to show how stressed] to be successful, I am confident that I am able to teach HIM to do HIS best that HE can do. And everybody in here is capable of so many things. So, I guess I feel confident that I can be flexible to help students where they are.

The term *flexibility* was an interesting one in reference to WISE, as it allowed Gabby to adjust her expectations for student growth to align with the diversity of her class. As discussed previously, teachers’ perceptions of student progress was a strong mediator of WISE. Interestingly, Lucy and Ruth made similar comments. When asked about her perception of WISE, Lucy said, “Everybody’s growth is their growth, and I can celebrate that and know I can work from there,” and Ruth, as noted above, talked about each level of learner in her classroom. Ruth also made an interesting comment during my second interview and related this attitude of flexibility to years of experience, as it allowed her to understand “one way was not going to be the way for everyone.” This view allowed teachers to re-define their WISE based on the diversity in students’ incoming literacy competencies.

**Personal Contextual Influences**

The personal attributes of teachers stood out as unique components of the context of this *movement through* SPWI. Teachers’ personal goals for writing had significant influence on SPWI, but this influence was demonstrated predominantly through teachers’ anticipated WIOE, and will be discussed later in this chapter. Other factors that had significantly shaped WISE were teachers’ own experiences with writing and their emotional and physiological responses tied to students’ levels of progress and growth.
with their writing. Again, the uniqueness of kindergarten as the start of the writing journey was a significant source of affective validation for teachers. As Lucy succinctly, and enthusiastically, shared:

I love kindergarten. I really do. I think it’s where you can mold and really have a heart for the students. They come to me like this a blank piece of paper. Some of them have stuff on their paper but most of them come like this \[shows me a blank sheet\] and then, by the end of the year, I have all of this writing, all of this reading, and all of this, you know, going on with them. So I really like kindergarten!

It is my hope that, so far, my attempt at careful crafting has captured the 12 teachers’ constant and whole-hearted involvement and investment in the triumphs and challenges of the contextual lifeworld of their classrooms.

**Personal experiences with writing.** Lydia’s initial interview helped to “bring me to” an understanding of how a teacher’s personal experiences with writing can influence the instructional decisions they make and the instructional management strategies they choose to strengthen WISE. She shared:

A weakness that I personally had that I’ve turned into a strength, is as I look at them, I look at me—that was me. I just did not like writing…Nobody took the time to encourage me to write, or to work with me…I think that is the driving force with me. Every time I walk around it’s like, “Don’t be that teacher that told you that you could not write.”

As previously discussed, Lydia was focused on teaching the mechanics of writing in kindergarten to start addressing what she saw as detrimental student practices ingrained
by third grade. Additionally, she talked about liking the structure of Math and said it never changed, though how someone graded a writing sample was very subjective. The influence of this lens on her WISE can be described in what I observed on my second classroom observation. Lydia met with small groups of three. I soon realized this was not the typical small group instruction focused on differentiated learning but was a form of group conferencing. Each student had to read a previously completed writing sample and grade it, and the student had to decide if they should get a 1, 2, or 3—based on how many of the three rules they had incorporated and following a very structured approach. This grade was then recorded on their paper, and then the next student shared. Students had all completed the same worksheet and responded about something they observed in the picture. Lydia rotated groups of three until she had met with all students. This example explained why Lydia expressed low WISE because she perceived that her students were neither retaining nor applying the rules in their writing. Additionally, her very structured and objective approach to grading writing related to her appreciation for the lack of subjectivity in Math.

Joanne’s experience, though similar with Lydia’s, had a somewhat different outcome because of a teacher who valued writing. Joanne shared:

My own personal experience as a child is really important. I remember my teachers would emphasize letter formation, correct spacing, and punctuation to the point that I would have to edit and edit and edit and edit and edit. To the point that I was so worried and concerned about my letter formation, and if all my commas were in the right place, and if all my words were spelled correctly, and if all my lowercase letters were directly underneath the second line, and if my tall letters
were EXACTLY [to show tonal emphasis] two lines tall—to the point where it made me a nervous wreck. And when you are a nervous wreck your ideas cannot flow!

She recalled, however, Mrs. Brown, a teacher who had allowed her to see the value of writing and developed her love for writing. Joanne’s instruction was focused on having students engaged in creative lessons for writing and developing their ideas. She expressly mentioned that she does not focus on the mechanics of writing. As a result, seeing her students enjoying writing is a strong source of WISE for Joanne. When I asked about her perception of WISE, she replied, “I feel pretty confident. They are not just writing, but they are enjoying it!”

April’s personal experiences also had a great effect on her instruction. She admitted, “I can empathize with the kids a little bit more because writing was a forte of mine growing up. Like for math, for example, I struggled with that.” She explained that her struggle with math allowed her to understand her struggling students. Across teachers, 7 of the 12 mentioned a personal reflection about their writing experiences. Of the seven, five reflected on positive experiences with writing, and two discussed negative experiences. It was informative that across all teachers, these experiences were important for empathizing with students that struggled with writing and influenced the instructional decisions they made. Since this empathy was seen as part of what it means to be a kindergarten teacher, it seemed to get “folded in” to the teaching task, and teacher’s ability to encourage and support students’ writing development—to build students’ own self-efficacy—was a source of positive information for their own WISE.
**Emotional and embodied reactions.** As discussed in Chapter 2, both affective and physiological states have an effect on WISE. Affective states are emotional reactions (e.g., anticipation, excitement) and physiological states are somatic or bodily reactions (e.g., stress, anxiety). For the teachers in this study, this context was referenced and observed quite frequently. Teachers were very candid about the positive aspects of their lifeworld, and about the challenges, and openly shared how these experiences had an effect on their emotional and physiological states.

**Positive emotional reactions.** The teachers that brought writing samples brought samples of struggling students who had shown progress. Many had journals, so they would show me where students started and what they had progressed to from September to the data of the initial interview. For example, Lucy said:

I’ve been really excited to show you these writing samples because they are now starting to believe they are writers. …Because, at the beginning of the year I say “Who is a reader in here?” you know. And I have one or two hands go up. And I ask, “Who is a writer?” and no hands go up. They do not even think that they are writers. But, when I ask the question later on in the year and you got all kinds of hands going up. Man! That makes me feel awesome! Because they now see that, “Oh hey! I am a writer! I can do it. I’ve got something to say!”

This reaction was common across teachers as they described the unique nature, and impact, of students’ growth in kindergarten (see Table 3). Teachers’ positive affective responses demonstrated that these reactions were a strong source of WISE, and the descriptions were important to the beautiful tapestry being designed by teachers’ lived experiences with the phenomenon.
### Table 3
**Teachers’ Positive Affective Reactions to Teaching Writing in Kindergarten**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Excerpts from Interviews and Journal Entries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Amanda      | • Not that he wrote the last word on his own, by no means, but the fact that he was copying all the sight words with us. That makes me feel good.  
• This was a good guide for me and helped my lessons to be more successful. And when my lessons are successful, I feel a sense of relief. |
| April       | • She is an amazing hard worker. …she makes me feel very successful.  
• It makes me feel very accomplished when I see/hear students using the strategies I have modeled and taught. |
| Dawn        | • And it was really cool and they were so proud of it and I was so proud of them.  
• My students were really excited about writing today and it made me excited, too! |
| Lexi        | • I was so, so proud of this [pointing to the artifact]. Because I’ve seen how he struggled. I was extremely proud of his efforts.  
• I love the growth and that’s why I love kindergarten. |
| Joanne      | • Oh it is wonderful. It makes me feel wonderful, like I’m doing something right.  
• They are so excited to tell me their story…They are so excited and I’m so excited that they are so excited. |
| Autumn      | • It is so exciting to see the progress in the data. …I am excited to see where their writing goes.  
• There is no greater feeling than knowing that her progress is a result of my efforts; to see the growth…that gives me confirmation that I’m doing the right thing…and it makes me feel good. |
| Lucy        | • But I love teaching writing. I love especially with this age because the light bulb is starting to go off you know. …Man! That makes me feel awesome.  
• Now it is like night and day. He is seeing himself as this student who can perform. I was like, Yes! Yes! Yes! |
| Lydia       | • And I just sat back and I was just listening to them, “This is the rule and you didn’t follow the rule…where is the space?” Yes! So it was just phenomenal to watch them grow.  
• It makes me feel good because when you are successful I am successful. When I can see you smile and love writing it makes me feel good. |
| Rachael     | • I am able to help all students to develop their ideas and that is very satisfying.  
• The journal shows the ability of students to have great ideas and the beginning of their writing development and that is pretty exciting! |
| Ruth        | • But the journals are my favorite. And that’s why I love kindergarten because I can see that they started with hardly nothing and now, by the end, they can really write. That’s why I like the journals so much;  
• I could actually read *cupcake* although not spelled perfectly. I remembered thinking: Yes, it’s working! |
| Gabby       | • I feel like I can just explode with pride…to see them extending, and growing, and loving their story! It’s the best feeling.  
• It is encouraging to me and I love seeing it; I get to see the potential and where they are possibly heading. |
| Susan       | • So I have this little boy when he first came in and didn’t know his letters…nothing. He came in super-duper fresh…But look, he has so many sounds in there. I am so proud of this little boy!  
• By the end of last year I remember my kids wanting to write all the time and I thought that was so cool, and it’s exciting! |
Positive embodied reactions. Vagle described a student’s physical reactions during an interview he conducted, speaking of the student’s embodied reactions of flushed skin and clenching fists (personal communication, April 27, 2017). Over the course of this study, I became purposeful in noting the embodied reactions of teachers. As teachers described their excitement, pride, pleasure, and success that resulted from students’ progress, they leaned forward, sat straighter, shoulders relaxed, and/or their faces got flushed in excitement as their expressions grew animated. An unexpected embodied reaction for me, as the researcher, was my own physiological reaction of relaxing or leaning forward as I lived this level of alignment between Social Cognitive Theory and Appreciative Phenomenology.

During one classroom observation, I witnessed an event that helped me understand the distinction between a post-intentional phenomenological sensitivity that resists the mechanistic connotation of participants unpacking a phenomenon, but seeking instead to have participants bring us to the experience of a phenomenon. A student in Lucy’s classroom had what many teachers referred to during interviews as “a lightbulb moment.” Lucy was walking around as students worked independently on a writing assignment, and stopped to conference with this student. I saw the student looking up at Lucy with an expression of pure joy, one that is very difficult to express textually. I also noticed Lucy’s posture as she talked quietly with the student. Lucy moved on and stepped out of the sight line of most of the students, and did a very short dance—she actually danced. She then returned to conferencing as if nothing had happened.

About five minutes later, Lucy was close enough for me to ask the question I was dying to ask, “Why the dancing?” She appeared a little embarrassed, but her eyes were
shining with excitement as she asked me to hold on. She retrieved a folder with writing samples from a file cabinet and showed me samples from a student who was clearly struggling with writing. She then asked me to walk over and look at a student’s writing (indicating the same student I had noticed her conferencing with). The difference in the writing product was marked, and I understood Lucy’s emotional and embodied reactions. The students’ progress was a significant source of information for Lucy’s WISE, and it manifested itself through an embodied reaction.

**Negative emotional reactions.** As excitement was the predominant positive reaction of teachers, frustration was the predominant negative reaction to their writing instruction. Many of the causes of this frustration have already been articulated in this chapter. This word kept coming up in interviews, so during analysis I did a word count. Participants used it across interviews and journal entries 49 times. The emotional reaction of frustration was linked most to instructional management during individual seatwork. The curriculum and rubric were the next most frequently mentioned classroom influences on this negative emotional reaction.

Sadness and self-doubt were also negative emotional responses of teachers to their writing instruction. This reaction was always tied to seeing students struggle with writing. As a mother myself, Gabby’s response resonated with me when she shared, “But for me as a teacher, seeing someone struggle so much in writing, it pulls at my mama-heart strings because it makes me sad.” For most teachers, however, they verbalized that this sadness served as a positive motivator for them to work harder to help students’ writing progress, and informed the opening up of the distinctiveness between sadness and frustration as sources of motivation.
Devaluation was another negative emotional reaction also referenced by teachers and represented another moment of shock for me. When examining what framed my shock, I realized that my own lens as a researcher narrowed this devaluation specific to writing instruction. Nine of the 12 teachers shared, however, that they perceived this as a global construct across content areas that was specific to their grade level. When asked why she agreed to participate in this study, Lexi replied, “This is important. No one understands what we have to face on a day-to-day basis. They don’t understand the importance of what we do, the challenges we face, and the importance of supporting us.”

Though a global construct, Lexi explained how this devaluation affected her writing instruction. Lexi’s school had a high ELL population and was designated as a Successful Challenged school. She explained that the administration had family services in place to “boost those scores” (workshops, tutoring etc.), but they were not offered to parents until first grade. When discussing the classroom supports for parent of students that were ELL, Lexi outlined the many supports she personally provided kindergarteners’ parents. A reflection she shared in her journaling included a wish for as much support in kindergarten as provided in the tested grades, and she commented, “Where could we be if we had them start in Kindergarten?”

Negative embodied reactions. Amanda’s interviews were very candid and spoke specifically to the pressure and stress of writing assessments. She explained that this stress affected her class, because no matter how much she tried, students felt her stress. A significant moment of honesty with Amanda, however, was when she discussed students that come into her classroom late in the year. She was comparing the level of support for ELL students she had in a previous school to her current school. She explained that in the
previous school, with the high level of support, she made some very specific instructional decisions:

- It made me feel like, this might be ugly to say, but it made me feel like I could focus more on the kids that stand a chance because that’s my personal philosophy. It’s really terrible, and I’m so sorry to say this and I feel for parents whose kids are just low. It’s not that you’re not going to put forth effort, but I’m going to focus more on the ones that have a chance of making it. And with her coming in and being able to pull those low, low babies with a language barrier, it allowed me to focus on the bubble kids who might need more attention towards the end of the year. So it alleviated more pressure and let me focus on what I thought was important. Not that my students aren’t all important but…

This conversation brought me to the level of emotional distress a teacher faces when teaching in challenging contexts. I observed as Amanda’s shoulders hunched and her voice dropped, as she explained her philosophy. Another teacher mentioned how the stress of assessments may affect kindergarten parents:

- We have a kindergarten parent, not in this room but another room, who has their child in tutoring for college. They have a goal. They want their child in college because no one in their family has gone to college. They are sacrificing and paying to tutor because they don’t have the capability in English to tutor their child.

Though this pressure of performance was specific to the parent and the child, I wondered how much pressure, stress, and anxiety this knowledge also exerted on the teacher referenced. Bandura (1997) was very clear about the level of arousal, whether negative or
positive, on a person’s perceptions of self-efficacy. Amanda’s perception that “this might be ugly to say” and a teacher knowing a family was depending on her to have high WISE when teaching their child are expressions of high anxiety. Teachers’ perceptions of unclear guidelines for writing instruction layered with these contextual sources of anxiety and stress are problematic.

**Personality.** These emotional and physiological reactions of teachers seemed to also align with their personality, or what Bandura (1997) explained as being more prone to a specific affective or physiological state. Ten of the 12 teachers mentioned this influence on how they responded to challenges with teaching writing. They used phrases like: “My personality helps because I keep it super flexible”; “a lot of it starts with your personality and your character”; and, “so just stressing the positive, a lot of it is just my nature.” Gabby and Ruth explained that their strength in writing instruction was their ability to recognize and value individuality, as each student’s growth was unique. Lexi explained, “It is so rewarding, and my attitude allows me to see even the smallest hint of growth.”

Lexi’s experiences were also nuanced in a way that was not mentioned by another teacher. She spoke of her faith allowing her to see her job as a calling, to love kids and nurture their learning, as “she may be the only Jesus they ever see.” This “higher purpose” seemed just as impactful as her mastery experiences. Recall the discussion earlier where Lexi had outlined very specific aims and goals for her writing instruction, even with what she saw as an unclear curriculum. With a lack of clear strategies outlined for writing instruction, Lexi had defined her own, had mastery experiences to back them.
up, and a higher purpose to serve. This allowed a high degree of WISE that allowed her to say, “I am very confident of my ability.”

Across my interviews with all 12 teachers, a predominant personality trait mentioned, however, was an ability to encourage and motivate students by providing positive reinforcement and feedback. Susan, explained, “I can take any scribble scrabble you give me and tell you how amazing it is. And tell you exactly, but genuinely, why.” During an interview, Susan described her verbal reactions to her students this way: “I’ll say, ‘Look at the beginning of your sentence. You are amazing! You are a master author! Look at you!’” When I asked about her positive attitude, she explained, “In kindergarten, you have to be positive. They need you to be.” Teachers articulated this lens of positivity in different ways that “fit” their personality, but the underlying understanding was that the unique nature of emergent writing demanded a supportive attitude. As Joanne explained, “we have to honor the risks those babies are taking.” The teachers’ abilities to encourage students and celebrate even the smallest accomplishments tied directly to their WISE as they saw this encouragement as crucial to building students’ own self-efficacy with writing, which then led to their progress. According to Joanne, “Well, I make every child feel like they can write and they have something to write and they can do it. So I make them believe it and so they actually do it.”

**Professional Contextual Influences**

Professional experiences in the contextual lifeworld of kindergarten writing instruction included vicarious experiences, feedback, and administrative leadership. As defined in Chapter 2, vicarious experiences are comparative judgments about capability based on observations of others performing a similar task, especially when a peer models
the task. Though teachers’ lived experiences closely aligned with Bandura’s (1997) observations on vicarious experiences, feedback as a source of efficacy differed from Bandura’s findings in a nuanced way. Distinctive to this study and for these participants, the vehicle of feedback was not always verbal. Bandura discussed the influence of “indirect appraisals” (p. 102), and this type of feedback was closest to teachers’ experiences that emerged from the data. The feedback teachers referred to did not always have a formal evaluative component so, in the succeeding discussion, feedback will represent teachers’ perceptions of significant others’ faith in their capability based on direct and indirect expressions.

**Vicarious experiences.** When teachers discussed the challenges with writing instruction in kindergarten, one thing they agreed upon was that there was not enough modeling of, or embedded professional development provided for, what writing instruction should “look like” in the classroom.

**Modeling.** From my observations and interviews, this construct of modeling played a significant role in the diversity of instructional decisions made, and the degree of instructional management implemented, in the classrooms I visited. For early-career teachers, this was especially influential. When I first interviewed Dawn, one of my first requests was for her to share her strengths with writing instruction—an appreciative inquiry lens. She admitted, “To be honest, I really do not think I have any strengths in writing…I feel like I am trying but it is hard, and I wonder about my students, if they are where they should be.” Her candid reply surprised me, and as we continued talking she explained, “I did practicum in third and then fifth grade, and now I’m teaching
kindergarten. And I'm like, ‘What do I do?’ If I had seen it modeled, it may have been different.”

Dawn admitted that she had not received any focused instruction in emergent writing in her elementary teacher preparation program, though she did receive extensive training in reading development and instruction. She had gone to teammates for help, but this was not always successful. She shared, “When I’ve asked for ideas and help, most of them just say, ‘You just model and you’d do just fine.’ But I feel like I’m missing something and I need more than just modeling things every day for them.” Dawn’s lack of vicarious experiences (having writing instruction modeled to her) explained Dawn’s low WISE as the lack of clarity on the what and how of writing instruction were very negative influences on her own instruction (modeling writing for her students).

April, a first-year teacher, said she had completed her practicum in kindergarten and had also worked as an instructional assistant in kindergarten, so had seen writing instruction modeled quite frequently. As the interview continued, I asked about the biggest influence on how she taught writing and she shared:

Actually, now that I think about it, my student teacher [cooperating teacher from student teaching]. I model from a lot of what she showed me, and a lot of her teaching was direct instruction. She’s been teaching over 30 years so I don’t think she’s doing any of that cooperative learning stuff and nobody is going to tell her not to. So her approach was telling them and showing them: I, you write it, finger space; see, you write it; the—and they have their journals out—then finger space, you write it; cat, and they sound out cat together.
April and Dawn’s experiences point to the influence of both the amount and type of vicarious experiences on instructional decisions, instructional management, and WISE.

Susan had a different experience than Dawn, and talked about a very supportive administration (another area of grey overlap). She explained that her principal provided classroom coverage for 30 minutes once every quarter so that her team can observe each other’s lessons. She spoke highly of the benefit of this approach for a new teacher, and explained:

You learn so much from each other because we are each other’s greatest resource.

Especially because it’s hard talking to each other about it. Like it’s one thing to say, “Well this is what I do,” but to see it in action is so much more powerful.

Gabby had incorporated a very structured process for writing instruction that she had seen modeled during her training in her graduate program. She admitted, “If you haven’t seen it done then you are just making up this thing in your head that you think it is supposed to look like.” This comment was evidenced in many of my observations.

**Professional development (PD).** In our initial interview, Amanda explained that she was new to her team and had retained practices from her previous school that were different from the practices of her current team. She also shared that she had only gone to one kindergarten-specific professional development for writing. This “newness” to the team and lack of PD may explain Amanda’s extreme frustration with writing instruction. Teachers also had very clear ideas about the type and delivery of PD that would help their practice. A major point of discussion during one of the focus groups was the grouping of grades by K-2 for PD. The teachers all insisted that kindergarten “is its own world” and that what applied to second grade very seldom applied to kindergarten. Consequently, the
teachers seemed disillusioned by PD. During the focus group meeting, Lucy recounted a PD experience that captured this perfectly. She explained her team had attended an all-day PD workshop for K-2, and they were a little embarrassed because they have never used the forms being discussed. When they got back to their building, they realized the training did not apply to kindergarten. The forms were used in Grades 1 and 2.

The teachers also spoke about who delivers PD as, again, kindergarten is its own world and, as Autumn commented, “if you have not lived it, you don’t understand it.” This became very apparent as 8 of the 12 teachers mentioned, independent of each other, a training they had attended over the previous summer, focused on early elementary writing. This was the first writing-specific PD session six of them had been to, and they all said it was a very formative session. Joanne admitted, “Then I watched her and wrote down everything she had to say and so much stuck with me. I said, Wow! I am going to entirely change my writing instruction.” I wondered what would cause that type of drastic reaction, especially as every teacher that mentioned the session kept saying that it applied to her classroom. Rachel remembered the presenter admitting to being “the least comfortable with kindergarten writing because it is a whole different animal.” This connectedness made a difference. I eventually learned that the presenter was a previous reading specialist who had revamped the writing program of her kindergarten team. She resonated with teachers because she met the teachers’ criterion of “living it.” Additionally, teachers mentioned the effectiveness of coaching rather than a 1-day session, as they all valued “seeing it.”

**Feedback.** The process of feedback that was a part of teachers’ professional environment included a thread that pushed against assumptions of normality in an
elementary school context. Additionally, it pushed against the normality of verbal persuasion as conceptualized in Bandura’s (1997) seminal work. Of all the teachers that commented on this influence, Lydia’s was the first that forced me to slow down in order to understand the nuances of the experience she shared:

And actually when I took my portfolio up to be evaluated, our assistant principal gave me exemplary based on the writing. When the teachers would come down the hall last year they would look, and nobody thought that these kindergartners could do this.

I realized that Lydia’s experience represented both a formal and informal “exemplary” and it seemed this informal feedback was just as significant to her.

Lydia then flipped this perspective and offered context for her comment. She explained that when she was teaching third grade she would walk the hallways and see kindergarten writing, where they were forming letters incorrectly, and would think, “that teacher should be correcting this.” Lydia’s comments explained why I could not use Bandura’s (1997) construct of verbal persuasion to frame this dimension of the contextual lifeworld of kindergarten—the valuation by peers was not always verbal, but sometimes perceived. Lydia, with the likelihood of limited verbal feedback on her writing instruction, seemed to resort to an internal dialog about how peers perceived her writing-instruction competency. As an educator working in an elementary school for over eight years, I “got it.” I remembered walking the hallways and admiring work displayed, especially in the kindergarten halls! I asked Ruth about her feelings of placing students’ work in the hallway and she had a lot to add to this conversation:
The kids love seeing their papers on the board. And I don’t really think the kids realize like, “Oh, hers is so much better than mine,” because they just like seeing that it’s on the board and they know they can read their writing. It is important to them. As far as the kids. But I think that it is good for the other teachers to see what is happening in my room because maybe if her classroom over there is not quite getting there, then I would be very willing to give her some pointers so that her kids could be writing like that.

These conversations were fascinating to me and, as I mentioned, pushed against assumptions of normality. I also remembered Rachael’s comment about the hallway displays and her concerns around if her kids were “not doing that.” Displaying kindergarten students’ writing in the hallway was just the elementary way. The impact on instructional decisions, and hence on WISE, was something I had never before considered.

**Administrative leadership.** This was an area of overlap in so many sections of this chapter. Lexi spoke of an administrator who insisted she remove the kitchen in her room and who, she perceived, valued the work done in the testing grades without seeing the impact of kindergarten on that work. Susan talked about an administrator who valued her staff’s expertise and provided coverage for her team to go visit other classrooms, as “they were their own best resources.” Both worked in Successful Challenged schools, but had administrators with different leadership styles. Both teachers had formed distinct perceptions of their administrator’s valuation of specific academic content or grade level importance. These perceptions directly influenced the instructional decisions teachers made in their classrooms and influenced perceptions of WISE.
April shared in a follow-up interview that her team had complained about the length of the school day as a developmentally inappropriate expectation for kindergarteners. Her administration allowed them to pilot two recesses, which started during the third nine weeks of school. Dawn, however, shared Lexi’s complaint that her administration ensured ESL support was stronger in the testing grades and emphasized, “But they really need it in kindergarten because that is when they’re coming in so behind.” Both Dawn and April were in Challenged schools with administrators using different approaches to the needs of the kindergarten team. This also reminded me of Dawn’s comment about tacit expectations for math and reading instructional time, as opposed to writing. Racheal, Lexi, and Gabby spoke about the academic push in their buildings (Successful/Successful Challenged), the trickle down to kindergarten, and the negative effect it had on writing instructional time.

**RSQ(b): Teachers’ Responses to Perceptions of Students’ Engagement and SPWI**

As discussed in Chapter 2, Fredricks and colleagues (2004) wrote a much-cited synthesis of seminal research on student engagement. The authors conceptualized student engagement as a meta-construct with multi-dimensional influences across three domains: (a) a behavioral domain—level of active participation, (b) an emotional domain—positive and negative affective reactions, and (c) a cognitive domain—level of effort exerted. This blend of attentiveness caters to the whole child during instruction. In this current study, teachers’ perceptions of student engagement (the interconnectedness of behavior, emotion, and cognition) served as the vehicle for uncovering answers to the second research sub-question—How do kindergarten teachers respond to their perceptions of students’ engagement with learning to write? The answer to this question
was answered mostly within the contexts of instructional groupings and student’s progress.

**Instructional Groupings and Student Engagement**

As I visited the classrooms of the 12 teachers, I noticed a recurring dynamic. This was also noted in the four classrooms I visited in the pilot study and reinforced through interviews and teachers’ journals. Teachers’ reactions to students’ engagement with writing exhibited movement across instructional groupings. When teachers conducted whole group instruction, they saw students engaged and reacted positively to this level of engagement. The switch to individual seatwork or small group instruction had a negative impact on the classroom dynamics.

**Mini lesson.** During my observations, teachers typically started off their writing lessons with a mini-lesson, as students sat on the carpet and they modeled a strategy, shared-the-pen (had students help with writing), acted as the scribe and wrote based on a prompt, used teacher talk-aloud to model their thinking about writing, reviewed sight words, and/or used a mentor text to support idea development for a chosen prompt. Teachers used charts, white boards, and/or interactive boards to conduct their mini-lessons. Teachers in this study relied on this instructional grouping the most and many reported that this is when their students seemed most engaged with the writing lesson.

 Teachers shared that they were able to monitor all students and this supported higher levels of engagement with learning and increased their enjoyment of teaching. When I asked Autumn about her perception of students’ engagement, she seemed confident in her students’ involvement with her writing lessons. This is an excerpt from our interview:
Autumn: So I think that hopefully I make it interactive and it’s not just skill and drill writing.

Interviewer: What does skill and drill writing mean to you?

Autumn: Like the students are just writing but not engaged with it. So when we work on it together they get into the writing. I’m not just telling them to do this and do that. It is modeled.

She felt “when they worked on it together” this was effective, and so it strengthened her perception of WISE.

April also talked about students’ loving the interactive writing time during her mini-lesson. During my second interview, she shared, “They love it. …I do that every day with a different sentence stem or prompt, just about every day.” It was interesting that she supported this in a journal entry dated December 7, 2017. She wrote:

The direct instruction I provided today on the letter C went very well. I was able to engage all students over the wide variety of ability levels I currently have in the classroom. I feel like even the students who are forming letters, know all letter sounds and are able to sound out words benefited from this lesson.

Her perception was that even advanced students were engaged with the whole-group lesson on forming the letter C, she was pleased that the lesson went “very well,” and this strengthened her WISE.

Sharing circles. Another whole-group activity is facilitated with sharing circles, when students share their writing products. Susan perceived that her students were very engaged during sharing circles and said, “But they really do enjoy it and that’s when I see them really engaged because they really like listening to the stories.” She admitted
however, the pressure of pacing and time hampered her from using this strategy as the
year progressed, and this resulted in a negative affective reaction. Joanne also commented
that her students were most engaged during sharing circles. She was focused on the
illustrations in the beginning of the year, so had students share their illustrations. She also
had students draw from prompts that were personal to them and saw them most engaged
with their writing then. Speaking of the sharing circles, she said:

Oh it is wonderful. It makes me feel wonderful and like I’m doing something
right. They are so excited to tell me their story and they do not want to leave out
any detail. They are so excited and I’m so excited that they are so excited.

Ruth said she did not routinely conduct whole-group sharing time but tried to have her
students line-up each day, after they completed their writing, and read to her individually
so that at least they are sharing. She admitted, however, “After 30 years, I haven’t figured
out how to do this without the other kids getting antsy [while waiting in line], but I let
them read everything they write to me.” During both classroom observations, her lines
were at times half of the class, the process and wait-time were long, and the students were
indeed “antsy.”

**Collaboration.** Dawn’s experience is a moment that stands alone but represents a
powerful thread in this tapestry. During our first interview, I asked Dawn to think about a
time when she saw her students most engaged with writing (AI lens), and she
remembered a collaborative book she had done with her class as a technology lesson. She
explained the class wrote about *Fire the Dragon* and, as she served as the scribe, students
developed the story. She remembered, “And they were really excited about it and they
were into it too because it was a cool story, and it was an interesting story.” She talked
about the students’ affective and cognitive engagement with this collaborative work, and she said she used the end product as a class book after the project ended. Dawn fondly recounted that students always wanted to read the book. I asked if she would try a project like that again, and she agreed it was the most fun both she and her students had with a writing lesson.

Dawn’s embodied reaction was also interesting to note. She got up, very excited, and left the table where we were and spent a couple of minutes trying to find the book. We then looked at it together and she was very animated as she recounted students’ work and engagement (emotional, behavioral, and cognitive) while creating the book. Two weeks later, she wrote this journal entry, which was another testament to the power of appreciative phenomenology and to the power of student engagement:

We began writing a class story today. I read my class the story that my class wrote a few years ago. They found it really cool. I decided to start by having us come up with ideas and make a plan by answering Who? Where? What? questions. We started with Who? I told them that we needed to come up with a main character we want our story to be about. They were really excited about this. We made a long list of ideas. Many of them want us to write about a superhero, so I have a feeling that is what we may end up doing but we have not decided yet. We ran out of time to write today, but I’m hoping we’ll have some time next week to finish.

For a teacher who experienced and expressed very low WISE across the study, these students’ engagement created a mastery experience.
Diverse Abilities and Student Engagement

As described earlier, a major source of frustration for teachers was that students were entering kindergarten with diverse abilities. Teachers recognized the importance of differentiated instruction so they tried to conduct small groups, or meet individually with students, once they ended the mini-lesson. As there were so many diverse needs represented, and as Lexi stated, “I am only one person,” they saw their students’ level of engagement decline, which affected their own level of engagement. In one journal entry, April wrote:

I feel very overwhelmed by the writing process in kindergarten because there are so many varied levels and abilities that it is hard to help a small group without having the others not being met with. Most all of my students are not self-directed and cannot monitor their own work at this point.

Amanda admitted that it was difficult not to let her level of stress during this time have an effect on students, and said, “The minute I turn the writing over to students, at this point in the year, they struggle to apply skills I know they have. It’s extremely discouraging for the teacher and I know it stresses out the kids.” Amanda went on to explain an interesting dynamic with the diversity of ability levels in her classroom. As the focus of any small group instruction was on struggling students, teachers admitted this meant the more advanced students were not as engaged as they could be during seatwork. Amanda explained:

On one hand I feel like I’m doing the right thing and I’m providing differentiated instruction. But on the other, I know I am falling short for the kids who are achieving at grade level and above grade level. It makes you feel a little less than.
I noted this level of frustration and agitation across classrooms as instructional management seemed to have a strong influence on teachers’ reactions to their perceptions of student engagement across these instructional groupings. This was true even for Lexi who wrote this excerpt in a journal entry after my observation:

I would still love to find a more effective way to meet the needs of each student during independent writing time. As you observed, I feel like a ping-pong ball as I try to provide individual feedback that will enhance that student’s learning.

This reflection touched on two issues shared by all 12 teachers. When I asked teachers for a wish to enliven their writing instruction (AI lens), they all mentioned more help during the writing block so they can meet the needs of all students, and more time for writing. Lydia said, “Being able to send teachers into more writing workshops and more reading workshops to know how we can encompass all of this within our lesson plans. And time. More time.” Teachers realized that students were not spending the writing block with time-on-task to the fullest potential, that this had a direct influence on student engagement, and a direct relationship with their own reactions to their instruction.

What was interesting to note is that during my second interview, many teachers exhibited excitement when discussing student engagement as it related to movement and time. They talked about the third and fourth 9-weeks as being significant in students’ independence in writing, and they envisioned having the opportunity to conduct more small-group, differentiated instruction as they could relinquish control.

**Training and Student Engagement**

One thread that stood out in this inquiry about student engagement during writing instruction was the importance of training in instructional management strategies.
Gabby’s instructional management during small group instruction was a potent example. She had seen the instructional management strategies she used modeled during her graduate training (another area of grey) and incorporated them into her classroom. Gabby had patterned her instruction after her guided reading groups and blended her writing and word-work into this block. Students rotated through centers as she met with two to three small groups per writing block at a kidney table sitting to the back and center of the classroom. Students meeting with her wrote on whiteboards as she offered scaffolded support, then they switched to the writing center and independently copied the sentence they had generated with her into their journal, a card (December visit), or a worksheet. On my second visit, they were responding to the prompt: What would you do if you were a snowman at night? (see Figure 15).

The other two rotations were a free-write and word study (tasks dependent on the day of the week—cutting and sorting onset and rime families e.g., /at/, /un/; rainbow writing; peer sorting etc.). Gabby clearly had a set structure for her small group rotations and her instructional management was effective. Gabby admitted that the first couple of
weeks were difficult as she had to teach students the structure, but once they learned it, she saw a difference in managing the writing block. She explained:

I do a lot of small group instruction with my writing and that really targets their problems or their issues. The product is so much greater in the end because if we are working on /at/ words today, and I say, “Here you go,” they are just going to be writing random stuff. But if I am right there, I can keep them where they need to be. What I love seeing the most in my small groups is when the kids start moving to my higher groups because of that structure of the small groups.

The synergy among supporting student engagement, the impact on student progress, and Gabby’s enjoyment of teaching writing supports the core of this inquiry—noting this shaping of SPWI so that more of these experiences can be shared among kindergarten teachers.

**Authentic Writing Tasks and Student Engagement**

Seven of the 12 teachers explicitly noted that when working on independent projects, students were more engaged when they were writing about topics that were personal to them. For example, Dawn wrote in her journal:

We discussed different topics to write about based on the list we created a few days ago. Most of the topics we discussed were related to ourselves and things that really happen. I decided to model writing a fiction story for them that I came up with on the spot. They were so excited about it as I was telling the story of finding a monster in my closet. They went back to their seats and got straight to work.

This theme ran through journal entries and interviews addressing student engagement
with writing. Joanne noted she did not like using the sentence stems because her students were most engaged when they wrote their own stories. She shared in a journal prompt:

Focus on the story! You know, and take your personal experiences and throw them in there, because if you know it you can write about it! You are not writing about somebody else’s because it is yours and everybody has a story to tell. That is when they are engaged in their writing.

Lucy shared a technique she used in the classroom. She explained:

Sometimes I would ask parents to email me their pictures if a student talked about something special they did. “So-and-so said this today. Can you email me a picture of it?” Last year, one of my students was like, “We did such-and-such with my pumpkin,” and I was like, “Oh, get your mom to email me a picture.” And when I got it, I put it up on the promethium board so everybody can see it, and we wrote about it. One of my students was in a race and he got a medal. And he came in on Monday—and they get to share what they did over the weekend. I said, “Tell your mom to send me a picture,” and she did. Oh, my kids love those lessons!

It was informative to see Lucy’s embodied reactions as she remembered her students’ engagement with those lessons. Gabby used a similar approach with her rotations when students were working on free-writes. In the past, she had students bring in a picture from home, and they usually brought in a picture of a pet. She explained, “Yeah, and then they get super excited about it, and they say, ‘Oh! They ate my shoe!’ So they have a great idea for an engaging and funny story.” Autumn, Rachael, and Lydia all observed this same trend with students’ engagement when writing for authentic purposes and made
many instructional decisions based on these observations. These teachers all explicitly mentioned that more authentic writing assignments increased students’ engagement with writing and increased their own enjoyment of teaching writing.

RSQ(c): Teachers’ Self-Satisfaction in the Pursuit of Instructional Goals

In trying to uncover how kindergarten teachers’ movements through self-perceptions of writing instruction take shape in their unique contexts, Bandura’s (1997) construct of outcome expectancy was used to get to this aspect of the phenomenon of SPWI. As discussed in Chapter 2, WIOE is a future-focused construct that sought to capture how kindergarten teachers experience self-satisfaction in the pursuit of instructional goals for writing. In order to uncover an understanding of teachers’ movements through self-satisfaction when thinking about their writing instruction, I asked teachers about their instructional goals for writing and found that these goals represented strong sources of information for their SPWI. I made the distinction here between professional goals (PCS defined) and personal goals in order to get to the level of congruence between the two, and to uncover if the level of congruence influenced teacher’s self-satisfaction with writing instruction.

Instructional Goals and WIOE

As I looked across the data, I was reminded of the interconnectedness of aspects of the phenomenon of SPWI. There were many areas of overlap, and the number of years a teacher had taught emerged as one such area, especially when exploring WIOE.

Developing a story. Seven of the 12 teachers aligned their personal goals with writing to having students develop a story. Three of the four teachers with over 10 years of experience talked specifically about having students writing three to four sentences by
the end of the year with a beginning, middle, and end. When Lexi mentioned this at her focus group meeting, I asked if this goal was articulated by the county. She informed me she had come up with it independently and that it was not written on any official document. I wondered if this was a goal specifically articulated by the county at one point through professional development training and teachers had adopted it without even realizing they had, as a way to compensate for unclear curricular guidelines. During an interview, Rachael said:

Well, first of all, I want them to have a detailed picture. I mean that is number one for me. Then, if they are using sight words, I want them to be spelled correctly. And the goal for me is, I want them to have at least three sentences with the beginning, the middle, and the end. That is the goal. Just not, “I can see the cat.”

Ruth’s response was almost the same. She said:

I think of myself as a very developmental teacher and I understand when they're not ready to do certain things. At the end of the year they will not all be in the same place. But like for my kids who are ready to go with sentences I start off by saying, “You can write two or three sentences.” . . . some may be writing two [or] three sentences, and some may be writing stories that have a beginning, middle, and end.

These three sentences as a way to incorporate the “beginning, middle, and end” pointed to the concept of story. The teachers that discussed this learning outcome seemed to see it as an easy and efficient way to frame the compositional aspects of emergent writing, and not just have students write, “I can see the cat.” Joanne’s goals, like Ruth’s, took into consideration where students started. Joanne said:
If they can write a sentence, using those details in their illustration, by the end of the year that tells me about their story regardless of what level they came in on, then I will consider myself being a success in teaching writing.

**Creativity.** Four teachers mentioned fostering more creativity in students’ writing as their main goal. It was interesting as three of these teachers were early-career teachers. Of these four teachers, three made their instructional decisions based on teaching the skills of mechanics. This dissonance was noted as a significant source of disappointment and impacted teachers’ WISE and WIOE. For example, Dawn wanted to have her students writing real stories and not just structured sentences. This explained her level of frustration with the lack of support for knowing how to meet this goal, and had a negative impact on her WISE.

As discussed earlier, Autumn’s frustration was the highest noted across all teachers with respect to incorporating creativity and play into instruction, especially in kindergarten. April’s personal goals for writing were interesting. She had demonstrated in this study that, in the first half of the school year, she adjusted her personal goals to PCS’ goals, which she perceived as easily attainable, and depended on low-cognitive activities for students. She expressed, however, that it was a personal goal to have students writing sentences that were more creative by the end of the year. As this study ended after the second nine weeks, I was not able to see the continued trend of April’s instruction, but her reliance on sentence stems using direct instruction does not align with this goal and can have an impact on her WIOE.
Meeting the standards. Four teachers specifically mentioned the standards when articulating their goals. Their overlaps with “story development” and “love for writing” showed the many nuances of WIOE. Amanda’s response was intriguing:

So, if I was to give them a topic, they would be able to sit and write two to three complete sentences on that topic. I think that would be a success for us all, with uppercase, punctuation, word wall words spelled correctly. Is that correct? That would be my goal. And I feel like that aligns with what the county expects.

Amanda’s response was interesting as it was a very specific way to articulate a balanced approach to writing, and she also included this concept of two to three sentences, though she only taught kindergarten for four years. Her question, “Is that correct?” and comment, “And I feel like that aligns with what the county expects” both speak to her attempt to align her personal and professional goals and to the uncertainty she experienced. Gabby said, “My number one goal is that students love writing and see the potential I see in them to progress. That they can move from a 1 to a 4, and that I can help them in that movement.” Susan said:

I want them to be able to put their thoughts into words as fast as they can, even if it is not spelled the right way, but that they are trying. That they are listening to the sounds because that part would make sense and help them with their reading. Dawn responded that she wanted to have all students “meeting the writing standards, and being able to support those students who can write multiple sentences,” but also mentioned helping struggling students write with creativity. This goes back to her desire for lessons not using structured sentence stems. Lydia shared, “At the end of the year, I want my students to be using their sight words, and following the rules for writing, and
staying on topic. They should love writing.” Lydia, who focused on the rules of writing, also had the very same goal of wanting students to love writing.

This blend of goals that teachers felt were PCS’ goals (two to three sentences or handwriting instruction with Fundations), their own personal goals, and a rubric that couldn’t assess these goals pointed to some of the challenges all 12 teachers faced when discussing their WIOE.

**movements through WIOE**

It was interesting to see the trends that developed as I asked teachers about their anticipated sense of satisfaction with being able to meet their instructional goals for writing by the end of the year. These trends represented another nuance of teachers’ experiences that fully demonstrated the concept of movements through. When I asked Rachael about her WIOE at our initial interview she said she expected to be moderately satisfied, and that did not change when I asked again in the middle of the school year. She tied her expectations directly to the “variety of skills coming into kindergarten” and students’ abilities to write three sentences. What was interesting about both interviews, however, is that Rachael believes this is PCS’ benchmark. She described her expectations perfectly in this journal entry:

> These students have more to learn to be able to write the expected three sentences at the end of the year. There are a few who can write a simple sentence that they’ve learned at home (ex. I love mom). I expect them to write three sentences by the end of the year because the county says so. So the expectations impact how satisfied I think I will be.

She did qualify her current expectations during our second interview, however, with the
time of the year, and explained:

It isn’t until the third and fourth nine-weeks that we really get into writing three sentences, which would meet the expectations set forth by the county. So, I still think that there’s plenty of time left to teach and for them to develop as writers. This expectation for the second half of the school year was shared by 10 of the 12 teachers. For example, Lexi’s expectation of WIOE was high every time we discussed it, but in the second interview she stated, “I get excited for writing instruction in the third and fourth nine-weeks because of the skills that the majority of the kids have acquired to this point.” She also included that she was excited to see her students becoming more engaged with writing because of this movement in their progress. During our first interview Susan tied her WIOE directly to her goals and said, “Well I know they will be writing with spaces because we work a lot on finger spaces and putting your fingers down and then they can write.” During our second interview she articulated a much higher WIOE as she compared her students’ progress from the previous year to the current year.

The grey areas of overlap were so prevalent in these discussions of WIOE. Three teachers referenced the anticipated changes in instructional management during the third and fourth nine weeks, and how that affected their anticipations of WIOE. For example, Amanda’s comparisons showed an increase in her anticipation of WIOE because she had started to see an improvement in her instructional management and in student engagement. She said, “And when we move to the point where I relinquish control and they are completely writing independently, I then move to small groups.” April said she felt moderate WIOE when we spoke in the beginning of the year but, during our second
interview, anticipated greater WIOE because she was “hoping for the students to be working more independently.” Ruth referred to it as “the lightbulb is fully glowing” and went on to tie her own emotional reactions to that progress. She said:

These students are well prepared to go into first grade. My average students are writing sentences with word wall words and inventive spelling. I am pleased with their writing. My young students are not as comfortable using inventive spelling but understand the concept. These students need more time to develop their writing but I feel they know the concepts of spaces between words, capital letter at the beginning, and punctuation at the end. I don’t know for sure but I think I emphasize writing more in my class than the others at my school. I believe this makes my students good writers going into first grade.

She demonstrated a high WISE and WIOE, consistent with her differentiated expectations, but felt confident that even her weaker students could meet PCS’ end-of-year benchmarks. This observation reinforced the earlier comments by Amanda and April that students’ progress outmatched the benchmark expectations for the end of the year and relieved the stress that existed at the beginning of the year.

I was intrigued when comparing Autumn’s movements in WIOE since she was the most frustrated with a lack of alignment with her own personal goals and the reality of her classroom. She expressed high WIOE at the beginning of the year because a first grade teacher had shared a student’s writing sample demonstrating the impressive growth of this student who had initially struggled in Autumn’s class the previous year. The reward of seeing that growth and the positive feedback from a peer had bolstered both her WISE and WIOE. During our second interview, she was very excited about her
students’ progress and could not wait to see how they moved into writing real, creative stories in the upcoming nine weeks. Lucy expressed the same sense of anticipation, which raised her anticipation of WIOE. Interestingly, Joanne tied her WIOE to the PD she had previously attended and was excited to see the results of the change in focus of her instruction from conventions to composition.

To this point, I have described either static or higher anticipations for WIOE across teachers and these have been matched to their goals for writing and to the contextual influences that had an effect on their WISE and on student engagement. Two exceptions were Gabby and Lydia. When I first interviewed Gabby, she said she expected to be very satisfied with her end products of writing instruction, but during the second interview she said she was “pretty satisfied” and linked it to the ability of her collab students and instructional management. Lydia reported going from expectations of being “very satisfied” to expectations of being “very dissatisfied” in our second interview. Lydia further explained in a journal entry dated January 30, 2018.

As I look ahead to my class this year, I would describe my feelings toward writing instruction based upon my previous years of experiences as dissatisfied. This year my students came to kindergarten with only little to no preparedness for school. Many of them have no concept of letter recognition or sounds. Likewise, many of them have never used a pencil. With our writing block only being 30 minutes, it’s a challenge for accomplishing all the remediation that needs to occur. However, each day we are working on the proper way to sit while writing, the correct grip of holding one’s pencil. My students need constant reminders of these rules. Teachers’ experiences, expectations, and contextual realities added layers to the
phenomenon of WIOE and to the fluid, temporal nature of the SPWI.

**Tentative Manifestations of SPWI: Viewing the Tapestry**

The preceding sections of this chapter very clearly answered the sub-questions that guided this inquiry and allowed me to arrive at tentative manifestations that answered the research question: How might kindergarten teachers’ movements through self-perceptions of writing instruction take shape as they teach in their unique classroom contexts? By explicitly answering the sub-questions, I attended to Vagle’s (2014) challenge to deconstruct the phenomenon and expose the contextual elements that shape what the phenomenon might become. This section attends to the crafting—the blending and intertwining of these rich and nuanced experiences to see what the intricate design of SPWI might be. In crafting this section, I am cognizant of Vagle’s reminder that the unit of analysis in phenomenology is the phenomenon, not the individual.

The term *tentative manifestations* is specific to the methodology of post-intentional phenomenology as a way to make meaning of a phenomenon. The word *tentative* does not imply uncertainty, but alludes to the temporal nature of a phenomenon. Vagle (2014) stressed that a phenomenon does not have an essence, as the contexts within which it resides is always shifting and changing. The reality of the lifeworld of a kindergarten classroom has supported that tenet of post-intentional phenomenology. The word *manifestation* shows a sensitivity to how we get to the phenomenon, as it is not unpacked or discovered, but participants “bring us to” how the phenomenon manifests itself in their unique context. The tentative manifestations of the unique tapestry of SPWI are diagrammatically represented in Figure 16.
Figure 16. Tentative manifestations of kindergarten teachers’ movements through self-perceptions of writing instruction

As teachers’ experiences illuminated, the phenomenon is marked by continuous movements that influence WISE and WIOE, the two aspects of teachers’ SPWI this inquiry explored. The interplay among the shifting components of the model (Figure 16) makes explicit the unique shaping of SPWI. Five tentative or temporal manifestations emerged from all the movements through observed.

Tentative Manifestation 1: WISE, WIOE, and Student Progress

Student progress is a significant mediator of WISE and WIOE. When students were progressing, teachers were able to navigate the frustrations of their contextual lifeworld. For teachers that questioned students’ progress, they felt more frustrated with contextual challenges. This manifestation of the phenomenon explains why student
progress sits central to the model. Teachers in this study linked student progress to mastery experiences, as 10 of the 12 teachers brought artifacts showing student progress to initial interviews as representative of successful experiences with writing instruction.

An important nuance of teachers’ expectations of students’ progress was the cognitive and developmental growth expected as the year progressed. Teachers’ expectations of this growth (e.g., fine-motor skills, letter/sound knowledge) in the third and fourth nine weeks of school helped them anticipate students internalizing and applying instruction to foster continued growth in writing. Teachers expressed that these developmental expectations are most noticeable in kindergarten than in any other grade, and teachers’ anticipations of WIOE were poised when this study ended mid-year.

Teachers that reported no change, or negative change, in WIOE felt that the third and fourth nine weeks were developmentally significant in allowing students’ growth to accelerate. This affected WIOE more than WISE, but “looped back” to WISE through the instructional decisions they felt would now shift and change, and the ability of students to work independently. This independence would allow a relinquishing of control and support more authentic writing experiences.

The feedback loops linking instructional decisions and instructional management were significant as they represented teachers’ agentic beliefs. Teachers could anticipate satisfaction with their instruction because they could recalibrate, restructure, or reinforce instructional decisions and instructional management strategies to meet students’ needs. Additionally, teachers aligned this relinquishing of control to their instructional decisions and instructional management strategies for varying their instructional groupings (more small group instruction), anticipating more differentiated instruction (teacher focused)
and greater levels of student engagement (student focused) during writing. They anticipated that these processes would lead to higher SPWI.

**Tentative Manifestation 2: Kindergarten Readiness and SPWI**

Students’ kindergarten readiness had significant influence on teachers’ SPWI. Teachers reported that most of the challenges of teaching writing in kindergarten stemmed from the diverse literacy backgrounds and experiences of incoming students. This was conceptualized in most classrooms represented in this study by the balance between students who attended PreK and those who had no previous exposure to literacy. These student influences placed significant stressors on teachers’ SPWI and was seen as affecting WISE through lack of time to adequately meet all students' needs and lack of training on how to structure instructional management strategies to implement best practices. Many teachers balanced their anticipated self-satisfaction (WIOE) with meeting the needs of students struggling with literacy against their sense of dissatisfaction with not meeting the needs of on-benchmark and high achieving students. Additionally, knowing how to teach (WISE) across these diverse abilities was a challenge for all teachers in the study, irrespective of years of experience and previous mastery experiences.

**Tentative Manifestation 3: District and Building Support**

Teachers needed clear curricular guidelines and assessment protocol for kindergarten writing. Chapter 2 outlined the embedded philosophical, national, state, and district contexts that have shaped a lack of emphasis on writing instruction, especially writing instruction in kindergarten. The tapestry that emerged from this inquiry supported that embedded contextual reality through teachers’ interactions with the district’s
curriculum and assessments. Teachers were challenged, and frustrated, by the ill-defined curricular guidelines and an ill-designed rubric for kindergarten writing. These district influences resulted in a diversity of instructional decisions and instructional management strategies used by the teachers in this study. Teachers depended on their own philosophies about what should be taught (a focus on mechanical skills or compositional processes), how it should be taught (instructional strategies), and the developmental progression of instruction in the face of unclear curricular guidelines.

The nebulous nature of the curriculum had an especially negative impact on early-career teachers’ SPWI, as they had less mastery experiences to mitigate the challenges they felt the curriculum presented. As the assessment of kindergarten writing was also unclear, teachers reported variability and inconsistency (low inter-rater reliability) when scoring student’s writing samples, and this uncertainty of the tasks led to uncertainty of their capabilities. Some teachers in this study were able to adjust their WISE to what they perceived as lower district standards that made student progress relatively easy to accomplish, regardless of the challenges they faced in the classrooms. Other teachers felt frustrated with the dissonance between personal and professional goals for writing instruction. These teachers perceived an undefined and invariant curriculum and rubric required developmentally inappropriate goals at the beginning of the school year and relatively easy goals by the end of the school year. WIOE was affected depending on how their personal philosophies and goals aligned with professional goals for writing instruction, and with how they mediated that perceived level of alignment.

Teachers’ were also operating within a hidden curriculum when comparisons among the district’s curricula for reading and math showed more specificity and clarity.
than the writing curriculum. This sent a subtle message that devalued writing instruction in kindergarten and negatively influenced SPWI. Additionally, administrative leadership emerged as a significant influence on WIOE, where teachers perceived that some administrators tacitly devalued writing instruction, especially as a state assessment was not mandated in the elementary grades. Some teachers, however, commented on the positive impact administrative support for kindergarten writing had on WIOE.

**Tentative Manifestation 4: Professional Development for Teaching Writing in Kindergarten**

Teachers reported a lack of adequate training for teaching writing, especially for knowing the appropriate developmental progression of instruction for kindergarten writing. In this study, some teachers were not using a balanced approach to writing instruction. Their instructional decisions and instructional management strategies were focused, instead, on teaching the mechanics of writing due to their personal philosophies. Additionally, regardless of the balance implemented, teachers were unsure of how to use the current literacy abilities represented in their class as a guide for structuring developmentally appropriate practices for writing instruction. This knowledge-gap: (a) applied to teachers across varying years of experience and educational backgrounds, (b) affected the instructional decisions and instructional management strategies teachers used, and (c) made feedback a significant influence on WISE and WIOE. Teachers also articulated that this lack of training had a negative impact on students’ engagement during writing instruction as they felt unprepared to implement strategies (like creative play and sharing circles) that they perceived increased student engagement when implemented in their classrooms.
Teachers in the study had very specific recommendations for the types of vicarious experiences needed to support their writing instruction. They all articulated that a coaching model where they saw the practices in action in their classrooms would be more effective than the traditional one-day off-site session the district relied on. Teachers also expressed that PD should be grade-specific and not grouped as kindergarten through Grade 2, as “what can work in second grade will not work in kindergarten.” Additionally, they recommended that the training should be designed and presented by someone with extensive experience in kindergarten classrooms, as “kindergarten is its own world.” This perspective about the uniqueness of teaching writing in kindergarten as compared to other grades also facilitated an unanticipated sense of bonding among teachers during the focus groups.

**Tentative Manifestation 5: Instructional Groupings and Student Engagement**

Further study is needed to explore student engagement during kindergarten writing. For this study, student engagement was tied to the instructional groupings implemented and to instructional management across groupings. Teachers also reported that kindergarteners were more engaged when they had authentic writing prompts linked to students’ own experiences. This study also suggests that teachers need training specific to conducting small groups for writing instruction and for effective strategies for implementing sharing circles.
CHAPTER 5

Implications

This atmosphere of excitement, arising from imaginative consideration, transforms knowledge. A fact is no longer a bare fact: it is invested with all its possibilities. It is no longer a burden on the memory: it is energizing as the poet of our dreams, and as the architect of our purposes.

—Alfred North Whitehead (1929/1967, p. 93)

The rich and vibrant accounting of each teacher’s lived experiences within the dynamic and nuanced contexts of the kindergarten classroom allowed a temporal glimpse at what we have traditionally looked through. The purpose of this post-intentional phenomenological study was to understand how kindergarten teachers make meaning of their movements through self-perceptions of writing instruction. This chapter will explore recommendations for practice and provide implications for future research that can add to the knowledge base of kindergarten writing.

The intent of this post-intentional phenomenological study was to look across kindergarten teachers’ experiences in order to uncover tentative manifestations of the phenomenon of self-perceptions of writing instruction (SPWI). These tentative manifestations can help to identify ways to strengthen and support teachers’ SPWI, and to identify steps educators can take to remove or mitigate elements that challenge and lower
teachers’ SPWI. These endeavors can support the ultimate aim of emergent writing development—having kindergarteners develop and apply writing competencies across content areas and grade levels, in a way that fosters a true appreciation for literacy. It is my hope that the succeeding sections provide succinct and explicit implications for ways that national, state, and local educators can partner with kindergarten teachers to accomplish this type of learning for our nations’ most vulnerable and impressionable writers.

**Strengthening WISE and WIOE to Support Student Progress**

Attending to teacher’s writing instructional self-efficacy (WISE) and writing instructional outcome expectancy (WIOE) holds national significance. As noted in Chapter 1, the National Commission on Writing (2003) dubbed writing the “Neglected R” as educators have disregarded the synergistic relationship between reading and writing development. Recent research has shown that students struggle with reading and writing competencies, implying that this imbalanced approach is not efficient (Al-Bataineh et al., 2010; Bahr, 2012; Galligan, 2011; NCES, 2012, 2016). Research has also shown the key role teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs play as reliable, predictive measures for student achievement (Bandura, 1997; Bellibas & Liu, 2017; Brindle et al., 2016; Landon-Hays, 2012; Lee et al., 2017; Shoulders & Krei, 2015; M. Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009; Zee & Koomen, 2016).

As the teachers in this study demonstrated, however, many elementary teachers have expressed concerns over the factors that negatively influence their self-efficacy (Al-Bataineh et al., 2010; Brindle et al., 2016; Gilbert & Graham, 2010; M. Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011; Zee & Koomen, 2016). The current cycle of low self-efficacy
and low writing competencies has been evident in the K-16 pipeline as NAEP results and college entrance exams show our nation’s students struggle with writing (Achieve, 2005; Bahr, 2012; Brock, 2010; Cole, 2007; Graham & Perin, 2007; Hassel & Giordano, 2015; NCES, 2003, 2012). The issue is a K-16 issue, but an informed approach will embrace proactive policies that focus on supporting writing, starting in kindergarten.

This study has also shown the synergistic relationship between WISE and WIOE. The extant literature on teacher stress, burnout, and attrition all point to the importance of national, state, and district leaders’ attention to teachers’ sense of satisfaction with their instruction (e.g., Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014; Aloe et al., 2014; Caprara et al., 2003; Chang, 2013; Fisher, 2011; Heitin, 2012; Richards, 2012; Sass et al., 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Wang et al., 2015). The established links of teacher self-satisfaction to classroom culture to vibrant schools (Collie et al., 2012; M. Tschannen-Moran & Clement, 2018) show a progression that makes strengthening every link an important endeavor for retaining teachers and providing students with the best of what education “can be.”

Understanding the scope of the issue of supporting writing instruction should be a national imperative. Funding emergent writing research, supporting policies that move away from a Reading First policy agenda, and embracing the synergistic nature of reading and writing processes are important policy initiatives.

**Understanding the Influence of Kindergarten Readiness**

Classroom dynamics are changing in kindergarten. This is not just an educational change but reflects a societal change. In 1950, only 21% of children attended kindergarten but today, that has changed to almost 100% (Graue, 2009). This movement
and fluidity are also reflected in 2015 data that showed 74% of two-parent households in the U.S. have both parents working outside the home, compared to 54% in 1970 (Pew Research Center, 2015). This household shift has evidenced a continuous rise in PreK enrollment, with 54.5% of three- and four-year olds enrolled in pre-school in 2014 (NCES, 2015). As teachers in this study reported, the result is a diverse spread of abilities in kindergarten classrooms, a diversity that changes from year to year. When NAEYC (1998) developed their position statement in 1998, they noted, “diversity is to be expected and embraced, but it can be overwhelming when teachers are expected to produce uniform outcomes for all, with no account taken of the initial range in abilities, experiences, interests, and personalities of individual children” (p. 2). As this study implicated, the demographical change is even more pronounced today, 20 years after NAEYC’s prediction, and the extant literature has reported that many students are entering kindergarten with stronger academic skills (e.g., Bassok & Latham, 2017).

Additionally, some teachers in this study shared that their instruction was also affected by the rising trend of student mobility. Student mobility “can include any time a student changes schools for reasons other than grade promotion, but in general it refers to students changing schools during a school year” (Sparks, 2016, para. 5). The U.S. Government Accountability Office (2010) found that 13% of all kindergarten through Grade 8 students changed schools four or more times, and that a large percentage of those students had limited English proficiency. Teachers in the study reported that the major challenges this raised for their classroom instruction were (a) what and how content was taught with incoming students, and (b) how to adequately attend to the needs of transient students and the needs of the rest of the class. These findings are consistent with the
experiences of three of the 12 teachers in this current study and require attention from educational policy advocates in supporting teachers’ efforts to best meet the needs of all students.

One way that national, state, and district educational leaders can attend to the voices of teachers is to invite teachers to inform policy conversations. Figure 17 demonstrates a surprising understanding that emerged from the data. Most teachers in this study operated with a very micro-focused lens that was specific to their classroom contexts. Only 2 of the 12 teachers referenced state policy when discussing their frustrations with classroom influences.

![Figure 17. Level of policy diffusiveness among philosophical, national, state, district, and classroom contexts for kindergarten writing instruction. Text in the middle of the model represents the tentative manifestations of kindergarten teachers’ movements through SPWI depicted in Figure 16.](image)

Traditionally, the focus on literacy policy has been top-down with policy efforts seemingly disconnected from classroom reality (Teale et al., 2014). Though policy-
implementation is sometimes hindered by processes as they filter down from national to classroom contexts, it may be more applicable to think of fluidity of flow by finding ways to “open up” the classroom context. There is a need for policy advocates to bridge the policymaker-practitioner gap and engage in more bottom-up practices where teachers are invited to sit at the table and actively help define the issues with a lens of the reality of the changing nature of classrooms.

One noteworthy step in this direction is the U.S. DOE’s Teaching Ambassador Fellowship program that includes a one-year Fellowship for a current, practicing teacher. The hope is that “by bringing teachers into the conversation early on, these programs and processes improve the likelihood that the policy will be well-designed, well-received and well-implemented in the classroom” (C. E. Brown, 2015, para. 6). An important contribution of bringing teachers into the conversation can be an understanding that kindergarten is its own world. Policies that apply to second grade will not apply to kindergarten. The K-2 grouping has been detrimental to an understanding of the uniqueness of kindergarten, and policy advocates will benefit from this nuanced lens when advocating for elementary reform. Additionally, understanding the synergistic nature of emergent writing and reading development and instruction, from teachers’ perspectives, has the potential to strengthen the policymaker-practitioner pipeline and create classrooms where authentic literacy instruction can thrive.

**Developing Effective District and Building Support**

There are also many district- and building-level recommendations that emerged from the data. I spend a little more time on these recommendations in order to honor the voices of the teachers that made this inquiry possible. The diverse use of instructional
models and strategies observed during the four months I was invited into kindergarten classrooms was very informative and reinforced the challenges teachers faced with the district’s curriculum and rubric for kindergarten writing. Teachers perceived that the curriculum and rubric, specific to this district, were ill-defined and ill-designed, especially when compared to the math and reading curricula. To compensate, they adopted their own philosophies (models), strategies, and techniques for instruction, but seeing these diverse approaches in their own buildings impacted their SPWI. Al-Bataineh and colleagues (2010) conducted research with teachers in Grade 1 through Grade 8, and a common theme that emerged from their research was that school districts and administrators needed to be more purposeful in their “obligation to nurture the self-efficacy of their teachers” (p. 439). One way that PCS’ administrators can do this is to clearly define and articulate their philosophical approach to kindergarten writing instruction. Additionally, district leaders should ensure teachers are aware of the how various models, strategies, and techniques of instruction can be used to facilitate and support a plan for teaching writing.

**Articulating a Philosophy**

Joyce, Weil, and Calhoun (2015) grouped educational models for teaching and learning into four basic frameworks. These frameworks are based on philosophical and psychological beliefs about the best ways students learn. The frameworks are (a) Information Processing, (b) Behavioral, (c) Personal, and (d) Social. Information processing models depend on organizing instruction in a way that students “make sense of the world by acquiring and organizing data, sensing problems and generating solutions to them, and developing concepts and language for conveying them” (Joyce et al., 2015,
One information-processing model of instruction commonly used in the classrooms I visited was Concept Attainment. This model, as the name implies, focuses on getting students to understand “rules” or concepts that apply to kindergarten writing, and the 12 teachers in this study used this model most when teaching the mechanics of writing.

With behavioral models, instruction is “discrete, concrete, and individualized” (Joyce et al., 2015, p. 316). Direct instruction is a behavioral model that is skill focused and uses a high degree of teacher direction and control to teach content. Students then practice under the teacher’s guidance—guided practice. This model was used frequently when teachers conducted writing mini-lessons. Personal models of instruction place the teacher in a facilitative role, with students developing “self-confidence and a realistic sense of self, and through building empathetic reactions to others” (Joyce et al., 2015, p. 279). One model that sits in this framework is developing self-concepts, a model that the 12 teachers referenced frequently for developing students’ identity of authorship.

Teachers in this study were skilled at using feedback and encouragement to support and build students’ confidence with their writing. Social models of instruction are attentive to “how we learn social behavior and how social interaction can enhance academic learning” (Joyce et al., 2015, p. 229), and cooperative learning is one model in this framework. Working together on the carpet to brainstorm or develop a story, and the use of sharing circles are examples of cooperative learning in kindergarten.

Joyce and colleagues (2015) explained that effective teachers find ways to incorporate the best combination of models based on the intended learning outcomes of a lesson. What I observed in PCS’ classrooms was that teachers tended to rely on only one...
model that (a) “fit” their philosophical beliefs, (b) matched what was modeled to them, (c) represented an area of high WISE, or (d) could be implemented given the pressure of time and pacing. These constraints limited the strategies for instruction they chose, the instructional decisions they made, the choice of instructional groupings relied upon, and the techniques that students used to develop their writing competencies. The taxonomy of instruction depicted in Figure 18 includes some of the models, strategies, and techniques I observed in the 12 classrooms I visited.

Figure 18. Taxonomy of instruction for kindergarten writing

What teachers articulated they needed from PCS’ administrators was a clear philosophy about writing instruction. If teachers have consensus on the intended learning outcomes for instruction, and they understand how to use the models, strategies, and techniques of instruction to support a balanced approach to writing instruction, the frustration that impeded teachers’ SPWI can be mitigated. Additionally, they can still
have autonomy in knowing how to best apply all models, strategies, and techniques of instruction as their classes change from quarter to quarter, from year to year.

Mooney and Mausbach (2008) advised that, when designing a curriculum, one of the first steps is ensuring there is consensus on the philosophy of teaching and learning that guides the curriculum. This reality was a major finding for a school district in Illinois when they formed a committee of teachers and administrators to draft a writing curriculum. They were surprised that they did not all share the same philosophy on how to teach writing (Al-Bataineh et al., 2010). This issue is very similar to ones facing PCS as neither teachers nor administrators have a common understanding about the philosophical beliefs guiding the district’s writing instruction, a reality that can lead to what Schmoker (2006) called curricular chaos. Additionally, curriculum should have clear standards aligned to appropriate assessments (Gareis & Grant, 2015; Mooney & Mausbach, 2008). Given the level of consensus on the inadequacy of both the curriculum and rubric of PCS, expressed by the 12 teachers in this study, these documents need to be addressed by district literacy administrators. Immediate and comprehensive review of both documents is crucial, especially given how much both the curriculum and the rubric negatively influenced teachers’ SPWI.

Just as critical is the need for teachers to be well trained on strategies for providing differentiated writing instruction in small-group instructional groupings. The diverse spread of students’ abilities makes this type of delivery a necessity for meeting the needs of all students represented in kindergarten classrooms. Small group instruction, sharing writing products, and differentiation are established, research-based literacy practices (Graham et al., 2012; Graham at al., 2015; Troia & Olinghouse, 2013), but
teachers brought us to an understanding of the difficulty of implementing these strategies for writing instruction without adequate training, time, and support. This small group support is especially important in the first and second nine weeks of instruction to meet students’ diverse needs and limited ability to self-regulate and self-direct their own learning. The 12 teachers specifically expressed the need for instructional assistant coverage during writing instruction (already provided for reading instruction), which they felt would go a long way in helping them differentiate instruction, use effective instructional management strategies, and strengthen student engagement with writing.

**Administrative Leadership**

Research has consistently shown that principals’ instructional leadership has significant influence on teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs and instruction (Bellibas & Liu, 2017; Hallinger, 2012; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). According to Bellibas and Liu (2017), “Effective schools have the type of principal who attaches importance and devotes substantial time and attention to instructional issues rather than a principal who spends most of their time dealing with managerial matters” (p. 53). This distinction in extant literature between managerial leadership and instructional leadership calls for an administrator’s awareness of the reality of teachers’ classroom dynamics in order to support their instruction. A report by NAEYC (2009) recognized that limited administrator knowledge of the uniqueness of early childhood classrooms is problematic, as some administrators “are not always aware of what is and is not good practice with children at that age” (p. 5).

In this study, teachers were candid about the role of administrative leadership in supporting SPWI. Recall Lexi’s discussion about an administrator who insisted she
remove the kitchen center from her room. This administrator was also operating within
the taxonomy represented in Figure 18, not seeing the value of teaching and learning
across models of instruction. Susan’s administrator understood that teachers “were their
own best resources” and provided coverage so that her team could observe each other
teaching writing. This leadership decision exposed her team to the different models of
instruction teammates were using, and helped them see how they could be applied in their
own classroom: two administrators with different understandings of the taxonomy of
instruction for kindergarten writing.

These issues that emerged from the data support recommendations for PCS’
district literacy leaders to (a) determine and articulate a clear philosophy about teaching
writing in kindergarten, (b) address the concerns teachers have with the curriculum and
rubric, (c) increase their awareness of teachers’ diverse views about what constitutes
developmentally appropriate practices in kindergarten classrooms and how those
understandings influence instructional decisions and SPWI, and (d) provide training to
building administrators on developmentally appropriate practices that support
kindergarten writing instruction.

**Professional Development for Teaching Writing in Kindergarten**

As the 12 teachers in this study shared, many of them lacked confidence in
various combinations of knowing what to teach, how to teach it, and when it was
developmentally appropriate to teach certain writing tasks. Though the research on
kindergarten writing is sparse, the extant literature discussed in Chapter 2 showed
consistent findings from teachers across elementary grades that they lacked confidence in
their ability to teach writing (Galligan, 2011; Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Korth et al., 2017;
Ritchey et al., 2015). Al-Bataineh and colleagues’ (2010) explored the link between self-efficacy and professional development for teachers. They found that professional development is an area where most districts can begin curricular change and stated:

One crucial idea which emerged from this study is that for many teachers, professional development has to encompass more than a few hour-long workshops after school. Teachers wanted training that was ongoing and tied to the practical workings of their classroom. Districts must work to provide that foundation if they hope to create long-lasting, sustainable growth in teacher self-efficacy and writing instruction. (p. 447)

This sentiment was echoed by Fullan (2001) who warned that information “only becomes valuable in a social context” (p. 78), and that leaders should not be focused on dissemination of information but on use of information.

As this study uncovered, administrative leaders need to be more sensitive to the pedagogical needs of early-career teachers. Brindle and colleagues (2016) recently conducted a national survey of third and fourth grade teachers, and reported that 76% claimed they had little or no instruction on how to teach writing in their college preparation program, a finding also supported in recent research conducted with middle school teachers (A. Ray et al., 2016). An important administrative lens is an understanding that early-career teachers have yet to acquire the mastery experiences that help to overcome the many challenges that can negatively affect teacher self-efficacy (M. Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007).

Professional development should also include specific and explicit instruction on the difference between handwriting instruction and writing instruction in kindergarten.
Some researchers have argued that instruction emphasizing process writing has resulted in a de-emphasis on the direct instruction of handwriting skills. They argued for the importance of handwriting instruction as it supports the development of fine-motor skills in kindergarteners, connects to kinesthetic memory, and promotes handwriting fluency (Shaw, 2011; Stevenson & Just, 2014; Vander Hart, Fitzpatrick, & Cortesa, 2010). Vander Hart and colleagues (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of research on best-practices for teaching handwriting in kindergarten. They found support for direct and explicit instruction of strategies to include modeling letter formation, pencil grip, posture, paper position, corrective feedback, compliments, goal-setting, and student self-evaluation.

Flower and Hayes (1981) cautioned, however, against the confluence of handwriting and writing instruction, as they are two distinct instructional foci. As stated in Chapter 1, Flower and Hayes’ seminal work stressed the distinction between translation and transcription when discussing writing for meaning. The authors argued that translation includes any visual representation of ideas developed during the planning phase (compositional focus—drawing, scribbles, invented spelling, and/or words), whereas transcription is focused on handwriting and accurate spelling (conventional focus). Calkins (1994) warned against over-emphasizing transcription during the developmental years and argued, “When our students resist writing, it’s usually because writing has been treated as little more than a place to display—to expose—their command of spelling, penmanship, and grammar” (p. 13). Both instructional foci are necessary in kindergarten, but teachers should ensure an informed, balanced, and developmentally appropriate approach during instruction (Auguste, 2018). This study
demonstrated the diverse writing instructional practices of the 12 teachers in this study with respect to writing and handwriting instruction. These distinctions need to be clarified and the recommended curricular emphasis on CCPS’ Pacing Guide trait of *Presentation* (spacing, handwriting, and neatness) needs to be explicitly articulated.

With the many changes that kindergarten teachers move through, training for all teachers on appropriate balance and implementation of the Traits can be an easy first step for PCS. Most elementary schools in the district have the *Trait Crates* already available. Ensuring that teachers: (a) know what the traits represent, (b) know how they can be implemented in developmentally appropriate ways, and (c) are provided training on the use of the materials in the crates is a low-cost solution given that the materials are already available. PCS’ administrators also strongly supported the development of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in their schools and continuously provide extensive support for professional development and research. These internal structures already in place provide a great foundation for assisting kindergarten teachers. Recent state mandates requiring research-based practices like sharing and writing for a variety of purposes will need to be supported by targeted training to support fidelity of implementation, and this can be facilitated through PLCs. Further, PCS’s administrative literacy leaders will need to provide clarity on how these mandates can be structured in the 30-minute writing block, or clarify if teachers are expected to incorporate these practices into their guided reading framework.

The purpose of this study was to enlist teachers in the inquiry so that they can inform the beginnings of these discussions by describing and explaining the context-specific strengths and challenges of their pedagogy with writing instruction. Twelve
teachers participated because they had a high sense of agency and cared enough to invest the time and effort to uncover the phenomenon, as lived. They have outlined very specific recommendations for the training they need, and asked that, as educators, we find a way to honor these requests:

1. Job-embedded coaching
2. PD specific to kindergarten—not a K-2 focus
3. PD developed and led by someone who has worked in their lifeworld.

A practice-embedded approach is supported by research showing the effectiveness of intensive, sustained, and collaborative teacher PD directly tied to issues of practice (Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers, & Killion, 2010; Killion et al., 2016). Furthermore, studies have documented the inadequacy of traditional PD delivery models that rely on one-time, episodic teacher training (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Snyder, Hemmeter, & Fox, 2015). Job-embedded coaching is also supported by self-efficacy research that has documented the strength of vicarious experiences where a significant other is observed successfully modeling a teaching task (Bandura, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 2016; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011). M. Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) described this dynamic well:

The observer has the opportunity to appraise his or her own capabilities because the model provides a standard and this can help the observer set goals for his or her own teaching. The greater the assumed similarity between the observer and the model, the more persuasive will be the belief that one possesses the capabilities to master comparable activities. When an observer watches a
successful teaching exchange, he or she is more likely to see the teaching task as manageable. (p. 230)

This type of training has the potential to support WISE and WIOE, strengthen teachers’ SPWI and, ultimately, increase students’ progress with writing.

**Training that Supports Instructional Management**

Research has shown that teachers with high self-efficacy play a significant role in fostering student engagement (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012; M. Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). In this current study, an implication for further research was situated in teachers’ identified need for training on strategies for instructional management across instructional groupings, and how this can then increase student engagement. When Cutler and Graham (2008) conducted a national survey of first through third grade teachers they found that, during writing instruction, teachers used whole group instruction 56% of the time and small group instruction 23% of the time. Coker and colleagues (2016) observed writing instruction in first grade classrooms only, but found the same reliance on whole group instruction. Though Brooks and Thurston (2010) looked at middle school classrooms, their research was specific to students identified as ELL and their level of academic engagement. They found students were more engaged during small group instruction than during whole group instruction. There was no research found, however, that looked at kindergarteners’ engagement during writing instruction. The teachers’ observations in this study are a good starting point for understanding the best supports for student engagement in kindergarten during the writing block may lie in teachers’ ability to effectively manage small group and individualized instruction.
Recommendations for Future Research

Kindergarten is its own world. This understanding should undergird all future research into this unique lifeworld. A specific recommendation is that there should be more research focused on this grade level. The expectations for kindergarten have changed, and as the writing samples included in this manuscript have shown, kindergarteners can write! What is needed is more support in kindergarten classroom so that teachers can adequately meet these new demands and offer support to all students. When structuring curriculum for kindergarten, it should be with an understanding that the classroom dynamic is constantly changing, fluid, and tentative.

Additionally, there should be more focused training in teacher preparation programs to ensure all pre-service teacher candidates are exposed to best practices for emergent writing instruction. As discussed in Chapter 2, research has shown many programs have not kept pace with changes in standards for writing instruction, affecting the quality and type of writing instruction implemented by early-career in-service teachers (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011; Korth et al., 2017; National Commission on Writing, 2006; Norman & Spencer, 2005; Troia et al., 2010). Additionally, a better understanding of the practicum placements of new hires, how teachers are assigned to classrooms, and the level of congruence with training and/or mentoring between these two would allow building administrators to better meet the needs of new in-service teachers.

Finally, I would like to ask more researchers to consider the use of appreciative phenomenology as a way to design research that honors the beauty of participants’ lived experiences. As Vagle predicted, this particular tapestry was created with each of the 12
teachers’ rich and thick accounting of their lived experiences that continuously shape their SPWI, the rich and thick contexts within which they taught, and the impact of an appreciative lens as we interacted (personal communication, April 27, 2017). In asking teachers to think of their strengths and successes with writing instruction, I was a witness to their imaginations taking flight and exploding past what is towards what can be.

**Conclusion**

Of the three “Rs”—reading, writing, and aRithmetic—writing has been dubbed the Neglected “R” because of a paucity of research and policy focused on this important literacy competency (National Commission on Writing, 2003, 2004). This research gap is most evidenced by the paucity of research on writing in elementary classrooms. To demonstrate, a meta-analysis of writing research conducted from 1999 to 2004 showed that only 5% of writing studies targeted elementary students (Juzwik et al., 2006) and, more than a decade later, research studies focused on early elementary writing are still sparse (Graham et al., 2015; Puranik et al., 2014; Ritchey et al., 2015). Co-occurring with this limited policy and research focus are national data showing that American students struggle with writing (Bahr, 2012; Brock, 2010; Hassel & Giordano, 2015; NCES, 2003, 2012). The established link between student progress and teacher self-efficacy makes the need to strengthen teachers’ self-efficacy a research priority (Bandura, 1997; Bellibas & Liu, 2017; Brindle et al., 2016; Landon-Hays, 2012; Lee et al., 2017; Shoulders & Krei, 2015; M. Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009; Zee & Koomen, 2016).

The purpose of this post-intentional phenomenological study was to uncover how kindergarten teachers make meaning of their movements through SPWI. The goal was to provide needed insight into how best to support kindergarten teachers as they teach
writing, so that they can continue to “change the world by creating powerful writers for forever instead of just indifferent writers for school” (Fox, 1993, p. 22). Twelve teachers brought me into their lifeworld and allowed me to catch a glimpse of their movements through SPWI. Teachers revealed that there were many contextual factors that had an effect on their SPWI to include district, student, personal, and professional influences. This opened up an understanding of the phenomenon as nuanced and multifaceted. Teachers were candid and transparent when they admitted their need for more training, a well-designed curriculum, and a rubric that is developmentally appropriate. It is my hope that this research starts a conversation with PCS district literacy leaders to involve teachers in redesigning the curriculum that guides writing instruction and aligning it to a developmentally progressive rubric. I know of 12 excellent candidates that can help lead this redesign.
APPENDIX A

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS FOR KINDERGARTEN WRITING - 2010

Text Types and Purposes

1. Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose opinion pieces in which they tell a reader the topic or the name of the book they are writing about and state an opinion or preference about the topic or book (e.g., My favorite book is . . .).

2. Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose informative/explanatory texts in which they name what they are writing about and supply some information about the topic.

3. Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to narrate a single event or several loosely linked events, tell about the events in the order in which they occurred, and provide a reaction to what happened.

Production and Distribution of Writing

With guidance and support from adults, respond to questions and suggestions from peers and add details to strengthen writing as needed.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

Participate in shared research and writing projects (e.g., explore a number of books by a favorite author and express opinions about them). With guidance and support from adults, recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.
## APPENDIX B

### FRAMEWORKS FOR STAGE DEVELOPMENT OF EMERGENT LITERACY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Age/Grade</th>
<th>Developmental Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beginning Writer</td>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>Develop phonemic awareness and an alphabetic principle; start using invented spelling with salient sounds and by the end of this stage can start incorporating simple vowels; produce word-by-word writing; may write a few words or lines (mixture of invented and conventional spelling); shows a concept of print and begins to use high frequency words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transitional Writer</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>Can write several organized paragraphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intermediate Writer</td>
<td>10-100</td>
<td>Write fluently with expression and voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robertson, R., 2007, p. 41.</td>
<td>Random Scribbling</td>
<td></td>
<td>Children realize that they can use lines, shapes and color to make meaning; developing fine motor skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Controlled Scribbling</td>
<td></td>
<td>Children are grasping the connection between word and print; beginning attempts at linearity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Repetitive lines or patterns</td>
<td></td>
<td>Children experiment with lines, dots, and curves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Letter Practice</td>
<td></td>
<td>Children are using some letters, especially letters in their names; they have no phonemic awareness</td>
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<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environmental Print</strong></td>
<td>Children understand the symbolic nature of letters and gain an understanding of the alphabetic principle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name Practice</strong></td>
<td>Children experiment with writing without a teacher model; their name is typically a favorite thing to write</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Invented Spelling</strong></td>
<td>Children begin to acquire phonemic awareness and an understanding of the alphabetic principle; they move from beginning sounds, to beginning and ending sounds, and understand the connection between writing and reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conventional Spelling</strong></td>
<td>Children write with a purpose; creativity not accuracy is the focus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emerging Writer</strong></td>
<td>Little to no readability; little awareness of audience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Developing Writer</strong></td>
<td>Starts to develop a topic and some organization; simple words and patterns incorporated; little awareness of audience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focusing Writer</strong></td>
<td>Clear topic but incomplete development; developing sense of audience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experimenting Writer</strong></td>
<td>Topic clear and developed; clear beginning, middle, and end; written for an audience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engaging Writer</strong></td>
<td>Clear organization that sustains the writer’s purpose; effective use of varied sentence and language patterns; engages the reader</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extending Writer</strong></td>
<td>Topic elaborated with rich details; creative use of language; engages and sustains the reader’s interest.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gunning, 2010, p. 508
(Adapted from Georgia Department of Education)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness and Exploration</td>
<td>pre-K</td>
<td>Children build the foundations for learning to read and write; use known letters or approximations of letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>Children develop basic concept of print; begin to write letters of the alphabet and some high frequency words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Writing</td>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>Children begin to write about a topic that is personally meaningful; attempt to use punctuation and capitalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Writing</td>
<td>Grade 2</td>
<td>Children begin to write various text forms using simple and complex sentences; write across topics to different audiences; use common letter patterns and critical features to spell words; punctuate simple sentences correctly and proofread their own work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent and Productive Writing</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>Children can write expressively in many different forms (stories, poems, reports); use a variety of vocabulary and sentences appropriate to text forms; revise and edit their own writing during and after composing; spell words correctly in final drafts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX C

**VIRGINIA ENGLISH STANDARDS OF LEARNING: KINDERGARTEN WRITING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Standards</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| 1995 | K.10 The student will print his/her name.  
     | K.11 The student will draw pictures and/or use letters and phonetically spelled words to write about experiences, stories, people, objects, or events.  
     | K.12 The student will explore the uses of available technology for reading and writing. |
| 2002 | K.9 The student will print the uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet independently.  
     | K.10 The student will print his/her first and last names.  
     | K.11 The student will write to communicate ideas.  
     | a) Draw pictures and/or use letters and phonetically spelled words to write about experiences, stories, people, objects, or events.  
     | b) Write left to right and top to bottom.  
     | K.12 The student will explore the uses of available technology for reading and writing. |
| 2010 | K.11 The student will print in manuscript.  
     | a) Print uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet independently.  
     | b) Print his/her first and last names.  
     | K.12 The student will write to communicate ideas for a variety of purposes.  
     | a) Differentiate pictures from writing.  
     | b) Draw pictures and/or use letters and phonetically spelled words to write about experiences.  
     | c) Use letters and beginning consonant sounds to spell phonetically words to describe pictures or write about experiences.  
     | d) Write left to right and top to bottom.  
     | K.13 The student will use available technology for reading and writing. |
| 2017 | K.10 The student will print in manuscript.  
     | a) Print capital and lowercase letters of the alphabet independently.  
     | b) Print his/her first and last names.  
     | K.11 The student will write in a variety of forms to include narrative and descriptive.  
     | a) Differentiate pictures from writing.  
     | b) Use prewriting activities to generate ideas including drawing pictures.  
     | c) Use letters to phonetically spell words that describe pictures or experiences.  
     | d) Write left to right and top to bottom.  
     | e) Compose simple sentences.  
     | f) Begin each sentence with a capital letter and use ending punctuation.  
     | g) Share writing with others. |
### Shared Reading

During shared reading, teachers provide explicit comprehension instruction. Through modeling and guided practice, teachers demonstrate and assist students as they learn how proficient readers make sense of text before, during and after reading. This includes developmentally appropriate skills such as how print is organized, read and interpreted. This daily instruction allows teachers to build a community of readers who are actively engaged in intentional, thoughtful interactions with text while mastering reading strategies and skills.  
(Retrieved from PCS Districts’ Language Arts Department, 2013)

### Guided Reading

Guided reading enables the teacher to observe, teach and support a small group of students as they develop an understanding of the reading process and practice their literacy skills. Students read a book that has been carefully selected based on their strengths and needs. The teacher facilitates learning and guides and directs the readers.  
(Retrieved from PCS Districts’ Language Arts Department, 2013)

### Independent Reading

Independent reading provides students with an opportunity to apply reading strategies in a text of personal interest. Time should be devoted daily for independent, self-selected reading. During this time, students read independently to practice and refine reading strategies and skills learned during shared and guided reading. Structured independent reading helps students build stamina for longer texts and helps develop the habit of lifelong reading.  
(Retrieved from PCS Districts’ Language Arts Department, 2013)

### Words Workshop

Words workshop focuses on students’ word knowledge. Teachers use activities that develop phonemic awareness, phonics, automaticity with high-frequency words, an awareness of word structure and vocabulary. In the primary grades, teachers engage students in activities to
build sound symbol relationships, sort words by sound and pattern and read and write high-frequency words.

In word study, students are engaged in comparing and contrasting words by sound and spelling patterns as well as categorizing words by meaning, use and part of speech. Word study is based on this developmental sequence:

- Emergent stage — Students learn to recognize and write the letters of the alphabet, play with beginning sounds in words and recognize rhyme.
- Letter name stage — Students learn consonant sounds, short vowel patterns and consonant digraphs and blends.

(Retrieved from PCS Districts’ Language Arts Department, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formative Assessment</th>
<th>The assessment of student learning integrated into the act of teaching.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Retrieved from Gareis &amp; Grant, 2015, p. 182)</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summative Assessment</th>
<th>Assessment of student learning at the end of some period of instruction.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Retrieved from Gareis &amp; Grant, 2015, p. 184)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX E
DAILY LITERACY BLOCK FOR PCS DISTRICT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Component</th>
<th>Instructional Practices</th>
<th>Instructional Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Workshop</td>
<td>• Shared Reading (whole group)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Guided Reading (small group; differentiated)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Independent Reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• read alouds</td>
<td>60 – 90 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• choral readings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• readers’ theater</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• dramas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• songs, poems, chants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• literature circles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• retellings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Workshop:</td>
<td>• Write for a variety of purposes: expository, narrative, persuasive, and descriptive</td>
<td>30-45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 6 Traits: Ideas, Organization; Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency, Conventions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• presentations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• peer editing</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• oral storytelling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• read aloud (mentor text)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Workshop</td>
<td>• peer discussions</td>
<td>15-30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Study/Word Wall</td>
<td>• vocabulary hunts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• songs, poems, chants</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
# APPENDIX F
## KINDERGARTEN WRITING CURRICULUM FOR PCS DISTRICT

Writes for a variety of purposes  
Mode: narrative, informational, functional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **First Nine Weeks** | • Prints his/her first name  
                     • Differentiate picture from writing  
                     • Draw pictures and/or use letters and phonetically spelled words to write about experiences  
                     • Write left to right and top to bottom  
                     | Demonstrates growth in word study knowledge and applies it to writing |
| **Second Nine Weeks** | • Prints his/her first name  
                     • Draw pictures and/or use letters and phonetically spelled words to write about experiences  
                     • Use letters and beginning consonant sounds to spell phonetically words to describe pictures or write about experiences  
                     • Write left to right and top to bottom  
                     | Demonstrates growth in word study knowledge and applies it to writing |
| **Third Nine Weeks** | • Prints his/her first and last names  
                     • Draw pictures and/or use letters and phonetically spelled words to write about experiences  
                     • Use letters and beginning consonant sounds to spell phonetically words to describe pictures or write about experiences  
                     | Demonstrates growth in word study knowledge and applies it to writing |
| **Fourth Nine Weeks** | • Prints his/her first and last names  
                     • Draw pictures and/or use letters and phonetically spelled words to write about experiences  
                     • Use letters and beginning consonant sounds to spell phonetically words to describe pictures or write about experiences  
                     | Demonstrates growth in word study knowledge and applies it to writing |

*Note. Accessed on February 9, 2017 from district website.*
APPENDIX G
OVERVIEW OF CONTEXTUAL TIMELINE
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Sub-Questions</th>
<th>Conversation Prompts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RSQ(a): What experiences shape kindergarten teachers’ self-efficacy of writing instruction?</td>
<td>1. I asked you to bring an artifact to our interview that represents a satisfying experience with your writing instruction. Tell me about your artifact and the significance it holds for you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Tell me a story of a time when you were especially successful in structuring a writing lesson. What about that experience makes it stand out in your mind? Describe your classroom, your planning, and your instruction in detail. What was the outcome?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Without being modest, what unique skills and strengths do you bring to your instruction as a kindergarten writing teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. What have been the biggest influences on you in learning how to teach writing to kindergartners?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Have you observed others teaching writing, either live or on a video, that has shaped your practice? Recall, if you can, an observation that impacted you and your practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Have there been mentors or colleagues who have encouraged you or provided useful feedback?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What initial training or professional development experiences have had an influence on how you teach writing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSQ(b): How do kindergarten teachers respond to their perceptions of students’ engagement with learning to write?</td>
<td>Think about the range of affective reactions your students have to learning to write.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Tell me about a student who was very engaged with learning to write. What did you notice when they were writing? What did you notice when they were sharing their writing? How did you respond to this student?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Tell me about the emotions of a typical kindergartner who is learning to write. How do you respond to this student?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                                                                                       | 3. Tell me about a student who has struggled to learn to write. Describe for me the range of emotions that you’ve
| RSQ(c): What does it mean for kindergarten teachers to experience self-satisfaction in the pursuit of instructional goals for writing? | 1. What are your instructional goals for writing?  
2. If you could structure writing instruction any way to accomplish this goal(s) in your classroom, what current practices would you keep? What practices would you change? How would this structure impact your affective reactions to teaching writing?  
3. If you had three wishes for changes in the writing curriculum, what would they be?  
4. If you had three wishes that would enliven the writing instruction in your classroom, what would they be? |

Do you have any further comments or observations that are specific to this interview today?
**APPENDIX I**
**WRITING INSTRUCTION OBSERVATION PROTOCOL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OBSERVED PRACTICES/AFFECT</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Practices</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ handwriting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ spelling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ punctuation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ spacing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Composing:                |          |
| Whole Group: Mini-lessons |          |
| □ Explicitly stated lesson objective |          |
| □ Activated prior/background knowledge |          |
| □ Used Mentor text        |          |
| □ Model Writing           |          |
| □ Interactive writing     |          |
| □ Idea Development        |          |
| □ Teacher Think-aloud     |          |
| □ Explicitly teaches writing stages |          |

| Independent Activities    |          |
| □ Writing for a purpose   |          |
| □ Topic Selection : __student __teacher |          |
| □ Invented spelling encouraged |          |
| □ Differentiated lesson   |          |
| □ Focus on correctness/natural learning |          |
| □ Use of technology       |          |
| □ Works on piece for ______day(s) |          |

Inclusion of 6+1 Traits

**Date _________________________________**
**School ____________________________**
**Teacher __________________________________________________________________**
**Topic ___________________________________________________________**
**Length of Lesson: ___ __________ Minutes ___ New Lesson ___ Continued Lesson___**

*All observation questions refer to the writing instruction*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conferencing</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Circulating room</td>
<td>□ individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ small group instruction</td>
<td>□ small group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ one-on-one</td>
<td>□ whole group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ verbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ written comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ formal assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Collaboration</td>
<td>Student Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ sharing ideas</td>
<td>□ sharing circles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Behavior – stayed on task</td>
<td>□ Emotion – level of students’ interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Cognition – number of words/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sentences produced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noticing students’ engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Management</td>
<td>Classroom Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies/Structures:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Classroom expectations/rules</td>
<td>□ Consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Classroom layout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Accessibility of materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s Observed Self-Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical reactions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal reactions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining effective relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Kotula, Aguilar, & Tivnan, 2014.
APPENDIX J

WEEKLY JOURNAL PROMPTS

Hello Teachers,

As you prepare for your writing instruction the week of ________________, please consider answering the following prompt in at least one of your journal entries. The remaining entries this week can continue with this theme or may reflect any thoughts that are especially relevant in your classroom on a specific day, experienced during a lesson, or experienced as a ‘moment of surprise’ provided by a student.

**Journal Prompt:**

___________________

If describing a specific experience/event when journaling:

Think about the event(s) chronologically. Describe what you saw, what was said, what you heard, how you felt, and/or what you thought. Try to describe the experience as if you are watching it on a film (adapted from van Manen, 1990).

(If you want to use names in your description, please use a pseudonym)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Theoretical Underpinning</th>
<th>Prompt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Outcome Expectancy</td>
<td>As you look ahead to your class this year, how would you describe the feelings of satisfaction (from highly satisfied to highly dissatisfied) you expect to experience with your writing instruction? Can you explain why these are your expectations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy/Outcome Expectancy</td>
<td>As you reflect on your writing instruction during this time of year, think about the most positive or exciting expectations you have for teaching writing. Please document and share some specific examples from your instruction during the week that shape these expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>As you reflect on your writing instruction during this time of year, think about the most challenging expectations you have for teaching writing. Please document and share some specific examples from your instruction during the week that shape these expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Self-Efficacy/Outcome Expectancy</strong></td>
<td><strong>In what ways would you say that keeping up with literacy assessments at the beginning of the school year affects your writing instruction? Can you provide specific examples of the interplay between assessment and instruction?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Self-Efficacy</strong></td>
<td><strong>As you prepare to journal this week, be mindful of a moment when a student seems especially engaged during writing. What did that student do? What did that student say? How did that reaction influence your future goals for writing instruction?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Outcome Expectancy</strong></td>
<td><strong>As you prepare to journal this week, think about a student that you see as struggling the most with writing. Can you describe that struggle? Can you describe how you think this struggle will influence your emotional reaction to teaching this student to write?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>What aspects of writing instruction would you like to discuss this week?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><strong>Self-Efficacy</strong></td>
<td><strong>A recent, popular sentiment is that, “Kindergarten is the new first grade.” In your opinion, what curricular change(s) has/have most influenced kindergarteners’ development as writers (positively, negatively, or both)? Can you share specific examples from your classroom experiences?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><strong>Outcome Expectancy</strong></td>
<td><strong>As you teach this week, be on the lookout for a student who, you believe, has begun to value learning to write. Document even the smallest example(s). How does this change influence your own feeling and motivation about your future instruction during writing workshop?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>What are your thoughts on scaffolding students' writing with illustrations first and then writing, or writing first and then illustrations? Can you provide your rationale and an example of how your approach has helped a student</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td><strong>Outcome Expectancy</strong></td>
<td><strong>As you plan for teaching this week, how satisfied are you with your writing instruction from the beginning of the year to now? How do your feelings of satisfaction affect your goals for writing instruction as you look ahead to the third and fourth nine weeks of school?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td><strong>Self-Efficacy</strong></td>
<td><strong>As you reflect on your writing instruction from the beginning of the school year to now, what would you say is an area that</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
will continue to be strengthened during the rest of the school year: instructional strategies, student engagement, and/or classroom management? Can you provide specific examples from your classroom this week that support/justify this belief?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>13</th>
<th>Outcome Expectancy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thinking about your involvement in this study, what did you learn that provides the greatest anticipation of a sense of satisfaction with your future instruction? What would you like to know more about to support your confidence and satisfaction with your writing instruction?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX K

MEMBER CHECKING COVER LETTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Study:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protocol #</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant: #</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dear Kindergarten Teacher,

Thank you so much for sharing your experiences and expertise on kindergarten writing instruction. Below is a summary of our interview. You will also see verbatim excerpts (italicized) included in the summary. As you read this summary, please ask yourself the following questions:

- Does this match what I shared about my experience?
- Do I want to change anything?
- Do I want to add anything?

I have left a space for comments after each section to allow you to add/change/expand on anything you think necessary.

There are two ways to respond to this document:

1. If you agree with the summary and do not have any changes or additions, you can send an email to emailaddress.edu with this sentence: I agree with the summary of my interview.

2. If there are changes or additions, you have two options:
   - You can contact me and ask for an electronic copy of this document to facilitate making changes. Changes can be made to the summary, not to verbatim (italicized) quotes. You can then send the edited document electronically, or
   - You can manually fill in the comments sections, or mark through and change any portion of the summary. You can then contact me at the above email address to collect this document with the added changes/additions.

Again, thank you for sharing your expertise. As you read the document, I hope you recognize how much you have enriched my understanding of writing instruction in kindergarten.

Sincerely,
APPENDIX L

Teacher Informed Consent Form
The College of William & Mary, School of Education
Educational Policy, Planning, and Leadership

Protocol #  Principal Investigator: Elizabeth Auguste

Title: Exploring Kindergarten Teachers’ Self-Perception of Writing Instruction: An Appreciative Phenomenological Approach

This is to certify that I, ____________________________________________, have been given the following information with respect to my participation in this study. I agree to participate in this study and have read all the information provided on this form.

I understand that as a participant in this study I will be interviewed about my self-perceptions of writing instruction as a kindergarten teacher. This will include one face-to-face interview scheduled at a time and place of my convenience, and will also involve a minimum of one follow-up interview. Interviews will not exceed one hour I understand that I may also be invited to participate in an audio-recorded focus group with other kindergarten teachers participating in this study. I understand that my privacy and confidentiality will be protected in the following ways:

• (PCS District) Research Committee and The College of William and Mary’s Institutional Review Board have reviewed and approved all research protocol.
• A pseudonym will be used for the County’s name and for the school’s name. Since administrators and teachers will be aware of the study, however, the researcher cannot guarantee my anonymity.
• If asked to participate in a Focus Group, I understand that I am guaranteed neither anonymity nor confidentiality, as the information shared during a Focus Group becomes public information shared with all participants.
• A pseudonym will be used for my name in all recorded documents. Since administrators and teachers will be aware of the study, however, the researcher cannot guarantee anonymity.
• The researcher will apply a coding system for my name, matching my actual name to a pseudonym. This information will be kept separately from the collected data in the researcher's home office in a locked drawer, for which only the researcher has a key. This coding document will be destroyed at the completion of the study.
• All field notes and audio-recordings will be kept at the researcher’s home office in a locked filing cabinet for which only the researcher has a key. All individually identifiable data will be removed from field notes and transcribed data.
• Interviews will be audio-recorded and will be transcribed by a transcription agency with all names removed and replaced with a coded identifier (pseudonym). Once transcribed, the original recording will be deleted. The original recording and subsequent coded transcripts will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the researcher’s home, for which only the researcher has a key.
• The computer used to transcribe and store notes is password protected and only the researcher has access to the password.
• Any emails related to this study will be saved and printed with coded identifiers and originals will be erased from the computer.
• I understand that I will be asked to keep a journal reflecting on my writing instruction, and that I am asked to complete a minimum of one entry weekly. Journal entries can be written on paper or sent via email. All journal entries will have my name removed and coded with my identifier. I understand that journal entries can be used in the final product of this study and that I will be compensated for journal entries ONLY. I understand that I will be compensated $3.00 for every entry, with a maximum compensation of $9.00 per week (3 entries), even if I submit more than three entries weekly. With a possibility of participating in journaling for 13 weeks, I understand that the MAXIMUM compensation possible for the requested 13 weeks of journaling is $117.00. Compensation will be provided in the form of a VISA gift card at the end of the 13 weeks. I am also aware that I will not be compensated for interviews nor if asked to participate in a focus group.

I am aware that the results of this study could be used in professional development and/or educational conference presentations and can be submitted for publication, but that I will not be personally identified as a participant. I am also aware that I can choose not to participate in this study at any time, without any penalty.

I am aware that I may report dissatisfactions with any aspect of this study to __________, Ph.D., the Chair of the Protection of Human Subjects Committee by telephone __________ or email ____________.

➢ I give my permission to be interviewed for this study.

Signature____________________________________________  Date: ____________________

➢ I agree to participate in a focus group discussion for this study.

Signature ____________________________________________  Date: ____________________

➢ I agree to have excerpts from my interviews, journal entries, and focus group used in the final products of this study.

Signature ____________________________________________  Date: ____________________

THIS PROJECT WAS APPROVED BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone: _______) ON [_______] AND EXPIRES ON [_______]
## APPENDIX M

### FOCUSED CODES AND THEMES

Shaping Self-Perceptions of Writing Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focused Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussing significance of artifacts</td>
<td>Instructional Decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing strengths for writing instruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with unclear curricular goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling frustrated by the lack of clarity and specificity of curriculum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing administrators</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Clarifying instructional orientation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Needing training</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Being frustrated with the push of time/pacing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with diverse student abilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembering mentors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing emotional reactions to student growth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing a lack of consistency when scoring students writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing frustration with the developmental progression of the rubric</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing personal experiences with writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing personal goals for writing instruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipating satisfaction with instruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipating dissatisfaction with instruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting whole group instruction</td>
<td>Instructional Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing students disengaged with seatwork</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needing to meet with struggling students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needing more support for small group instruction</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lacking time for individual conferencing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporating collaboration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling guilty about high-achieving students</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Relinquishing control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing small groups</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
References


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Vita
Elizabeth Auguste

Education

[2018] Doctor of Philosophy
College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia
Educational Policy, Planning, and Leadership
Concentration: Curriculum Leadership
Cognate: Research in Literacy

[2014] Master of Education
University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia
Concentration: Reading Education
Certification: Reading Specialist

[1993] Master of Public Administration
Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Alabama

[1991] Bachelor of Arts in Sociology
Norfolk State University, Norfolk, Virginia
Minor: Urban Studies

Professional Experience

[2017-Present] Literacy Plan Committee Member, Public School District, Virginia

[2016-2018] Development Board Member, College of William and Mary, School of Education


[2016-2017] American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), Holmes Scholars National Committee Member